



Fig 1
Lady Elizabeth
Southwell
(1674-1709)
(possibly 1705), by
Sir Godfrey Kneller
(1646/49-1723), oil
on canvas
127 x 102 cm
(DCM 2000-272)

SIR GODFREY KNELLER

and the Southwell and Cromwell families

Eileen Black

Amongst the older paintings in Down County Museum are three portraits of the Southwell family, two of which are by the illustrious painter Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646/49-1723), namely, a three-quarter length of Lady Elizabeth Southwell (née Cromwell) (Fig. 1), purchased by the museum in 2000 and a similar-sized portrait of her husband Edward Southwell (Fig. 2), on long-term loan from the Southwell Trust. The third painting, a head and shoulders of Edward Southwell within a feigned oval (Fig. 3), was bought by the museum in 1995. Acquired as being after the Dutch artist Martin Mytens (1648-1736), it is here attributed to Kneller

on stylistic grounds. All three works exhibit typical Kneller characteristics: a concern for realism and the catching of a likeness, free and vigorous handling of paint, a technique Kneller adopted after 1698 on seeing Rubens' work in Flanders and – certainly in the two three-quarter lengths – the sense of movement and drama associated with the Baroque. This is strongly evident in the great swathes of scarlet draperies around Edward Southwell's waist and in the atmospheric background landscape; also, in the green stole encircling Lady Southwell (or 'Lady Betty', as she was generally known) and in the dramatic seascape behind her. The small yacht cresting the

waves is an unusual feature in a female portrait and may be a reference to Lady Betty's origins as the only child of the 4th Earl and Countess of Ardglass (a small fishing village in County Down).

Sir Godfrey Kneller, the most successful court and society painter of his age, dominated English portraiture from his arrival in London, from Germany, in 1676 until the time of his death.¹ Principal painter to the Crown from 1691, his output was enormous due to an efficient and highly productive studio and he painted everybody who was anybody: monarchs, politicians, soldiers, intellectuals and beauties. That he was acquainted with Sir Robert Southwell – Edward's father – early in his career is evident from the fact that Sir Robert sat to him around 1679.² By the middle of the following decade, he seems to have become good friends with the Southwell family, as he spent Christmas with them at their home at Kings Weston, near

Bristol, in 1685. Writing to his friend and relative by marriage, Sir William Petty on 23 December, Sir Robert remarked: 'Our Neddy (Edward) is come, and what between him and Christmas, the Girls (his daughters Helena, Elizabeth and Katherine) think they may be romps by authority. 'Tis only Mr Kneller that keeps them to any rules of proportion'.³ The friendship between Kneller and the Southwells was to continue for many years, with Kneller painting Sir Robert on at least two other occasions, namely, in 1690 to commemorate his election to the Presidency of the Royal Society (Fig. 4) and again in 1695. This latter work, a half length, was presented by Sir Robert to Gresham College.⁴ 'Neddy' and two of 'the Girls' were also painted, Edward in 1693 and Helena and Elizabeth in 1694.⁵ All three works were head and shoulders within oval frames. Kneller was to paint members of the family again during the early 1700s, of which more later.



Fig 2
Edward
Southwell
(1671-1730)
(possibly
1705), by Sir
Godfrey Kneller
(1646/49-1723),
oil on canvas
123.2 x 102 cm
(Long-term
loan from the
Southwell Trust)



Fig 3
Edward Southwell
(1671-1730)
(possibly 1702),
attributed to Sir
Godfrey Kneller
(1646/49-1723),
oil on canvas
76.5 x 63 cm
(DCM 1995-50)

