

Around Dover Museum

Veronica Ward

The painting, 'Elizabeth with the Cardinal and Theological Virtues' in the History Gallery was purchased by the Corporation of Dover in 1598 for 25 shillings! The name of the artist is unknown, and s/he was probably a local painter; very few artists had the opportunity to paint Queen Elizabeth I from life and most worked from approved 'face patterns' derived from official portraits.

Elizabeth I (r.1557–1603) was 40 years old at the time and was a woman in her prime. It is one of very few known portraits purchased for a civic setting and was previously displayed in the Maison Dieu as evidence of the town's loyalty and devotion to the Crown. With her naturally red hair Elizabeth could be easily regarded as the original Ginger Spice from the band the Spice Girls!

In those times few of her subjects would have ever seen her in person; her image would have been seen on coins, seals, medals, prints and panel paintings. The painting portrays the Queen as a great leader and features a number of female figures designed to associate the Queen with the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude.

The Queen is portrayed as the head of state in her parliament robes of crimson-velvet lined with ermine. The function of royal portraits was not only to capture the likeness of a person but to also serve as an emblem of monarchy. The aim of this painting was to glorify Elizabeth's authority and the stability of her reign.

As she aged, Elizabeth's image became more tightly controlled, with an official

proclamation of 1596 ordering any 'unseemly' portraits to be destroyed. While the so-called 'mask of youth' was flattering to Elizabeth, it also served a broader purpose, as Elizabeth became an icon of stability and national independence. It's possible the Queen wanted her image to remain youthful.

In the words of Ginger Spice. "Say you could handle my love, Are you for real? I won't be hasty, I'll give you a try. If you really bug me, then I'll say goodbye. So tell me what you want, What you really, really want, I wanna (Hey!), I wanna (Hey!) I wanna really, really, really wanna "zig-a-zig," ah!" ... just like Elizabeth who had numerous suitors, but she said goodbye to them all. Elizabeth I, with her strength as a leader, her style and swagger, she was the epitomé of today's Girl Power.

Come and view her portrait here at the museum. We open: Monday to Saturday 9.30am to 5.00pm. Open Sundays in the summer 10.00am to 3.00pm. Admission is FREE. Tel: 01304 201066.

www.dover.gov.uk/museum



Elizabeth I