

## George Romney

*Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771*

oil on canvas  
62.8 cm x 51.4 cm

Vancouver Art Gallery,  
Founders' Fund  
VAG 34.2.1



Photo: Teresa Healy, Vancouver Art Gallery

# George Romney

Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771

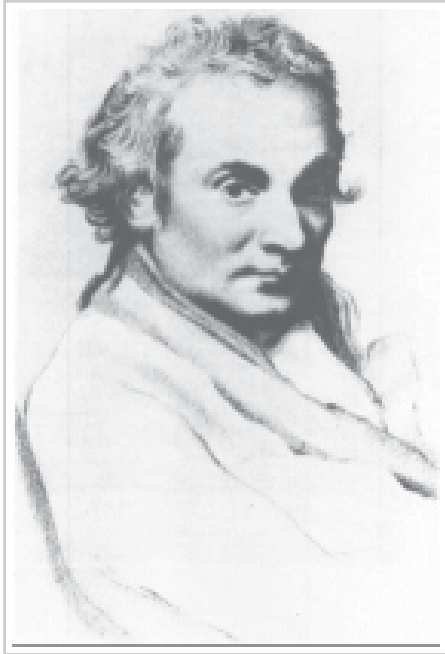


Image source: [www.rdarby.demon.co.uk/romney.jpg](http://www.rdarby.demon.co.uk/romney.jpg)

## Artist's Biography

Nationality: British

Born: 1734-12-26, Dalton-in-Furness, Lancs

Died: 1802-11-15

George Romney (December 26, 1734 - November 15, 1802) was a noted English portrait painter.

He was born on Boxing Day 1734 in Dalton-in-Furness (then part of Lancashire, today in Cumbria), and apprenticed to his father as a cabinet-maker. In 1755 he went to Kendal to learn painting from a Cumberland artist by the name of Christopher Steele, and within two years was becoming well-known as a portraitist.

In 1762, by which time he was married with two children, he went to London, and saw early success with a painting, *The Death of General Wolfe*, which won a prize from the Royal Society of Arts. Romney soon had a thriving portrait business in Long Acre.

Romney was invited to join the newly-formed Royal Academy but refused to resign from another artistic society, violating the Academy's exclusive membership rules.

In 1773 he travelled to Italy with fellow artist Ozias Humphrey to study art in Rome and Parma, returning to London in 1775 to resume business, this time in Cavendish Square (in a house formerly owned by noted portraitist Francis Cotes). He was engaged to paint the portraits of many famous people, including Emma Hamilton and fellow artist Mary Moser. He did not return to his family in Kendal until 1798.

Source: "George Romney (painter)" *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. December 11, 2005. <http://www.wikipedia.org>.

## Artistic Context

Nationality: British

Peers: Joshua Reynolds; Thomas Gainsborough

Group: Grand Manner; 18th century

Provenance: purchased from W. Freeman by Sir Charles Holmes on behalf of the Founders in 1934; Daniel Braithwaite (d.1817); Judge Martineau (d.1903)

Subject: portraits; high society

# George Romney

## Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



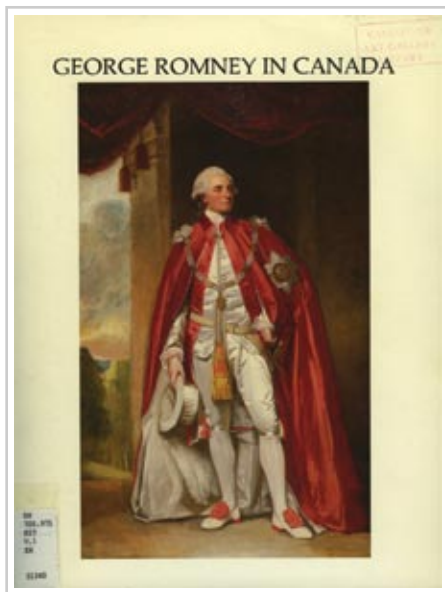
## Bibliography

### Paintings from the Permanent Collection Publication

[transcription of excerpt]

George Romney (1734-1802) Portrait of Major Pierson

Born in Lancashire, Romney was first apprenticed to an artist in Kendal, then came to London in 1762 to paint portraits. He visited Europe and studied two years in Italy. On his return in 1775 he was overwhelmed with sitters and painted no fewer than 2000 portraits. This portrait is an informal profile pose.