Edward's future wife, Lady Betty (Cromwell), was also a constant patron and sat to Kneller at least four times before the couple's marriage on 29 October 1703.⁶ The earliest recorded work was a half length, executed c.1699, showing her with her long tresses tumbling over her left shoulder, holding her draperies to her bosom.⁷ This was followed by a full length of 1702, which depicted her standing by a fountain.⁸ As he sometimes did with his female sitters, Kneller also represented Lady Betty allegorically, in this instance as the goddess Diana the huntress and as Saint Cecilia, patron saint of music. The Diana (Fig. 5) also dates from 1702. Elegant and fetching, Lady Betty poses within a somewhat neat and Italianate landscape, a quiver of arrows and hunting horn by her side – the only symbolic references to her persona.⁹ Interestingly, a small yacht appears yet again in the background. The Saint Cecilia (Fig. 6), painted around 1703,

before her marriage, is a much more specific image than the Diana.¹⁰ Eyes raised heavenward, Lady Betty stands at her organ, surrounded by chubby putti seated on clouds, whilst rays of light stream down from above. Her expression is both demure and otherworldly. She may have been inspired to be painted in this guise by William Congreve's poem, 'Hymn to Harmony written in Honour of St. Cecilia's Day' of 1703; certainly, she is known to have presented Congreve with a version of the picture.¹¹

Though she may have been a faithful patron, Lady Betty could also be a troublesome one, notably as regards payment. A receipt of Kneller's of 5 June 1703 records that he had supplied her with paintings of a total value of £430, in exchange for a bond (a promissory note) of £400.¹² Presumably, he gave the reduction because of her regular custom. This group of works included the four mentioned immediately

above, together with a posthumous full length portrait of her father, Vere Essex Cromwell, 4th Earl of Ardglass (1625-87).¹³ However, whilst he had been good enough to give Lady Betty a discount, Kneller clearly had difficulty getting his money. Writing to her from 'Mousley' (Moulsey, Surrey) in November 1703, he stated that he had painted two more pictures for her (presumably since June) but '... I have heard nothing from your Ladyship concerning the bond, which money I want very much, having bought some land ... Pray Madam do not disregard me so any longer for I have ever been very reddey to oblige your Ladyship ... I writ five letters to your Ladyship this summer but have had no answer.'¹⁴ Despite this difficulty and bad feeling, Kneller continued to work for both Lady Betty and the Southwells.

The outstanding debt would appear to have been settled by 1705, by which point Kneller had painted another two allegorical portraits of Lady Betty: a

full length showing her as Mary Magdalen, seated within a landscape and a second Magdalen, in a head and shoulders format, looking upwards and with hands folded over a book.¹⁵ Two small group portraits also date from around this time, namely, a portrait of Lady Betty, Mrs Marcia Fitzherbert and possibly Kneller himself of c. 1705 and a decidedly matriarchal group of c. 1706, showing Lady Betty, her mother the Countess of Ardglass and her three sisters-in-law, Helena, Elizabeth and Katherine. The inclusion of Lady Betty's baby son Edward sprawled playfully in the arms of his aunt Helena, together with a pet dog being fondled by the Countess, lends an air of cosy domesticity to the scene.¹⁶ Besides these various paintings of Lady Betty, Kneller also executed a few more of her husband: a head and shoulders in an oval frame of c. 1705-10 and a full length standing, of 1708.¹⁷ A mezzotint of 1708 by John Smith (Fig. 7), although only half length, may perhaps be derived from this latter work.

Fig 4
Sir Robert
Southwell
(1635-1702)
(1690), by Sir
Godfrey Kneller
(1646/49-1723),
oil on canvas 127
x 102 cm (© The
Royal Society)



As has been shown, Lady Betty and the Southwells clearly kept Kneller busy, for he painted them at least nineteen times, besides the three portraits referred to in the first paragraph of this article. In the matter of these three works, although dating them is purely speculative, a possible year for the portrait of Lady Betty (Fig. 1) is perhaps 1705, by which time she would have been thirty-one. Certainly, her demeanour and appearance seem older and more matronly than in the Diana of 1702 and the Saint Cecilia of c. 1703. As for the painting of Edward owned by the Southwell Trust (Fig. 2), this may also date from 1705, at which point he would have been thirty-four. Of a similar size to the Lady Betty portrait, the work may perhaps have been intended as a pendant to it. Concerning the other painting of Edward, the head and shoulders owned by Down County Museum (Fig. 3), this depicts him as a somewhat younger man, confident and almost cocky in his gaze. A possible dating is 1702, after the death of his father, at

which time he would have become head of the family. The coat of arms and inscriptions at the top left and top right are later additions, added after his second marriage in 1716.¹⁸ Considering the significance of the Cromwell and Southwell families to the locality, the acquisition of the two portraits and the loan of the third is highly fortuitous for Down County Museum.

