

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



John Russel, RA (1745-1806)

Portrait of Elizabeth Freeman (1779–1808), later Mrs Thomas Freeman-Heathcote, with her pet bullfinch

signed and dated centre left: J. Russell R.A. / 1790

pastel on paper, laid down on linen on an oval stretcher

75 x 61 cm., 20 x 24 in.

framed: 94 x 83 cm.; 37 x 32½ in.

with original frame

Literature:

Lord Redesdale, *Memories*, London 1889, p. 22;

G. Williamson, *John Russell*, London 1894, p. 155, when owned by Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford, 1st Baron Redesdale (1837–1916);

N. Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*, online edition, no. J.64.1762.

John Russell was a fashionable portrait painter in late eighteenth-century London who perfected the art of pastels. Of the many examples featured in our Gallery Notes over the years, this tender portrait of a

thirteen year-old girl ranks among the best of them. Russell's pastel portraits are not rare as he was very prolific, but very few are as well-preserved as this one, which has suffered from neither from losses (where the chalks fall away from the paper) or the unsightly discolouration of pigments. As the fragile nature of pastel does not lend itself in any way to restoration, they are by their very nature very much as one finds them. Russell's lively draughtsmanship is seen throughout the composition, and the remarkable status of preservation allows us to enjoy this portrait as it would have looked upon completion.

Worthy of note, too, is the irreplaceable, original carved and gilded frame, complete with finely carved rosettes in the spandrels.

The sitter was the only daughter and sole heir of Thomas Edwards Freeman of Batsford Park, Gloucestershire. In 1799 she married Thomas Heathcote (1769–1825), who later adopted the name Freeman into his surname. He was the son of Sir William Heathcote, 3rd Baronet of Hursley, Hampshire and upon his father's death in 1819, he succeeded to the title.