

NOTE AND DOCUMENT

Gregory Cromwell: Two Portrait Miniatures by Hans Holbein the Younger

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This paper presents a probable identification of not one but two portrait miniatures of Gregory Cromwell, only son of England's only vice-gerent in spirituals, by Hans Holbein the Younger. The historical evidence has hitherto remained unconnected because of misunderstandings about Gregory's age, which are clarified here, and also thanks to the unexpected modern locations of the two relevant miniatures.

The probable identification of not one but two portrait miniatures of Gregory Cromwell, only son of England's only vice-gerent in spirituals, cannot fail to be of interest to ecclesiastical historians. It is for art historians to take this identification further, but here is presented the historical evidence, which has hitherto remained unconnected because of some historical misunderstandings and also thanks to the unexpected

BL = British Library; *LP* = *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII, 1509–47*, ed. J. S. Brewer and others, London 1862–1932; TNA, SP1 = The National Archives, Kew, State Papers Domestic, call number SP1

The authors wish to acknowledge Cambridge University Library, the Frick Collection, New York, the Koninklijk Huisarchief, Den Haag and the National Portrait Gallery, London for their kind permission to reproduce copyright material. In particular they are grateful to Claudia Maartense-van Ham, Chef de Bureau at the Koninklijk Huisarchief and Grant Young at Cambridge University Library for their generous assistance.

modern locations of the two relevant miniatures, which are by Hans Holbein the Younger.

The first task in making the identification must be to establish that Gregory Cromwell was of the right age to be the young man portrayed in the two miniatures, respectively of the late 1530s and of 1543. This is a subject bedevilled by past mistakes. In publishing Gregory's first extant letter in 1846, Sir Henry Ellis correctly stated that the date of his birth 'could hardly have been earlier than 1520'.¹ In spelling, orthography and style, Gregory's dutiful holograph letter to his father is patently from a boy in his early teens, as Ellis realised, though he did not express a precise opinion about its date. J. S. Brewer, in editing the volume of *Letters and papers Henry VIII* which appeared in 1872, unfortunately assigned the letter to the year 1528, following its then positioning in a volume of the state papers devoted to papers of that year.² He had clearly already communicated his opinion to Dean Walter Hook, who in publishing a volume of his *Lives of Reformation archbishops of Canterbury* in 1868, acknowledged his debt 'to the researches of Dr Brewer' in producing a birth date for Gregory of 1515 or 1516.³

Subsequently, however, Brewer realised his mistake in dating Gregory's letter, and reassigned it to a much more plausible 1533, giving it a new place in volume vii of *Letters and papers*, published in 1883. Evidently in consultation with Brewer, the staff of the Public Record Office took the unusual step of moving the original letter to a later State Papers volume, comprising papers of 1533.⁴ By then, however, it was too late for Gregory's age to be corrected in the literature. The difference between 1515–16 and 1519–20 may not seem great; but try telling that to a ten-year-old who has been accused of being fourteen. Much condescending nonsense has been written about Gregory, based on this persistent miscalculation of his age; he has frequently been denigrated for not having the educational attainments of a teenager at a time when he was in fact ten years old or less.⁵ His handwriting steadily improved from that clumsy letter of 1533, so that by the late 1530s, he wrote a decent and careful secretary hand, though like many gentlemen of his time when they did not employ their clerk to write their letters, he was never very good at making his lines move across the page in disciplined horizontality.⁶

¹ *Original letters illustrative of English history*, ed. H. Ellis, London 1846, i. 338, introducing Ellis's edition of TNA, SP 1/75, fo. 85.

² LP iv/2, no. 4561, calendaring what was then SP 1/49, fo. 154.

³ W. F. Hook, *The lives of the archbishops of Canterbury*, London 1861–84, vi. 122.

⁴ SP 1/49, fo. 154 and LP iv/2, no. 4561 became SP 1/75, fo. 85 and LP vi, no. 337.

⁵ See *Life and letters of Thomas Cromwell*, ed. R. B. Merriman, London 1902, i. 11–12, and his particularly crass remarks on Gregory at pp. 53–4. For a detailed reappraisal, which anticipates the findings of this article, see M. Erler, *Reading and writing during the Dissolution: monks, friars and nuns, 1530–1558*, Cambridge 2013, 88–106.

⁶ Cf. for instance Gregory Cromwell to Thomas Cromwell, 29 June 1538, holograph, SP 1/133, fo. 231; LP xiii/1, no. 1281.

