



COWPER & NEWTON MUSEUM

Portraits and People

Information for Guided and Self Guided
School Visits

In The Hall



Artist Lemuel Francis Abbott

1792

Full sized copy of an oil painting

Original in the National Portrait Gallery London

The frame is original

The family tree is original

This artist also painted many portraits of Horatio Nelson

William Cowper

- Born 26 November 1731
- Died 25 April 1800
- ◇ He lived in this house from 1768 until 1786, when he and Mary (you meet her later...) moved to the nearby village of Weston Underwood
- ◇ The best known poet of his time
- ◇ Jane Austen's favourite poet
- ◇ The forerunner of the Romantic Poets (Coleridge, Wordsworth etc.)
- ◇ Collaborator with the Rev John Newton in the writing of the Olney Hymns (you meet him later...)
- ◇ Translator of Homer
- ◇ Famous writer of letters

Look for the clues in the portrait that tell you about William Cowper.



The writing table is in this room.

The frame around the portrait is hinged because the family tree was originally hidden behind the portrait.



What could be the reasons for this unusual arrangement?

The Museum has a copy of the letter from John Johnson, William's young cousin, who was there when the portrait was painted - he tells us about the process and how he sat in to model for the legs...

In The Hall



Miniature in an oval

Artist **William Blake**

Based on the pastel portrait
by George Romney

A copy of the Romney portrait
is in William's bedroom.

History and purpose of
miniatures at:

[www.vam.ac.uk/content/
articles/h/a-history-of-the-
portrait-miniature](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/h/a-history-of-the-portrait-miniature)

Personal Opinion: Lady Hesketh's (his cousin) comments on Blake's engravings of William. (copies on line)



The cap William is wearing in the miniature was made for him by Lady Hesketh - it can be seen in this room

William wrote a poem to thank her for the cap and other presents. (Gratitude is available on line)

Sometimes people wear lockets which have photographs inside of someone who is special to them.



Who would you have in your locket?

Hats and Headwear - make multiple copies of a person

Draw on different headwear?

Cut out pictures of headwear and stick to the person's head?

In The Hall

Anne Cowper

The portrait on the wall is a copy by W S Wright in 1900 for the opening of the Museum.

The framed photograph is of the original miniature on copper plate by John Theodore Heins



William's Mother and Father

Rev. John Cowper

William was born in the rectory (now rebuilt) of Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, where his father was rector of the parish as well as a chaplain to George II.



William's mother died when he was 6, giving birth to his brother, John: she was only 36 years old.

When William was 58 years old, he received this picture from his cousin Ann Bodham. He wrote in a letter that he would rather have possession of the picture *"than the richest jewel in the British crown"*. He placed it so that it was the last thing he saw as he went to sleep and the first when he opened his eyes in the morning. He also wrote a famous heartfelt poem about his thoughts and feelings when he first saw the portrait.

Copies of William's letters and his poem (*On Receipt Of My Mother's Picture out of Norfolk*) **can be found online**

Purpose of portraits in the past

- Status
- Remembering people/events
- Communication

Personal Response to portraits today, including photographs and social media

- Fame
- Remembering people/events

In The Parlour

Mrs Unwin

Artist Arthur Devis

C1740.

Original at Knights Hayes Court NT

Oil on canvas



After a bout of bad depression, William moved to Huntingdon in June 1765. Here he met the Unwin family. He wrote:

'I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin – the most agreeable people imaginable; ... They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me.'

The Unwin family were the Rev Morley Unwin, his wife Mary Unwin, son William and daughter Susanna.

By November 1765 William has moved in with the family and was writing positively about life. Then tragedy struck ...

On Sunday the 28th of last Month the Rev. Mr. Unwin, Rector of Grimstone, in Norfolk, riding from Huntingdon to Gravelly, was thrown from his Horse near Godmanchester, whereby his Skull was fractured in a dreadful Manner; and, although all possible Assistance was immediately given, he died the Friday following.

Northampton Mercury, Monday July 13th 1767

Mary and her family now needed to move from the rectory; and it was the Rev. John Newton, the curate of Olney, who suggested that they should come to Olney to live.

By the end of 1767, the family and William, were staying with the Newtons until this house was ready for them.

A later pastel can be seen on the lid of the workbox



- 
- Which clothes would you choose to wear for your own portrait?
 - What pose would you hold?
 - How will you show your personality?
 - What would you hold or have with you to tell people about your interests and skills?