### George Romney in Canada Publication

[transcription]

5 Maj. Thomas Pearson, c.1771

Oil on canvas  
64.2 x 52.7 cm

PROVENANCE: Daniel Braithwaite (d.1817); Judge Martineau (d.1903); thence by descent; W. Freeman, by 1934; from whom purchased by Sir Charles Holmes for the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1934

EXHIBITIONS: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and the Vancouver Art Gallery, *The Age of Elegance, 1961-1962*, no. 18; Art Gallery of Hamilton, *50th Anniversary Exhibition, 1964*, no. 29, repr.

LITERATURE: John Romney, *Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney*, 1830, pp. 69-70; Humphry Ward and W. Roberts, *Romney*, 1904, II, p. 120; Arthur B. Chamberlain, *George Romney*, 1910, p. 58; R.H. Hubbard, *European Paintings in Canadian Collections*, 1956, 1, p. 154

ENGRAVING: in an oval by William Ridley, published 1 January 1803

Maj. Thomas Pearson was born at Cote Green, near Burton-in-Kendal, Westmorland, about 1740. He came to London about 1756 and entered the navy office. He left England in 1761 on being appointed cadet in the Bengal establishment. In the service of The East India Company, Pearson rose to the rank of major. In 1767 he married a sister of Eyles Irwin; she died the following year. Pearson returned to England in August 1770, whereupon he collected an extensive library and built a large house in Burton-in-Kendal. He again left for India on 8 April 1776 where he died, in Calcutta, 5 August 1781. His only child, Sarah, an amateur artist, married Thomas Browne of Castle Browne in Ireland.

# George Romney

## Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



A writer in the *World* for 29 August 1787 mentions a double portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Browne then on view at Romney's house: 'Pretty Mrs. Brown—who was pretty Miss Pearson—is well portrayed, with much very divine influence in her countenance and a pencil in her hand. Thus exactly commemorating the various excellencies she has both from nature and art' (cited by William t. Whitley, *Artists and their Friends in England*, 1928, II, pp.93-94). This canvas, a long whole-length, was begun as a companion to *An Officer Conversing with a Brahmin* which depicted Major Pearson, exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1771 (see p. 25). The latter work was last recorded at Christie's, 5 July 1902, lot 117. A drawing of Major Pearson, 1770-71, presumably for this large composition, is reproduced in Patricia Milne-Henderson, *The Drawings of George Romney*, 1962, pl. X

The present work, a profile study from which a seal was engraved, must date after 1770 and, on stylistic grounds, quite likely before Romney went to Italy in 1773. It may well, according to a letter from Sir Charles Holmes, be datable c. 1771, the same time as the above whole-length of Major Pearson.

Vancouver Art Gallery



### Souvenir Catalogue: Opening the New Vancouver Art Gallery, 1951.

Publication  
1951-09-26

[transcription]

CONCERT GALLERY

EXHIBITION FROM OUR PERMANENT COLLECTION

The majority of the paintings in the European section of the Permanent Collection were provided by the Founders in 1931 when the Gallery was originally opened. The British School predominates and portrait painters are well represented.

The earliest example is by William Dobson (No. 2) who succeeded Van Dyck as Serjeant Painter to King Charles I. The eighteenth century painters begin with a pupil of Kneller, Joseph Highmore (No. 21), whose portrait of Elizabeth Hervey is particularly fine. Contemporary with Highmore is William Hogarth (No. 13), famous for his satirical engravings, but also a fine portrait painter. Sir Joshua Reynolds (No. 7), first President of the Royal Academy, is represented by "Judith with the Head of Holofernes," reflecting his study of the Italians. His great contemporaries Gainsborough (No. 15) and Romney (No 28) are also included. Allan Ramsay (No.32), at first established in Edinburgh, became Painter to George III in 1767. Bridging the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are Sir Thomas Lawrence (No. 34) and Sir Martin Archer Shee (No. 9) who both became Presidents of the Royal Academy.

