A PORTRAIT OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, F.R.S., BY JAMES MILLAR, 1789

RECENTLY the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery were offered the gift of a pair of portraits of Joseph Priestley and his wife Mary. The offer came from Mrs I. M. Priestley, and these portraits had been inherited by her late husband, Mr R. C. Priestley, from Mrs Sarah Wainewright, a distant relative, who was the daughter of Joseph Priestley II (son of Joseph I) and his wife Elizabeth. Both portraits were painted by a certain James Millar who practised in Birmingham.

The portrait of Joseph Priestley was found to be almost exactly similar in pose to another portrait painted by the same artist and dated the same year, which was given in 1829 by Mrs Judith Mansell of Birmingham to Manchester College, Oxford, which was then at York. In fact the two portraits differ chiefly in size, $25\frac{3}{4} \times 21\frac{1}{4}$ in. as opposed to $29 \times 24\frac{1}{2}$ in. They both carry the same date, 1789. The portrait of Mary Priestley is dated 1797 and since its measurements are the same as those of the Manchester College portrait of Joseph, it seems likely that these were always intended to be a pair and that the smaller portrait of Joseph Priestley was done additionally for some purpose no longer obvious.

In consequence of these discoveries the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery suggested to Mrs I. M. Priestley that the portrait of Mary Priestley might well be re-united with the portrait of her husband at Oxford, and that the other portrait of him might be given to the Royal Society which possessed no authentic contemporary portrait, whereas the National Portrait Gallery was well provided.

A description of the three portraits is here given:—

1. **Joseph Priestley.** $25\frac{3}{4} \times 21\frac{1}{4}$ in. head and shoulders to right in a black coat, plain white neckcloth and wig. Inscribed on the back of the canvas in black paint: *Rev. Jos Priestley LLD J: Millar pinx* 1789.

The original canvas has been re-lined but the inscription
may be presumed to have been copied from an older one on the original canvas and this represents incidentally a commendable practice among picture-liners in the last century. The liner’s name, Needham, is visible on the stretching frame.

In Henry Carrington Bolton’s *Scientific Correspondence of Joseph Priestley* (privately printed), New York, 1892, p. 177, this portrait and the wife’s are mentioned, and numbered 17 in a list of likenesses of Priestley.

(Presented to The Royal Society, in 1938, by Mrs I. M. Priestley.)


(Presented to Manchester College at York (now Manchester College at Oxford), in 1829, by Mrs Judith Mansell of Birmingham.)

3. Mary Priestley. 29×24½ in. Head and shoulders, seated to left, her right hand raised to her cheek; wearing lawn lace-edged cap tied with ribbon, a dark dress with fichu and shawl. Inscribed on the back of the canvas: Mrs Priestley painted by J. Millar, 1797. Presumably painted as a companion to the portrait of Joseph No. 2.

(Presented to Manchester College at Oxford, in 1938, by Mrs I. M. Priestley.)

James Millar, the artist, exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1784 to 1790, and his address in the catalogues of these exhibitions is always Birmingham.

One of the portraits of Priestley just described was probably No. 172 in the R.A. Exhibition of 1790, if the evidence of Mr Algernon Graves’ dictionary of Royal Academy Exhibitors (1905-6) may be accepted, as it usually can be. Mr Graves records that he got his information chiefly from catalogues annotated by contemporaries who visited the exhibitions and recognized the portraits, the best known of such annotators and the most prolific being Horace Walpole.

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