In The Parlour



Portrait silhouettes became all the rage in fashionable English Society of the Georgian period. They could be quick to make and were a cheap way of creating a likeness. You could pay for a professional portrait but many ordinary people made silhouettes as a hobby or pastime.

- Rev John Newton
- Susanna Pawley : the married name of Mary's daughter
- William Unwin: Mary's son and a good friend of William Cowper
- William Cowper



Notice the silhouette portrait is in profile (from the side).. What happens if you try to create a front facing silhouette?



Why not have a go at making a silhouette yourself, trying out different techniques.

A modern way is to take a photograph (in profile against the light works best!) print it out then cut out the shape of the head on the photo at the same time as from a black piece of card - or experiment with different colour card...

In The Parlour

Theodora Cowper - William's early love

After finishing school William started training for a career in law in London. Here he fell in love with his cousin Theodora when he visited his uncle's house at weekends. She became the Delia of his love poems which Theodora kept all her life and which were only published after her death..

They became engaged, but her father, Ashley Cowper, forbade the marriage - maybe because they were first cousins, or that they both had depressive tendencies or that William did not look like a good financial provider..?

Theodora never married but followed his career from a distance and sent him gifts and money anonymously through her sister, Harriett when he was in need, even a regular amount of money at one point.



Look very carefully through the glass of the writing cabinet which was where William filed his letters. You will find one labelled 'Anonymous' who we now know was Theodora. She wrote letters to accompany her gifts to him.



Gifts you can find in the Parlour and Hall: Seal ring Writing desk Snuff Box

The Museum cannot locate a portrait of Theodora nor her letters! There is a portrait of her parents by William Hogarth, with a suggestion that Theodora as a young girl was added later. This would be an opportunity to look at the dynamics of group portraits and positioning within the setting (copy online at [The Tate](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/t/the-tate))

Harriot Cowper

Lady Hesketh



Francis Cotes, R.A. (London 1726-1770) in the Public Domain

William's cousin and Theodora's sister. Married Thomas Hesketh who became 1st Baronet of Rufford. (Rufford Old Hall NT)

Portraits of Harriet and Thomas by Joseph Wright of Derby at

www.paintingstar.com

Elizabeth Cowper

Lady Croft



Thomas Gainsborough in the Public Domain

Original is at Croft Castle (NT)

Elizabeth Cowper was the youngest sister to Harriett and Theodora. She married Sir Archer Croft, 3rd Baronet.

Paintings were often commissioned for key life events such as coming of age, engagement, marriage, etc.

Different artists have their own style. Who would you choose to paint your own portrait?

Create a collage of your family photographs

Create an art work of photographs of yourself from baby to now...

Experiment with different frames ...



Reverend John Newton

Find a portrait like this one.

The oil portrait in the Museum was painted by WS Wright for the opening of the Museum in 1900. It is based on an engraving by J Collyer 1807 which itself was based on the pastel portrait to the left by John Russell 1788.



Try out your Art Detective Skills

Occupation? - *clerical bands which can be found in the John Newton Room at the Museum*

Personality? - *short biography on the next page*

Reason for his fame? - *see Museum website for Biography and more information on the hymn 'Amazing Grace'*

John was curate at St Peter and St Paul's church Olney between 1764 and 1780. As you found out earlier, he was the reason that Mary Unwin came to Olney after the death of her husband, with William Cowper coming with her and her family. This means that they overlapped here in this house from 1768 to 1780; but they continued to write to each other all their lives.

You will find a more detailed timeline of John's life on panels in the Olney History and down the stairs.

But do you think you can see John's character and life in his face?



Gambler, made up insulting songs about his Captain, drank and smoked

Slave and captive servant in Sierra Leone

Captain of a slave ship

Taught himself French, Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, German and shorthand

Motherless at age 6

Boarding school at age 8

Started work on board ship at age 10

A father who 'took great care of my morals, (but who) overawed and discouraged my spirit.'

Faithful in love with his wife - 'in my heart from that hour'

Disobeyed his father and ships' captains so he could visit his sweetheart.

Kidnapped to work on a Navy ship

Poet

Loved and respected Church of England Priest

Writer of hymns

Campaigner against slavery

William's Bedroom



Artist George Romney
1792

Copy of a pastel portrait

Original in the National Portrait
Gallery London



What does William's
facial expression say
about him?

What do you think he is trying
to tell us about his
personality?



