



A knight's tale: Herbert of Cherbury stays at home

ONE of the most important miniature paintings of the Jacobean period has been acquired for the nation through a funding partnership between the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund and the National Trust (*Letters*, page 56). For many years, Isaac Oliver's *Edward Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Cherbury* has been a star exhibit at its historic home, Powis Castle, near Welshpool, Powys, which is now in the Trust's care.

It will return to its Welsh home after conservation, further research and perhaps visits to other museums and organisations. The portrait's market value was assessed to be £5.2 million, but, after tax concessions granted on sales to public collections, it was secured in perpetuity for £2.1 million, which may be a record price for a miniature.

The deal was negotiated by the London fine-art agent Omnia Ltd on behalf of the private owner, who is understood to be a member of the family of the Marquesses of Powis, descendants of Lord Herbert (about 1582–1648) through a female line.

Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), a prominent courtier of the aged Elizabeth I and her Stuart successors, was first cousin of Sir William Herbert, 1st Lord Powis. Oliver's magnificent image presents him as the pattern of a romantic young knight, in a pose of fashionable melancholy, head on hand, lying in a forest glade, perhaps after a joust.

The shield on his arm bears the motto *Magia Sympathiae* (suggesting a balance of good and evil and the attraction of affinities) and a burning heart; in the background are his squire, horses, armour and, hanging from a branch, his Order of the Bath. It has been suggested that these may refer to the Ascension Day jousts held by James I at Whitehall Palace.

Another suggestion is that the distant city on a river could be



Paris, which Herbert first visited in 1608.

His own life reflected this Spenserian image of the knightly romantic. He was a metaphysical poet, musician, soldier, diplomat, philosopher, historian and, by his own account, as great a lover as he was a duellist.

Miniature in this sense does not necessarily mean small. It derives from the Latin *miniare*, to colour with cinnabar or red lead, by way of the techniques of manuscript illumination from which small watercolour or gouache portraits evolved. This is a comparatively large cabinet miniature, measuring 7½in by 9in and painted on vellum mounted on an oak board.

Isaac Oliver was born in Rouen and brought to England by his

The knight returns: visitors to Powis Castle will be able to see Isaac Oliver's magnificent miniature

Huguenot parents in about 1568. He was the pupil and successor of Nicholas Hilliard, the foremost English-born miniaturist of the first great period, and worked for the Royal Family, in particular James I's Queen Anne, of whom Herbert was a favourite.

It has been suggested that the miniature was painted between 1602 and 1617, but, from the sitter's apparent age, it must be at the early end of that estimate: after July 1603, when he was created a Knight of the Bath, but before 1614, when he left for the Continent to fight for the Prince of Orange and travel to Italy.

For opening times at Powis Castle, visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle-and-garden or telephone 01938 551944.

Huon Mallalieu