The earliest English landscape is by Richard Wilson (No. 33) painted during his Italian visit when he was persuaded by Zuccarelli (No. 12) and Vernet to abandon portraiture. Also of the eighteenth century is the beautiful landscape by George Lambert (No. 6). Born in the last quarter of this century were three other important landscape painters: Crome (No. 24), founder of the Norfolk School whose work reflects Dutch influence, Constable (No. 23) who revolutionized landscape painting and Cox (No. 3), best known for his watercolors.

# George Romney

## Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



Other interesting British paintings are a stable scene by the painter of country life, George Morland (No. 27); "Queen Mab" by Fuselli (No.36), fantastic contemporary of William Blake, and a large panel by Pre-Raphaelite Burne-Jones (No. 4). One of the most skillful of the "little masters" was Sir David Wilkie (No. 11) whose "Shadow on the Wall" is reminiscent of Flemish genre painting.

The most important French painting is by Thomas Couture (No. 18), master of Manet. Monticelli (No. 22) with his scintillating textures was a forerunner of the Impressionists.

J. A. MORRIS,  
Curator

## Further Reading

Cross, David. *Striking Likeness: the Life of George Romney*. Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999.

Hind, C. Lewis. *Romney*. London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1910.

Jaffe, Patricia. *Drawings by George Romney: Exhibition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Kidson, Alex. *George Romney, 1734-1802*. Princeton Univ. Press, 2002.

## Exhibition History

### Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

*Gift from the Founders*. 1934.

*Paintings from the Permanent Collection*. December 9, 1978 - January 14, 1979.

*Historical Works from the Permanent Collection*. December 4, 1982 - January 30, 1983.

*75 Years of Collecting: British Masters, Group of Seven and Pop Icons*. February 4, 2006 - May 14, 2006.

# George Romney

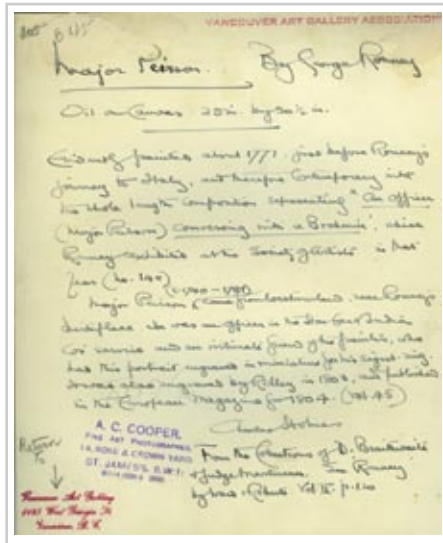
Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771

## Selected Exhibitions outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria. *The Age of Elegance*. 1961 - 1962.

Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton. *50th Anniversary Exhibition*. 1964.

Kitchener/Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener. *George Romney in Canada*.  
September 5, 1985 - April 20, 1986.



## Archival History

### Charles Holmes' Notes

Correspondence

#### [transcription of excerpt]

Evidently painted about 1771 just before Romney's journey to Italy, and therefore contemporary with the whole length composition representing 'an officer (Major Pierson) conversing with a Brahmin' which Romney exhibited at the society of artists in that year (No. 140). Major Pierson (c.1740-1781) came from Westmorland, near Romney's birthplace. He was an officer in the Hon. East India Co's service and an intimate friend of the painter, who had this portrait engraved in miniature for his signet ring. It was also engraved by Ridley in 1803, and published in the European magazine for 1804 (vol. 45).