The stereotype of the backward son seems to be derived solely from the testimony of the evangelical London merchant Richard Hilles, writing an account of Thomas Cromwell's fall and execution a year after the event to his correspondent in Zürich Heinrich Bullinger: he then referred sarcastically to Henry VIII's grant to 'Cromwell's son Gregory, who was almost a fool, [of] his father's title and many of his domains, while he was yet living in prison; that he might more readily confess his offences against the king, at the time of execution'.⁷ This is no more than stale public gossip, and there seems no other comparable evidence, apart from the common misapprehension that Gregory was born in the mid-1510s. In fact his letters at the end of the 1530s to his father contain attempts at stylistic elegance and even wit which are not at all those of a fool.⁸

Quite apart from the progress of Gregory's handwriting as a key to establishing his age is the chronology and progress of his education, meticulously planned by his always meticulous father. Until the early 1530s it was under the supervision of Margaret Vernon, prioress of Little Marlow, a sure sign that Gregory was not yet a teenager.⁹ A generous run of Vernon's letters about Gregory's education survive, most of them difficult to date precisely, but fortunately one can be assigned with reasonable certainty to 1529, when she was arguing against Cromwell's choice of a priest to teach Gregory in favour of her own candidate, William Inglefield.¹⁰ Inglefield would need to obtain a year's leave from Lincoln College, Oxford, she said, 'for he is a Master of Art and fellow of Lyncoln Colegg'. In fact Inglefield had obtained his MA on 22 July 1528, and Vernon does not suggest that this was a particularly recent event.¹¹ Equally to the point, in the same letter she writes (in a forthright style

⁷ 'Propter similem etiam dolum aliqui opinantur, regem dedisse Gregorio eiusdem Cromwelli filio, *vere fere stulto*, domini titulum, multaue sui patris, adhuc in carcere viventis, dominia, ut pater eius tanto citius diceret in hora mortis suae se offendisse regem [*our italics*]': *Original letters relative to the English Reformation*, ed. H. Robinson (Parker Society, 1846), i. 200–15 at p. 203; *Epistolae Tigurinae de rebus potissimum ad ecclesiae Anglicanae Reformationem pertinentibus conscriptae, A. D. 1531–1558* (Parker Society, 1848), 133–43 at p. 134 (*our italics*).

⁸ See for instance Gregory's first (and holograph) letter to his father from Lewes in April 1538, when he describes his reception from the Sussex nobility and gentry who have 'both with their preasences and also presentes right frendly entertained me and welcomed me': SP 1/131, fo. 62; LP xiii/1, no. 734.

⁹ As a rule the boys in nunneries were very young, as it was not considered appropriate for them to stay with the nuns later than their ninth or tenth year. It was acceptable for young boys, up to the age of nine or ten, to be supervised by nuns, but not taught by them, and so they were usually accompanied by a male tutor: E. Power, *Medieval English nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*, New York 1988, 263–4, 267. Margaret Vernon went slightly beyond that convention in negotiating supervision of Gregory until the age of twelve.

¹⁰ SP 1/65, fo. 37; LP v, no. 17. LP puts this too late, at 1531.

¹¹ *A biographical register of the University of Oxford, A. D. 1501 to 1540*, ed. A. B. Emden, Oxford 1974, 311. Inglefield's surname has a bewildering variety of spellings.

characteristic of her correspondence with Thomas Cromwell) as if her young charge is nowhere near the age of twelve years:

yf it like you to call unto yo'r remembrance you have promysid me that I schuld have the governance of yo'r child till he be xii yeres of age, and at that tyme I dowght not w'th Gooddes grace but he shall speake for hym selffe yff any wrong be offerd unto hym, where as yet he cannot but be my maintenance.

On any reckoning, then, Gregory was significantly younger than twelve in 1529, and the nature of his educational programme projects the date of his birth back to 1519 or 1520. While still under Vernon's 'governance', during 1528–32, he was beginning Latin with older cousins under the supervision of two Fellows of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, John Chekyng and John Hunt.¹² This regime was not without its tensions, and it ended in summer 1532, with Gregory's older and more academically-inclined cousin Christopher Wellifed writing to Thomas Cromwell from Bartlow near Cambridge in November 1532 that Gregory 'prospere more at his boke in a weke in my mynd then he dyd afore in a month'.¹³ Margaret Vernon was now dropping out of Gregory's supervision, indicating that the agreement for governance till Gregory's twelfth year had reached its end that year, and his care was transferred to Thomas Cromwell's intimate friend Roland Lee, ecclesiastical lawyer and future bishop.¹⁴

Lee had benefices at Banham in Norfolk and Ashdon in Essex, and it was in rural East Anglia that Gregory passed much of the next few years. He first spent what sounds like an enjoyable Christmas with young relatives under Lee's amused supervision in the redundant priory buildings of Bromehill in Norfolk, recently dissolved by Cardinal Wolsey, but now belonging to Christ's College, Cambridge (a college in which Thomas Cromwell was taking a sudden new interest). On 9 December 1532, as Lee set out for Bromehill from Ashdon with Gregory, he let Cromwell know that 'yowr littell man is mery, thankyd be Godd, and not only well and clenly kepyd, but alsoo profettes in hys lerning'.¹⁵ He wrote greetings to Cromwell on New Year's Day 1533, with news of 'your littill men', signing off ruefully 'at Bromehyll among a husfull of chylidren, God help'.¹⁶ All this pleasant domestic detail confirms that Gregory was not then a hulking late teenager born in 1515/16, nor was he free of schooling and supervision of his personal hygiene.

