

Hands On Learning

with Reading Museum Service

HOLBEIN DRAWINGS & TUDOR COSTUME A39/B

The pictures in this box are copies of drawings made by Hans Holbein the younger (1497-1543). He was born in Augsburg, Germany, and brought up in Basel, Switzerland. His father was an artist and trained the young man in the skills of his craft. The self-portrait on the right is thought to show him in 1542/3, just before his death.

Holbein made two visits to England in 1526-8 and 1532-43. He died in London, possibly of the plague. While residing in England, Holbein made a living from a variety of artistic activities, including wall paintings and designs for metalwork, but the bulk of his surviving work consists of painted portraits and the drawings that were made as preparation for them. His clients were merchants, churchmen, ambassadors, courtiers and the King himself - the wealthy, upper class of English society. He was referred to as the 'King's painter' in 1536 and received a regular salary from the King from 1537.



On his first visit to England Holbein painted the famous group portrait of Sir Thomas More and his family (left). The original painting was destroyed in the eighteenth century, but fortunately a number of copies were made. When he returned to England for his second visit many of the people he had painted had fallen from power, including More, who was executed in 1535.

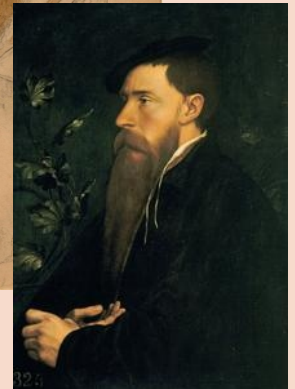
Holbein's skill, however, meant there was a demand for his work from the new people who had found favour with Henry VIII.

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Eighty-five of Holbein's drawings survive in the Royal Collection at Windsor. The drawings from the first visit are done in black, white and coloured chalks on plain paper, while those from the second visit use chalk and ink on pink primed paper.

The drawings were made as a preparation for painted portraits. Several of the portraits that were made from these drawings still exist. The portrait painted from the drawing of William Reskimer can be seen on the right. In some cases, no portrait exists and may never have been made. In others, there are portraits, but no surviving drawings.



The Reskimer portrait follows the drawing very closely. This is because Holbein's usual method was to place the drawing over a sheet of paper, the back of which had been covered with black chalk. In effect, the second sheet was the equivalent of a modern piece of carbon-paper. The two sheets were then laid on a prepared panel. Holbein then traced over his drawing with a sharp metal point and the design was imprinted onto the panel. Many of the drawings have score marks on them, in some cases obliterating the drawn lines underneath.

Several of the drawings have the names of colours written onto the clothing as a guide to the artist when he came to creating a painted portrait from them. The language used is German, but the drawing of Mary Zouch (see page 3)

includes the word 'black felbert', which suggests Holbein was familiar with English.



Left: The drawing and portrait of Sir Richard Southwell. Southwell came to power under Thomas Cromwell. He played an active part in getting Sir Thomas More condemned and assisted in the prosecution of his childhood friend the Earl of Surrey. During the reign of Elizabeth he fell out of favour for, oddly, declaring himself a Roman Catholic. The drawing shows the marks of the metal point used to trace it.

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In 1590 it is known that the drawings were kept in a 'great booke'. They are described as showing 'certyne Lordes, Ladyes, gentlemen and gentlewomen in King Henry the 8: his tyme, their names subscribed by Sr John Cheke Secretary to King Edward the 6'. Cheke had served as tutor to Prince Edward from 1542 and could have known both Holbein and many of the people portrayed.



Sixty-nine of the eighty-five drawings have been given names. Most of the unidentified pictures seem to be from the time of Holbein's first visit to England. Cheke was not at court during this period. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that the inscriptions that we can see on the drawings today are not those by Sir John Cheke, but were added in the eighteenth century. Cheke's original identifications may have been on the backing paper of the 'great booke' in which they were stored. In any case, Cheke has got some of the identifications wrong. For example, the drawings marked 'Thomas Earl of Surrey' are in fact of Henry his son.



Whatever the case, Holbein's pictures have fascinated people ever since they were drawn. Even more than the paintings, they seem to capture their sitters with a startling realism. Looking at them we catch a glimpse of the world of Henry VIII's court free, for a moment, of the glitz and glamour of Hollywood films and BBC TV-serials. The faces of individuals who lived 500 years ago and who, in many cases, died a bloody death during one of Henry VIII's purges, are shown to be not so very different from ourselves.