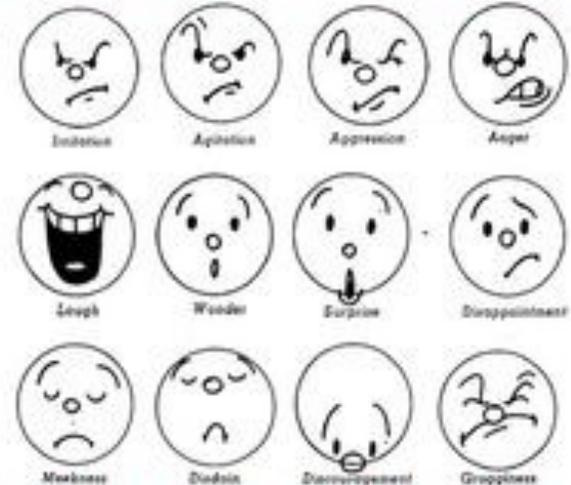
You have tried out poses, decided if you would like to dress as a character and thought if you would like to have objects that are important to you with you in the painting.

Now it's time to work on your facial expression. Artists will usually start with the face before they work on any other part because if the face doesn't work there is no point going on!

Try out your pose by :

- Holding your head in different directions
- Holding your gaze in different places
- Relaxing or tensing your mouth
- Relaxing or tensing your brows

DRAWING FACIAL



EXPRESSIONS

Mrs Unwin's Bedroom

Lady Anne Austen was a widow in her early forties visiting her sister when William first met her. Their friendship lasted for less than 3 years, including a 2 month falling out!

- She visited regularly, staying in the house on 2 occasions
- He arranged a picnic
- She inspired him to write 'The Task' and 'The Diverting History of John Gilpin'
- He wrote a poem; 'To a Lady Who Wore a Lock of his Hair Set with Diamonds'
- She sent him a present of 3 sets of shirt ruffles
- He wrote to other people about her wit and charm
- She sold her house and moved to Olney
- He wrote some songs for her...

However, in 1784 she left for Bath and did not see William again, even when visiting her sister.

She married again to Count Claude Tardiff de Granger.

Find more of Lady Austen's belongings in the Mrs Unwin's bedroom.

Lady Ann Austen



Lady Austen on the workbox in the Parlour

The etching is titled 'Lady Austen in the character of Lavinia' - the original was by Romney.

There was a fashion at the time to pose as Ancient Greek and Roman mythological characters: Circe, Bacchante, Flora, Ariadne etc.



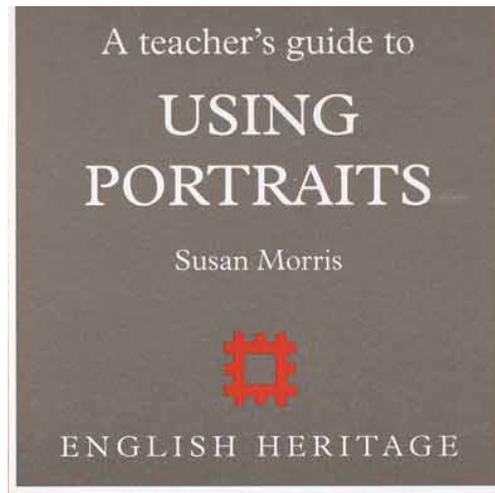
Today we might think of it as posing as a '**Superhero**' Who would you pretend to be in your portrait? (cartoon styles / Manga)



Try out your Art Detective Skills

There are 4 more head and shoulder portraits in Mrs Unwin's Bedroom

- Reverend William Bull - friend of John and William
- Reverend Thomas Palmer Bull, his son
- William Hayley - friend of William and his biographer
- Unknown lady



Available as PDF
download on TES

We have a full size standing frame in the Dressing Up Room which can be used for photographs.

In dry weather the frame can be moved to the garden.

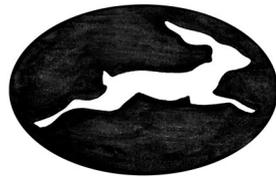
On the top floor you will find the Three Hares Gallery.

The exhibition changes each month. See the Museum website for which artist is exhibiting during your visit.

£3 per child Adults free up to a ratio of 1: 6

Because the rooms are small, classes should be split into smaller groups of 10 - 12 children

House and Garden Risk Assessment available



If visits are organised for **Mondays**, the Museum is closed to the general public.

From May to September there is a gazebo in the Courtyard which can be used for group / individual writing, as well as eating lunch.

Self guided We highly recommend you make a preliminary visit to help you get the most out of your trip

Guided Our guides can match their / activities talk to your desired outcomes if you talk to us prior to your visit

Photography is permitted for non-commercial use