¹² A series of letters from Chekyng to Cromwell terminate in a letter of John Hunt, with a postscript from Chekyng: SP 1/66, fo. 169; LPv, no. 359 (31 July *s.a.* but probably 1532, since before that Hunt was at Oxford).

¹³ SP 1/72, fo. 63; LPv, no. 1578 (26 Nov. 1532).

¹⁴ What is probably the latest reference to Gregory at Vernon's priory of Little Marlow, in a letter from Henry Lockwood the Master of Christ's College, Cambridge, to Thomas Cromwell, is unfortunately difficult to date: SP 1/73, fo. 120; LPv, no. 1745.

¹⁵ SP 1/237, fo. 79; LPAdd. i/1, no. 744 (wrongly dated by LP to 1531).

¹⁶ SP 1/237, fo. 5; LPAdd. i/1, no. 724 (wrongly dated by LP to 1531).

It was perhaps understandable that commentators were reluctant to accept such a late date for Gregory's birth as 1519–20, as it suggested a remarkably late date of marriage for Thomas Cromwell, a man born around 1485. It is possible that he had already been married before he wed Elizabeth Wykys, or that earlier children by her had died before Gregory's birth. The arrangements for Gregory's education described so far were against the tragic background of first the death of his mother and then two sisters (Anne and Grace) during 1529.¹⁷ So Gregory went on to adulthood alone; his sisters had probably been younger than him.¹⁸ According to a confident tradition in Cheshire, recorded in an Elizabethan heraldic visitation, Thomas Cromwell is said also to have fathered an illegitimate daughter: 'Jane base d. to Thom^s Cromwell, Earl of Essex'. She later married into a Cheshire gentry family, and long after Thomas's death became a firm Catholic recusant, but the circumstances of the liaison which lay behind this are not clear.¹⁹ A reference on 23 May 1539 to money sent by Henry Dowes to Gregory Cromwell's wife for 'apparel for Mrs. Jane' suggests that Jane was then a child living in their household, and that might imply that actually Gregory was her father and not her half-brother.²⁰ Thomas

¹⁷ Elizabeth's death is likely to have been in February or early March 1529, as Stephen Vaughan refers to money in the custody of Mrs Prior, suggesting that her daughter was dead: Vaughan to Cromwell, 23 Mar. [1529], SP 1/53, fo. 128; *LP* iv/3, no. 5398. Then two correspondents in April 1529 send Cromwell good wishes for finding a new wife: Eleanor Scrope to Cromwell, 6 Apr. [1529], SP 1/236, fo. 76; *LP* Add. i/1, no. 639; Edward Lewkenor to Cromwell, 13 Apr. 1529, SP 1/236, fo. 77; SP 1/236, fo. 77, *LP* Add. i/1, no. 640. Cromwell's daughters were evidently still alive when he made his will in the summer of 1529.

¹⁸ Nothing proves that the daughters were younger than Gregory, but there are no known moves to get them married off in the 1520s; if they were in their mid-teens negotiations might well have started in 1528–9. The original text of Cromwell's unused will of 1529 speaks of 'my little daughter Grace', but just 'my son Gregory', suggesting that she is younger than Gregory, but both girls get the same legacies, not just 100 marks for marriage when they come of lawful age to be married, but also £40 for finding them until then, suggesting that they are not far apart in age: SP 1/54, fos 234–47; *LP* iv/3, no. 5772.

¹⁹ Robert Glover refers to 'Jane base d. to Thom^s Cromwell, Earl of Essex', who married William Hough, the son of Richard Hough of Leighton and Thornton Hough, and his first wife, Christiana Calveley: *The visitation of Cheshire in the year 1580*, ed. J. P. Rylands (Harleian Society xviii, 1882), 128. See also George Ormerod, *The history of the county palatine and city of Chester*, 2nd edn, London 1882, ii. 552. On Jane's recusancy see K. R. Wark, *Elizabethan recusancy in Cheshire (Remains, historical and literary, connected with the palatine counties of Lancaster and Chester*, 3rd ser. xix, 1971), 153. Wark, however, has been led astray by R. V. H. Burne, *The monks of Chester; the history of St. Werburgh's Abbey*, London 1962, 167; William Hough was the son of Richard Hough and Christiana Calveley, as Glover indicates.