The Cromwell family's connection with Downpatrick stretch back to 1605, when Edward, 3rd Baron Cromwell of Oakham in Devon was appointed governor of Lecale, Co. Down.¹⁹ In 1617 his son Thomas received a grant from James I, giving him ownership of his father's lands and creating the Manor of Downpatrick. By 1668 the property had passed down to another Thomas – Thomas, 6th Baron Cromwell, 3rd Viscount Lecale and 3rd Earl of Ardglass (1653-82) – a drunkard and a gambler, who took little interest in his Downpatrick property and spent most of his life in England. Fortunately

Fig 6
Lady Elizabeth
Cromwell
(1674-1709)
(c. 1703) by Sir
Godfrey Kneller
(1646/49-1723),
oil on canvas
51.5 x 70.5 cm
(The Hilda Inge
Will Trustees.
Photograph:
Photographic
Survey,
Courtauld
Institute of Art)





Fig 7
Edward Southwell
(1671-1730)
(1708), mezzotint
by John
Smith after Sir
Godfrey Kneller
(1646/49-1723)
(DCM 1995-51)

for posterity, his property reverted to his uncle – Vere Essex Cromwell – by a settlement of 1680. Vere accordingly succeeded to the lands of the Manor of Downpatrick on Thomas's death in 1682 and assumed the titles of 7th Baron Cromwell, 4th Viscount Lecale and 4th Earl of Ardglass. An elderly gentleman by this stage (he was fifty-nine), Vere, his wife and only child – Lady Betty – lived at Bonecastle to the west of Downpatrick. Unlike his nephew, who had been an absentee landlord, he was involved in the community and is possibly best remembered for being one of the founders of Downpatrick Race Course. On his death in 1687, his wife and daughter lived firstly at Ballee House and then at Hollymount, both of which are situated a few miles outside the town.

It seems likely that Lady Betty met Edward Southwell in London, where her father had

rented a house and where her mother probably continued to do so. The couple, indeed, may have met through Kneller, perhaps at his studio. Edward – 'Neddy' – had a distinguished career as a politician and government official, being, amongst other things, secretary of state for Ireland and chief secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the 2nd Duke of Ormond.²⁰ By his marriage to Lady Betty he acquired the Manor and town of Downpatrick and although likewise an absentee landlord, did much to improve the town by granting leases and 'promoting a better sort of building more ornamental and more durable.'²¹ Amongst his many acts of generosity was the gift of bells for the parish church and the erection of a custom house, quay and storehouse by the river Quoile. Cultivated and of a pious disposition, he was a strong supporter of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and established charity schools on

his Irish estates. After Lady Betty's death in 1709, he married, in 1716, Anne Blathwayt – a union which, sadly for him, was to prove short-lived, as she died the following year. He himself died of a stroke on 4 December 1730 and was buried at Kings Weston. His cousin Lord Percival, later 1st Earl of Egmont, has left a charming and affectionate description of him: 'No man led a more pleasant life. He was beloved by all his acquaintance for his cheering, obliging temper, and esteemed for his experience in business.'²²