Top right: Mary Zouch. The drawing is labelled 'M Souch', which may simply mean Mistress Zouch, in which case it could be any female member of the Zouch family. Top left: A drawing labelled 'Anna Bolleyn Queen'. However, this identification has been much disputed and is still not certain. Right: Lady Margaret Elyot and her husband Sir Thomas - in this case there is no dispute about the identity of the people shown!



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This drawing is labelled 'Reskemeer a Cornish Gent:'. The sitter is almost certainly one of the sons of John Reskimer of Merthen, near Truro. The elder son, John Reskimer, with whom the portrait was traditionally identified, seems to have been engaged in local activities in Cornwall at the time the portrait was painted. However, his younger brother, William, was Page of the Chamber in 1532 and was thereafter almost continuously at Henry VIII's court, becoming a Gentleman-Usher in 1546. He died in 1552 at which date he was resident in Hendon, Middlesex.



This drawing is labelled 'Gawin Carow Knight'. Sir Gawain Carew (?1503-85) came from a Devon family. Over the course of his long life as a courtier he managed to survive all the regimes from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I. Carew was Protestant, a supporter of church reform. During the Cornish Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549 he was ordered by Henry VIII to pacify the rebels. During the reign of the Roman Catholic Mary I he spent some time as a prisoner in the Tower of London.

Edward Stanley (1509-1572) became the third Earl of Derby on the death of his father at the age of thirteen. King Henry VIII took responsibility for bringing him up until he was of age. He was rather more successful at keeping favour with the monarch than Sir Gawain Carew. Under Henry VIII he was sent on various diplomatic and military missions. For example, in 1542 he accompanied the Duke of Norfolk on a raid into Scotland.



When Edward VI ascended to the throne in 1547, Edward became a Knight of the Garter. When Queen Mary I became Queen, he was appointed Lord High Steward and became a Privy Councillor. He was a commissioner of Lady Jane Grey's trial and was frequently present during the trials of Protestants. Despite this, he flourished during the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I's reign, and remained on her Privy Council. She eventually appointed him Chamberlain of Chester.

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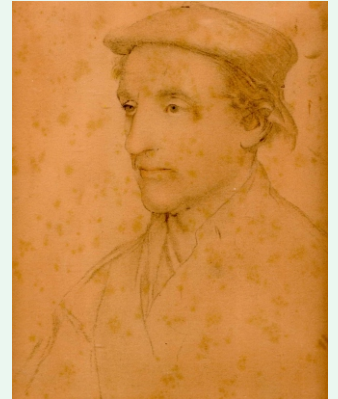
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This drawing is labelled 'Phil: Melancthon'. This is a bit of a mystery. Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) was a Protestant scholar - a friend of Martin Luther and important figure in the development of Protestant ideas. Melancthon was, by many accounts, a scrawny looking fellow - a portrait of him by Lucas Cranach can be seen on the left. Holbein certainly painted him. The



illustration on the lower right shows a miniature picture of Melancthon which is now in Hanover. There is clearly some similarity between the face in the miniature and the face in the drawing. However, all of the other Holbein drawings in the Royal Collection are of individuals who were present in England and Melancthon never visited

the British Isles. It is possible that this is an unknown gentleman in the court of Henry VIII, but no one is really sure.



This now faint drawing records a sitting with the very young Prince Edward, who is unlikely to have remained still enough for a sufficiently long period for Holbein to record his features in great detail! Henry VIII's sole male



heir Edward, Prince of Wales (1537-53) was born on 12 October 1537 to his third wife Jane Seymour. This drawing was used to create a portrait (left) that Holbein gave King Henry VIII at New Year 1539. The portrait has a Latin inscription which urges the infant Prince to imitate his father. Holbein shows the two-year-old prince as an adult monarch, his rattle held like a sceptre - perhaps a courtly joke.



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The clothes in this box are based on those that may have been worn by the figure named as Philip Melancthon in the set of portraits. Of course, the portrait only shows his head and shoulders, but the costume is typical of those that would have been worn by a scholar or an older man in the court of Henry VIII.

The hat is the same as that shown in the picture. The shirt is plain. The cote or gown is shown in the portrait as overlapping at the front and may have been held in place by a belt. This reproduction gown has been given a couple of buttons at the neck. A muffler has been added - scholars couldn't afford much heat and often had to sit warmed only by the light of their candle! The breeches, complete with a codpiece, are a bit old-fashioned for the 1540s, but scholar's didn't have the money to spend on the latest fashions either.

Right: Holbein's portrait 'The Ambassadors' (1533). The figure on the left is Jean de Dinteville (1504-1555), French ambassador to England in 1533, and (on the right) Georges de Selve (1508/09-1541), Bishop of Lavaur. The clergyman is dressed in much less flamboyant clothes than the aristocrat.