²⁰ 'Lady Owthred, by Hen. Dowes, for apparel for Mrs. Jane, 12l. 14s. 6d.': *LP* xiv/2, no. 782 (p. 341). Elizabeth Seymour, Gregory's wife, is given her superior courtesy title as widow of Sir Anthony Ughtred.

and Gregory were, after all, both successively Lord Cromwell, and Tudor genealogy was often slipshod: a family tradition of 'Lord Cromwell' could easily have morphed in the mind of Somerset Herald into the sometime earl of Essex.

The loss of all Thomas Cromwell's children apart from his son and heir obviously concentrated his affection on the boy. Roland Lee, who also showed every sign of being genuinely fond of Gregory, called him 'your treasure' when returning him to his father's care at the end of 1534, and Lee also suggested that Gregory was delicate or at least small in stature: 'although nature workith not in bodily strenght, yet it surmountith in goode gentle and vertuouse conditions'.²¹ Year by year the calibration of Gregory's education as a potential nobleman continued. There was hunting and schoolwork in East Anglia with Lee during 1533, the year to which Gregory's first letter, written from Lee's house, can properly be assigned. One letter to Cromwell from Lee at Bromehill that summer comments with affectionate sarcasm on the boy's fumbling efforts at using his bow to kill deer in the duke of Norfolk's nearby park at Lopham: 'he shott at buke and doo at hys plesure, but the skynnyes where soo harde that the fleysse whold not be hurte'.²²

Between July and Christmas 1534 came Gregory's first lesson in courtly life and royal governance in a setting nevertheless safely away from Henry VIII's court, when Roland Lee moved to the Welsh borders, newly promoted thanks to Cromwell as bishop of Coventry and Lichfield and Lord President of the Council in the Marches of Wales; they progressed around the western shires from the Lord President's own miniature court at Ludlow Castle. 1535 brought Gregory a long summer and autumn at Rycote House in Oxfordshire, hosted by a Cromwell cousin, John Williams (the future Lord Williams of Thame): the time was devoted to immersing Gregory in the life of an unfamiliar county society and in his now proficient enthusiasm for hunting.²³ 1536 saw a move back to East Anglia, in default of Roland Lee under the supervision of Sir Richard Southwell, brother of one of Thomas Cromwell's most trusted servants.²⁴ The emphasis this year was by contrast on more humanist academic polish: as Gregory's long-term and no doubt long-suffering tutor Henry Dowes said with prim

²¹ SP 1/87, fo. 129; LP vii, no. 1576.

²² Lee to Cromwell, 21 Aug. [1533]: SP 1/78, fo. 143; LP vi, no. 1011.

²³ See two ebullient letters from Gregory to his father from Rycote, 24 Sept., 25 Nov. [1535], SP 1/96, fo. 209; LP ix, no. 422, and BL, Cotton ms Titus B.I, fo. 357; LP vii, no. 1473 (the latter there misdated to 1534). The first letter apologises that his constant hawking, hunting and socialising have postponed his writing – disarming teenage frankness.

²⁴ See Sir Richard Southwell's letter to Thomas Cromwell as he set out for Norfolk with Gregory in March 1536: BL, ms Cotton Cleopatra E.IV, fo. 274; LP x, no. 507. Richard's brother was Robert Southwell, later knighted: *History of parliament: the House of Commons, 1509–1558*, ed. S. T. Bindoff, London 1982, iii. 354–6.

satisfaction from Southwell's home at Woodrising, 'Wheras the laste somer was spente in the serveyce of the wyldre goddess Diana, this shall (I truste) be consecrated to Apollo and the Muses.'²⁵

All this was preparatory to the dynastic marriage which raised the Cromwells astonishingly high: on 3 August 1537 Gregory was married to Queen Jane Seymour's sister, Elizabeth Seymour, at Thomas Cromwell's newly-acquired mansion at Mortlake.²⁶ Gregory thus became King Henry VIII's brother-in-law, as well as brother-in-law to Edward Seymour the future Protector Somerset, not to mention uncle to the future King Edward VI. At least his father was by now a peer of the realm, as Baron Cromwell of Wimbledon (of which Mortlake was the capital mansion), and it was not a coincidence that two days after Gregory's wedding, Lord Cromwell was created a Knight of the Garter: the status of the king's 'uncle by marriage' needed all the boosting that it could get.²⁷

Gregory's bride was the very young widow of Sir Anthony Ughtred, of Kexby, Yorkshire, and sometime governor of Jersey, who had been a business acquaintance of Thomas Cromwell at least since the latter entered Thomas Wolsey's service in the mid-1520s.²⁸ Since Elizabeth was married to Ughtred by January 1531, and since soon after they had one son (named Henry), she must have been a little older than Gregory, but the age difference was not as grotesquely disproportionate as in her first marriage (Sir Anthony died in 1534, in his fifties).²⁹ Gregory's and Elizabeth's first child, also Henry, was born in May the following year at Lewes Priory in Sussex, by then a Cromwell family property; he was clearly named after his uncle-by-marriage the king.³⁰ A second son, Edward (whose godfather was presumably his uncle Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford), was born in

²⁵ SP 1/92, fo. 104; LPviii, no. 618 (there misdated to 1535). On Dowes see *History of parliament: 1509–1558*, ii. 54.

