

THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Fact Sheet

George Arnold by William Hogarth



Title:	George Arnold
Maker:	William Hogarth (1697 - 1764)
Medium:	Oil on canvas
Date:	1738-1740
Dimensions:	h. 90.5 cm x w. 70.8 cm
Museum No:	21
Gallery:	3

The Artist

Born and bred in London, Hogarth's early life was marred by the four year stint his father spent as a debtor in the Fleet prison. This harsh early experience made Hogarth more socially aware than many of his artistic contemporaries, and gave him a determination to earn a good living and keep himself out of debt. Initially trained as an engraver, he went on to study drawing and his early income was provided by satirical engravings of contemporary events. He later took up painting and by the early 1730s was in demand as a painter of conversation pieces (informal portraits of two or more people shown in a domestic or appropriate setting), and also had aspirations to be a history painter.

The 1730s saw the beginning of Hogarth's moral progresses or moral stories narrated in a series of pictures. An example is "A Rake's Progress, which in eight pictures tells the sorry tale of a spendthrift, debauched young man about town, from riches right through to death in a madhouse. Hogarth's original paintings were engraved, and then sets of prints were printed for subscribers, giving him an income without the need for a patron. He was instrumental in encouraging Parliament to pass the Engravers' Copyright Act in 1735, which prohibited unauthorised copies of engravings for 14 years after their first publication. In the Fitzwilliam we have a pair of paintings in the same vein called "Before" and "After" depicting the seduction of a servant girl by a young (not so) gentleman.

Hogarth had a reputation for satire and for xenophobia. The latter was inflamed in 1737 by the arrival in England of the fashionable portrait painter Jean-Baptiste van Loo. Hogarth saw van Loo's paintings as bland and flattering and not aiming for a true likeness of the sitter. Hogarth set about creating a larger-scale portrait style, to paint a number of contemporary worthies in a style which portrayed the person he saw in front of him, and not the person they aspired to be. It is to this group of portraits from the late 1730s - early 1740s that the portrait of George Arnold belongs.

The Sitter

The portrait is of retired businessman George Arnold. Arnold had lived in London in St Martin's in the Fields, but in 1718 bought an estate at Ashby St Ledgers in Northamptonshire. By 1722 he had built Ashby Lodge, where he lived with his family, and where Hogarth is thought to have painted his portrait, and that of his daughter Frances (also in The Fitzwilliam Museum), in about 1738-40.

The Painting

The painting is a three-quarter length portrait, showing Arnold full-face, seated in a chair holding a black three-cornered hat in both hands before his knees. He appears to be about 65 years of age with a ruddy complexion and dark eyebrows, but wearing a full white wig. His dress is a coat with very full sleeves, and a waistcoat and both are light grey. The wristbands have ruffles and the neck cloth is white.

Lawrence Gowing wrote of Hogarth's portraits in the 1971/72 Tate exhibition catalogue,

He (Hogarth) came to his sitters with an unaffected expectation that each would carry as much sensible, determined, combative and compassionate bulk as he did himself. He showed the aspect that a man presented to his fellows and the place that he occupied in his world with a completeness that invented what was virtually a new kind of image.

F Antal wrote of this portrait in 1962 in "Hogarth and his place in European Art",

The pose lacks elegance, the look shows no consciousness of superiority, instead, an easy self-assurance, a high degree of individualism and an undisguised vitality animate the whole, whilst a directness of appeal in the rugged face and a solid naturalness in the arms,

planted heavily on his lap, have no parallel in the fashionable French portraiture of the time.

In 1997 Jenny Uglow wrote in her book "Hogarth",

Around 1740 he (Hogarth) painted a marvellously blunt portrait of the merchant George Arnold. He placed this strong-featured man facing straight out at the viewer, almost filling the canvas, a solid bulk against the grey background that brings out the sheen of his silver-blue suit. His head is slightly cocked, his button eyes alert and shrewd, his mouth turned down in a determined line. His hands grasp his good black hat. It is an assertive pose: the old merchant meets the viewer's eye, and Hogarth made no attempt to hide the warts and the double chin, or the lines that give such force to his expression. The completeness of the image, and the pliant brushwork, proclaim Arnold as a man Hogarth admired.