

25 Lady Mary Neville and her Son Gregory Fiennes, 10th Baron Dacre 1559

Oil on panel 50.2 × 71.4 (19¾ × 28⅞)
 Inscribed ‘ÆTATIS XXXVI.’ t.l.; ‘M.D.LIX.’
 top centre; ‘ÆTATIS XXI’ and ‘HE’ t.r.
 PROV: Noted by Vertue in sale of Mr
 Collevous, Covent Garden, Feb. 1727 as
 by Holbein; Earl of Oxford sale 8 March
 1741 (11), bt Horace Walpole; Strawberry
 Hill sale 17 May 1842 (37) as by de
 Heere, bt by a private collector
Private Collection

This powerful double portrait, in exceptionally good condition, is one of the finest works to be painted in Britain in the mid-sixteenth century. The identity of the sitters, however, has only recently been ascertained.

Its history is not known prior to 1727, when at the sale of Mr Collevous’s pictures, Vertue (11, p.23) noted that ‘on the back of this picture is wrote on a peice of paper pasted the Duches of Suffolk’ and suggested that the sitters must be Frances Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk (1517–1559, see *Burke’s Peerage*, 1916, IV, p.421) and her second husband, the former groom Adrian Stokes (1535/6–1585). This notion remained unchallenged until 1986 when Susan Foister reidentified the sitters and convincingly suggested the context in which the work was painted.

Foister pointed out that the ages thirty-six and twenty-one, inscribed above the sitters’ heads, do not correspond with those of Stokes and his wife in the year 1559. The features of the female sitter, however, strongly resemble those of the widowed Mary Neville, whom Eworth had previously portrayed in about 1555–8 (fig.30). In both portraits, moreover, the same distinctive ring is shown on the fourth finger of the lady’s left hand. Foister suggests that this double portrait, dated 1559, was painted to mark the restitution of the Dacre family honours following the accession of Queen Elizabeth I in the previous year, as the inscribed ages in fact fit both Mary Neville and her son, Gregory Fiennes (1539–1594).

On the night of 30 April 1541, Mary Neville’s first husband, Thomas, 9th Baron Dacre was part of a poaching expedition into a neighbouring estate, during which a keeper was killed. Lord Dacre, though not directly involved, was among those charged with murder, and on 29 June 1541 he was executed at Tyburn. His title and honours were consequently forfeited and his family disgraced.



In the earlier portrait in Ottawa, Eworth shows a redoubtable Mary Neville seated at a table with a book in her left hand and the pen in her right raised as she pauses in the act of writing. A tapestry hanging on the wall behind her is similar to that seen at the outer sides of Eworth’s portraits of the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk (no.27). Fixed to this, in a rare depiction of the way in which portraits were hung at this period, is an image of her long-deceased young husband. It is in the style of Hans Holbein, its frame inscribed with Lord Dacre’s age, twenty-four, and also the date 1540, the year preceding his death. This powerful view of Mary Neville, dressed in austere but costly black garments, serves to emphasise her determination to reverse the injustice done to her husband, particularly as it affected his children.

The double portrait does seem to mark the restitution of those honours and the attainment of his majority by Gregory Fiennes (whose elder brother Thomas had died in 1553). Both sitters are extremely richly dressed and bejewelled, the new Lord Dacre in a gown lined with the ermine that only the nobility were permitted to wear. As Elizabeth Honig observes, the double depiction of a mother and son is most unusual. In addition, this painting breaks the convention generally used for pendant male and female portraits (compare nos.18, 27, 140, 141), certainly those of betrothed or married couples, where the



fig.30 Hans Eworth, ‘Mary Neville, Lady Dacre’ c.1555–8, oil on panel. *National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa*

male portrait is placed to the left of the female. Honig relates this convention, equally prevalent on the Continent, to the practice in heraldry under which 'the man is placed to the woman's right, in the more important position' (1990, p.252 n.32).

In fact, by 1559, Mary Neville had remarried twice, to Norfolk gentlemen named Wooton and then Thursby, and had given birth to at least six further children (Thomas Barrett Lennard, *An Account of the Families of Lennard and Barrett*, 1908, p.207). Her son was himself a married man, although as his wife Anne Sackville apparently complained, he remained under the influence of his mother (*Dictionary of National Biography*, 1909, xvii, p.428). None of these other family ties, however, is apparent from this portrait. Eworth depicts Mary Neville at a slight distance from the viewer, behind a wide red cushion. Her son, portrayed on a slightly larger scale, is to the fore and looks directly out at the viewer, though with a somewhat vacant gaze. His mother passes the tip of her forefinger through a large signet ring, the symbol of dynastic power. The unusually dominant, 'masculine' role adopted by Mary Neville in her two portraits might be explained by William Camden's comment that Gregory Fiennes was 'a little Crack-brain'd' (*The Life and Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 1706, p.580).

With reference to the label noted by Vertue, in 1561–62 a 'Haunce the drawer', possibly Eworth, was recorded as in the service of Katherine, Duchess of Suffolk (1520–1580) (Auerbach 1954, p.162).

The portrait was engraved by George Vertue in 1748 (as of Duchess of Suffolk with Adrian Stokes and by de Heere).

LIT: Strong 1969, p.91, no.30; Varkonda-Bishop 1979, pp.77–80; Susan Foister, 'Nobility Reclaimed', *Antique Collector*, April 1986, pp.58–60; Elizabeth Honig, 'In Memory: Lady Dacre and Pairing', in Gent and Llewellyn 1990, pp.62–85