²⁶ 'Mr Gregory, by Mr Richard [Cromwell], "the same day he was married at Mortelacke": LPxiv/2, no. 782, p. 330.

²⁷ W. A. Shaw, *The knights of England*, London 1906, i. 22.

²⁸ John Nichols, *The history and antiquities of the county of Leicester*, London 1800, iii/1, 325; George S. Syvret and Samuel de Carteret, *Chroniques des Iles de Jersey, Guernesey, Auregny et Serk*, Guernsey 1832, 60. Evidence of Cromwell's and Ughtred's acquaintance comes from, for example, SP 1/38, fos 147–59; LPiv/2, no. 2193 [1], p. 978. This is an indenture, corrected by Cromwell, dated — 18 Henry VIII., between Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Robert, son and heir of Sir Henry Ughtred, of Kexbie, Yorkshire, conveying to the cardinal the manors of Atwele, Sutton, and other lands in Yorkshire. For Ughtred's friendly acquaintance with Cromwell, to whom he was then paying a regular fee, see Sir Anthony Ughtred to Cromwell, 16 June 1533 or 1534, SP 1/77, fo. 46; LPvi, no. 659.

²⁹ LPv, no. 80(14) is a grant in survivorship to Sir Anthony Ughtred and Elizabeth his wife, of the manors of Lepington and Kexby, Yorkshire, 16 January 1531. See also Syvret and de Carteret, *Chroniques des Iles de Jersey*, 60–1.

³⁰ Gregory and Elizabeth had two 'little boys' by December 1539, as witnessed by Gregory's affectionate enquiries about them to his wife: SP 1/155, fo. 101; LPxiv/2, no. 664. Henry was born in 1538 and therefore Edward in 1539, for Henry was

1539, and a third, Thomas, in 1540.³¹ A daughter, Katherine, arrived in about 1541 (if so, and if therefore the name was a compliment to King Henry's then wife Katherine Howard, it represented unfortunate timing) and their last child, Frances, around 1544.³²

In 1903 Sir Richard Holmes identified a miniature in the collection of the queen of the Netherlands as the work of Hans Holbein the Younger (*see fig. 1*).³³ This miniature, hitherto described as an 'Unknown youth' aged around sixteen, is approximately one-and-one half of an inch (3.8 centimetres) in diameter, and painted in water-colour on vellum, probably intended to fit into a wooden or ivory box or pendant locket. It forms one of a collection of some four hundred miniatures, of which fifty were of English origin, in the royal collections at The Hague.³⁴ Roy Strong dated the portrait to between 1535 and 1540.³⁵ On a bright blue background only the head and shoulders are shown, turned three-quarters to the viewer's right, the eyes cast down. The light brown hair is close cropped, and the sitter is wearing a brown doublet, trimmed with black, with a small, open falling collar with white strings attached. There is no inscription in the background. With the exception of slight discolouration of the collar through oxidization of the pigment, this miniature is in faultless condition. Holmes suggested that it was a portrait of a member of a family of one of the German merchants of the Steelyard.³⁶ Frits Lugt, who found the portrait to be reminiscent of Rembrandt's *Jeune homme assis et réfléchissant*, also considered that the sitter might have been associated with the Steelyard.³⁷

Arthur B. Chamberlain observed, however, that the facial characteristics of the *Unknown youth* 'appear to be more English than German, and that it

twenty-one around 21 May 1559: *Calendar of the patent rolls preserved in the Public Record Office: Elizabeth*, London 1939, i. 73.

³¹ D. Dean, 'Cromwell, Thomas (c.1540–1610/11)', *ODNB*.

³² *Magna Carta ancestry: a study in colonial and medieval families*, ed. D. Richardson and K. G. Everingham, 2nd edn, Salt Lake City 2011, iii. 604–5, 628. Frances may have been named for Richard Cromwell's wife, who died in about 1543.

³³ Richard R. Holmes, 'An unpublished miniature by Holbein in the possession of the Queen of Holland', *Burlington Magazine* i (1903), 218–19.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 218; Arthur B. Chamberlain, *Hans Holbein the Younger*, New York 1913, ii, plate 31, no. 5, pp. 229–32 at p. 229. On Holbein's technique see P. Ganz, *The paintings of Hans Holbein*, London 1950, 258, 260, and C. Winter, 'Holbein's miniatures', *Burlington Magazine* lxxxiii (1943), 266–9 at p. 269.