Edward and Lady Betty's son, Edward II (1705-55) – the infant pictured by Kneller lying in his aunt Helena's arms – maintained the family's links with Downpatrick though also an absentee landlord, being MP for the town in 1727. His most enduring legacy to the locality was the erection of the Southwell Schools in the Mall in 1733, a series of almshouses for six old men and six old women, together with schools for ten poor boys and ten poor girls. Directly opposite Down County Museum, the building is a fitting reminder of the importance of the Southwell family to Downpatrick.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The most useful sources of information on Kneller are Lord Killanin, *Sir Godfrey Kneller and his Times* (London, New York, Toronto, Sydney 1948); Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530 to 1790* (Melbourne, London, Baltimore 1953); J.D. Stewart, *Sir Godfrey Kneller* (London 1971) and J. Douglas Stewart, *Sir Godfrey Kneller and the English Baroque Portrait* (Oxford 1983).
2. Stewart, 1971, p. 57. The portrait was at Kings Weston House, Bristol in July 1695; current whereabouts unknown.
3. The Marquis of Lansdowne (ed.), *Petty-Southwell Correspondence 1676-1687* (London 1928), p. 179.
4. J. D. Stewart, 'Records of Payment to Sir Godfrey Kneller and his Contemporaries,' *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXIII, January 1971, p. 33.
5. Ibid. The whereabouts of these works is unknown.
6. See Stewart, *The Burlington Magazine*, January 1971, p. 33 and Stewart, 1983, p. 131 for details of the various Southwell and Cromwell portraits.
7. The engraving by John Smith illustrated in Anthony M. Wilson, *Saint Patrick's Town* (Belfast 1995), p. 115 is probably based on the portrait of c. 1699. The whereabouts of the original painting is unknown.
8. Is c. 228.5 x 152.4 cm; was in the collection of the Hon. J.E. S. Russell, Cliff House in 1983.
9. The original painting, c. 228.5 x 152.4 cm, upon which the Smith mezzotint is based, is in Kings Weston House, Bristol. Now a Business and Conference Centre, the house hosts conferences, corporate events, exhibitions and weddings. A major feature of Kings Weston is its splendid portrait gallery. The paintings in this form part of the house, the freehold of which belongs to Bristol City Council. Local businessman John Hardy has a long-term lease on the building.
10. The Saint Cecilia, 51.4 x 70.5 cm, was also in the collection of the Hon. J.E.S. Russell, Cliff House in 1983. Now the property of the Hilda Inge Will Trustees.
11. Stewart, 1983, p. 65.
12. Stewart, *The Burlington Magazine*, January 1971, p. 33.
13. Was in Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery in 1971; now in Kings Weston House, Bristol.
14. Stewart, *The Burlington Magazine*, January 1971, p. 33. In the early 1700s, Kneller bought an estate at Whitton near Twickenham. Presumably this was the land he was referring to.
15. The full length Magdalen is 61 x 40.7 cm (sight), owned by Lady de Clifford of London in 1983; the head and shoulders Magdalen is 76.2 x 63.5 cm, owned by the Hon. J.E.S. Russell, Cliff House in 1983.
16. The group of Lady Betty, Mrs Fitzherbert and Kneller (?) is 49.5 x 49.5 cm, owned by Lady de Clifford of London in 1983; the group of Lady Betty, her son, mother and sisters-in-law is 61 x 73.7 cm, owned by the Hon. J.E.S. Russell, Cliff House in 1983. This latter work is illustrated in Stewart, 1971, p. 57 and in Stewart, 1983, pl.63c.
17. The head and shoulders is c. 76.2 x 63.5 cm, owned by the Hon. J.E.S. Russell, Cliff House in 1983; the full length is c. 228.5 x 152.4 cm and is in Kings Weston House, Bristol.
18. The armorial bearings in Fig. 3 comprise Edward Southwell's arms, shown in the centre of the shield, the Cromwell arms on the left hand side and the Blathwayt arms on the right. Identification of the coat of arms by H.E. Paston-Bedingfeld, York Herald (letter of 14 December 2007). The painting is also inscribed 'Edward Southwell, Born 1671, Dyed 1731' top left and 'Cromwell' and 'Blathwait' at each side of the coat of arms.
19. See Anthony M. Wilson, *Saint Patrick's Town* (Belfast 1995) for a useful source of information on Downpatrick.
20. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004), vol. 51, pp. 705-6.
21. Wilson, 1995, p. 114.
22. Matthew and Harrison, 2004, p. 706.