³⁵ R. Strong, *The English Renaissance miniature* [London] 1983, 50–1.

³⁶ Holmes, 'An unpublished miniature', 218; Karen Schaffers-Bodenhausen and Marieke Tiethoff-Spliethoff, *The portrait miniatures in the collections of the House of Orange-Nassau*, Zwolle 1993, 373. For a detailed discussion of Holbein's Steelyard merchants see Thomas S. Holman, 'Holbein's portraits of the Steelyard merchants: an investigation', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* xiv (1979), 139–58.

³⁷ F. Lugt, *Le Portrait-miniature, illustré par la collection de S. M. la Reine de Pays-Bas*, Amsterdam 1917, 8–9.



Figure 1. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Unknown youth* (c. 1535–40) © Koninklijke Verzamelingen, Den Haag

probably represents the son of some personage about Henry VIII's court'.³⁸ Thomas Cromwell was such a personage, and Hans Holbein was known to him from around 1533, when Holbein first painted his famously unflattering portrait (see fig. 2).³⁹ Gregory was aged around seventeen or eighteen at the time of his marriage in August 1537, the same month that Cromwell was made a Knight of the Garter. A miniature depicting Cromwell wearing the Garter collar was probably painted in late 1537 after he had been installed as a Knight of the Garter; it is a more sympathetic depiction of a resolute statesman than the portrait of 1533 (see fig. 3).⁴⁰ What is more,

³⁸ Chamberlain, *Hans Holbein the Younger*, ii, plate 31, no. 5, and pp. 229–32 at p. 230.

³⁹ The artist painted Cromwell's portrait when he held the post of Master of the King's Jewels. See D. Wilson, *Hans Holbein: portrait of an unknown man*, London 2006, 214.

⁴⁰ Two miniatures of Thomas Cromwell wearing the Garter collar survive. The first was identified by Lionel Cust in 1911 as the work of Hans Holbein: 'A newly-discovered miniature of Thomas Cromwell', *Burlington Magazine* xx (1911), 5–7, plate a, and Chamberlain, *Hans Holbein the Younger*, ii, plate 31, no. 6 and pp. 229–32. That miniature, no longer considered to be by the hand of Holbein, belonged at one time to



Figure 2. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Thomas Cromwell* (1532–3). © The Frick Collection, New York

the features of the young man in The Hague's miniature have a distinct resemblance to those of the Lord Privy Seal, though they are more delicate, as for a youth in whom 'nature workith not in bodily strenght': he has the same characteristic Cromwell upturned nose.

There is every likelihood that a miniature of Thomas's son Gregory would have been painted around the time of his marriage, when both father and son had so much to celebrate. It is of interest to note that, in Cromwell's accounts for 1538, there is a payment on 4 January to

the Pierpont Morgan Collection and was sold with that collection at Christie's in 1932. See P. Ganz, *The paintings of Hans Holbein*, London 1950, 258; Erika Michael, *Hans Holbein the Younger: a guide to research*, New York 1997, 493. The second miniature (discussed here), probably from the studio of Hans Holbein, is exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery, London as *Thomas Cromwell, earl of Essex*, NPG 6311. The miniatures are $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. (4.4 cm.) in diameter. See Ganz, *The paintings of Hans Holbein*, 258, plate 190, and John Rowlands, *Holbein: the paintings of Hans Holbein the Younger*, Oxford 1985, 240, plate 262.



Figure 3. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Thomas Cromwell, earl of Essex* (c. 1537). © National Portrait Gallery, London

‘Hanns the painter, 40s.’.⁴¹ Hans Holbein arrived in London for the second time in 1532, probably after his former patron Sir Thomas More resigned from office. He was employed by his fellow countrymen, members of the German merchant community in the Steelyard. Cromwell himself had long-standing connections within the merchant community in the Steelyard: for instance, he proved a major patron for the goldsmith John of Antwerp.⁴² The miniature may have been a gift from a proud father to a friend, or paired with his own likeness, and could even be ‘the liberal token’ presented to his prospective

⁴¹ Chamberlain, *Hans Holbein the Younger*, ii. 232; *LP* xiv/2, no. 782 (p. 333).

⁴² John of Antwerp (Jan van der Goes) was employed by Thomas Cromwell as a goldsmith and court courier, and was used extensively by him from 1537 to 1539: Lionel Cust, ‘John of Antwerp, goldsmith, and Hans Holbein’, *Burlington Magazine* viii (1906), 356–60 at p. 359. See also T.S. Holman, ‘Holbein’s portraits of the Steelyard merchants: an investigation’, *Metropolitan Museum Journal* xiv (1979), 142, 144. Cromwell nominated him for the post of King’s Goldsmith and he was made a Freeman of the Goldsmiths’ Company in 1537 at Cromwell’s express command: H. Norris, *Tudor costume and fashion*, Mineola 1997, 347.

daughter-in-law for which she thanked him in summer 1537.⁴³ The two portraits are approximately the same size, which suggests that they may have once formed a pair. When they are placed facing one another, the rapport between the miniatures is touching (*see* [figs 1 and 3](#)).⁴⁴

This identification of an unknown youth with Gregory Cromwell might still seem arbitrary, were it not for the existence of another, later, portrait miniature of the same individual with a date and a year of age exactly corresponding to those already discussed. This remarkable nexus has been overlooked in the literature because of the tangled history and currently disputed ownership of the second little picture, which has taken it far from its origins in Tudor England. In 1913 Georg Habich identified a miniature portrait in the Danzig Stadtmuseum then in West Prussia (now the Gdansk National Museum in Poland) as the work of Hans Holbein (*see* [fig. 4](#)).⁴⁵ It holds a special significance as it was one of the last works, perhaps the last, undertaken by Hans Holbein during the final year of his life, for it is dated 1543.⁴⁶ Claimed by the Soviet Red Army from a stricken Germany as spoils of war in 1945, it is currently at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow.⁴⁷

⁴³ SP 1/125, fo.145–6; LP xii/2 no. 881. This letter, a holograph of Lady Ughtred, must be from before the marriage of August 1537; and is slightly misdated, to the autumn, by LP.

⁴⁴ It would be worth further exploring the possibility that another group of portrait images depicts Elizabeth Seymour, Lady Ughtred and Baroness Cromwell. The original portrait, dated c. 1535–40, is exhibited at the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, as *Portrait of a lady, probably a member of the Cromwell family* (ref. 1926.57). The National Portrait Gallery exhibits a similar painting, *Unknown woman, formerly known as Catherine Howard* (ref. NPG 1119), which has been dated to the late seventeenth century, without any consensus as to the sitter's identity. A miniature by William Essex, *Portrait of a woman called Princess Mary, duchess of Suffolk (1498–1533)*, in the Royal Collection (ref. RCIN 421718), is based on the Holbein portrait at the Toledo Museum of Art. This group of pictures raises interesting problems of identification but they will not be pursued here.

⁴⁵ G. Habich, 'Ein Miniature Bildnis von Hans Holbein in Danzig', *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst* (n.s. xxiv, 1913), 194–6, plate 1.

⁴⁶ Hans Holbein died between 7 October and 29 November 1543 at the age of forty-five: Wilson, *Hans Holbein*, 277–8.

⁴⁷ John Rowlands, *Holbein*, 152 (m.14) and plate 139. See also Division for Looted Art, The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Warsaw, <http://kolekcje.mkidn.gov.pl/en/product-war-losses/object?obid=29081> (accessed 7 Nov. 2014). For the current location of this miniature see Agence France-Press, 'Poland's culture minister Bogdan Zdrojewski seeks return of art seized by Soviet Russia in 1945', *artdaily.org*, 16 May 2013, <http://artdaily.com/news/62607/Poland-s-culture-minister-Bogdan-Zdrojewski-seeks-return-of-art-seized-by-Soviet-Russia-in-1945#.VGgRfmUeSp> (accessed 16 Nov. 2014), and 'Poland seeks return of art seized by Soviet Russia', *GlobalPost*, 16 May 2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130515/poland-seeks-return-art-seized-soviet-russia-1945> (accessed 16 Nov. 2014). See also BAT, (PAP), 'Polska chce od Rosji zwrotu 18 dzieł sztuki [Poland asks for the return of eighteen pieces of art from



Figure 4. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Man aged 24* (1543). Reproduced from Habich, 'Ein Miniature Bildnis von Hans Holbein', by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

This miniature, approximately two and one-eighth inches (5.4 centimetres) in diameter, is painted in tempera on parchment.⁴⁸ The contemplative sitter is a young man aged twenty-four, wearing distinctly English clothing. His features appear more English than German, and he is clearly the same as the *Unknown youth* in the earlier miniature (see fig. 1); their pose and expression is identical, with due allowance for the six years or so which separate them in age. On a blue background, the young man's head is painted in pink and white with grey shadow. He is wearing a deep black velvet cap and a black silk gown, a shade lighter, with a finely embroidered white shirt showing at the neck and wrist. The eyes are lowered, half covered by the lids, the arms folded. He is wearing two rings on his left hand and holding leather gloves. There is a flanking

Russia]', *Nowy Dziennik, Polish Daily News*, 17 May 2013, <http://www.dziennik.com/publicystyka/artykul/polska-chce-od-rozji-zwrotu-18-dziel-sztuki> (accessed 16 Nov. 2014).

⁴⁸ See Division for Looted Art, <http://kolekcje.mkidn.gov.pl/en/product-warlosses/object?obid=29081> (accessed 7 Nov 2014); cf. Habich, 'Ein Miniature Bildnis', 194–6, plate 1, at p. 194 (tempera on paper); cf. Ganz, *The paintings of Hans Holbein*, plate 173 and p. 260 (watercolour on cardboard); cf. H.F. Secker, *Führer durch die öffentlichen kunstsammlungen in Danzig*, Danzig 1913, i. 26–7, plate 6. (parchment).

inscription in gold at head height: 'ANNO ETATIS / SUÆ 24.1543': the sitter was thus born in 1519 or 1520.

It is not surprising that, writing in Prussia in 1913, Habich assumed a German identity for the sitter, albeit with English associations, 'like so many others in the Steelyard in London', while he noted the peculiarities of clothing, such as the pointed, tasselled shirt collar, which is found on English portraits by Holbein in this period. Habich spoke of a tradition in Danzig that the subject was 'a member of the old, prosperous, West Prussian patrician Schwarzwald family'. This assumption was probably based on the provenance of the piece: already in 1708 it was in the possession of a member of the Schwarzwald family, and together with a library and coin collection, formed part of a legacy to the Lutheran parish church of St Peter in Danzig. Habich admitted that the evidence for the sitter being from Danzig relied on a tiny detail: the ring on the index finger of his left hand. On this signet ring, there is a Z or very widely placed N, which can only be seen under magnification. Habich considered that this mark might be a 'house mark' or merchant's mark that was used, together with the signature, as a unique identification for a merchant's business.⁴⁹ He claimed that 'by tradition', the sitter was identified as Heinrich von Schwarzwald, but Heinrich's birth date of 8 July 1517 rules him out as the sitter, and in any case his merchant's mark does not correspond to the mark on the ring. A different claim was made at the same time by Hans Secker, who said that 'by tradition', the sitter was known as Johann von Schwarzwaldt, but if this was Heinrich's son, he too can be ruled out.⁵⁰

In fact the Z or N detail on the signet ring can be accounted for by Gregory Cromwell's heraldry, if it is seen as a zig-zag, or in heraldic terms, a fess indented. This was literally central to Gregory Cromwell's coat of arms, for the coat that he adopted when restored in blood and newly created Baron Cromwell by Henry VIII in 1540 was that previously borne by his father Thomas as earl of Essex: quarterly, *per fess indented*, azure and or, four lions passant counterchanged.⁵¹ This coat features, for instance, on Gregory's splendidly modish Renaissance funerary monument of 1551 in the chapel of his final home, Launde Abbey in Leicestershire.

⁴⁹ For examples of merchant marks in Holbein's portraits of the Steelyard merchants see Holman, 'Holbein's portraits of the Steelyard merchants', 152–8.

⁵⁰ Habich, 'Ein Miniature Bildnis', 195; cf. Secker, *Führer durch die öffentlichen kunst-sammlungen in Danzig*, i. 26–7, plate 6. For Heinrich Schwarzwald (1544–1608) see H. Freytag, 'Die Beziehungen Danzigs zu Wittenberg in der Zeit der Reformation', *Zeitschrift des Westpreussisches Geschichtsvereins* xxxviii (1898), 1–137 at p. 112.

⁵¹ F. Blomefield, *An essay towards a topographical history of the county of Norfolk*, London 1808, ix. 486–95 at p. 488. See also W. C. Metcalfe, *A book of Knights banneret, Knights of the Bath, and Knights bachelor: made between the fourth year of King Henry VI and the restoration of King Charles II and knights made in Ireland, between the years 1566 and 1698, together with an index of names*, London 1885, 87.



Figure 5. Gregory Cromwell's coat of arms.

(see fig. 5) The identification of the sitter of 1543 with the earlier miniature, so closely linked to England, renders a German identification redundant.

By 1543 Gregory Cromwell was a peer of the realm, having been restored to an honourable place in the kingdom by a monarch who had quickly regretted the destruction of his great minister; the young man was still also uncle to the heir to the throne, who indeed at his coronation in 1547 was to create Gregory a Knight of the Bath. What more natural, then, that in 1543 Holbein should paint a portrait of this living symbol of England's evangelical Reformation when undertaking his last round of English portraiture in the circle of Henry VIII's last queen, herself a convert to the evangelical cause? It is a reminder that Gregory Cromwell retained his proper place in Tudor political life after Thomas's execution; indeed, the baronial line which he founded lasted until the end of the seventeenth century. Despite his continuing conscientious attendance at meetings of the House of Lords up to his death in the reign of Edward VI, the fact that Gregory Cromwell chose to avoid high politics in later life and spent his time as a perfectly worthy provincial peer was, given his heritage, not the mark of a fool.