Charles Holmes

From the Collection of D. Braithwaite and Judge Martineau. See Romney by Ward and Roberts Vol. II pg. 20



### Charles Holmes Correspondence

Correspondence

1933-07-07

#### [transcription of excerpt]

PHOTOGRAPH  
DON'T CRUSH OR BEND

H.A. Stone Esquire  
Vancouver Art Gallery  
1145 West Georgia Street  
Vancouver, B.C.

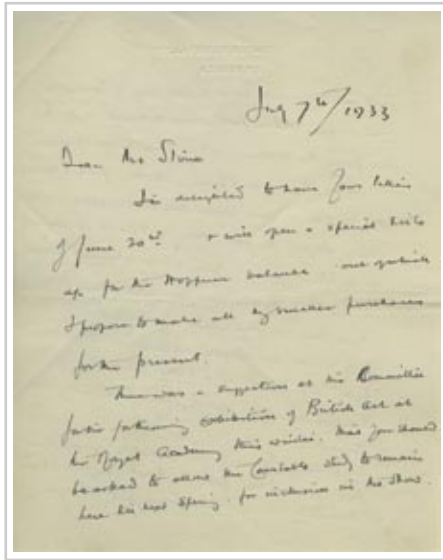
Dear Mr. Stone

I was delighted to have your letter of June 20th and will open a special title as for the Hopper balance out quickly and propose to make all smaller purchases for the present.

There was a suggestion at the committee for the forthcoming exhibition of British art at the Royal Academy this winter that you be asked to allow the Constable study to remain here 'till next spring for inclusion in the show.

# George Romney

Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



I am trying at Christies Wednesday for a Romney oil sketch, quite small but capable. Even if Fry will be a 'token piece' but a large typical Romney is nothing to come our way just now.

The Burne-Jones was sold almost immediately afterwards. Do you care to give me a little direction as to drawings where oil paintings are practically most valuable?

Stanley Spencer for example is on our list but I can find no painting by him which does not seem oddly extravagant to your

committee. But there are some quite admirable drawings which would represent him for the moment. I can find a recent Paul Nash which would really suit you. They have become mere geometry. I know of an earlier one in private possession which I might secure as the owner will be moving house, and is likely to consider it.

Meanwhile, for the modern I have bought a View in Provence from the Roger Fry Exhibition. He is such a prominent and influential figure in the art world that his work always has an interest, and this in my opinion is not the best thing

he has ever painted, but a summary of what contemporary landscape is trying to do. I have also got a vivid little Pyrenees landscape by the late J.D. Innes. The remarkable genius who died young, I had to pay 95 pounds. The Fry was only 30 pounds. It will anyhow be necessary to a historical series as well as fresh and lively in themselves and make a pleasant contrast to the more sober examples of the 18th Century.



**Bill of Sale**  
Acquisition Record  
1933-09-20

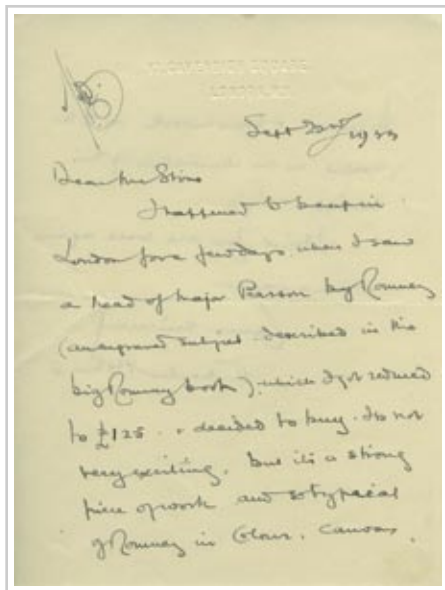
[transcription of excerpt]

19 Emlyn Road  
Stamford Brook  
W.12.

Sir Charles Holmes  
To Portrait of Major Peirson  
By George Romney  
£125.00

# George Romney

Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



## Charles Holmes Correspondence

Correspondence  
1933-09-20

[transcription]

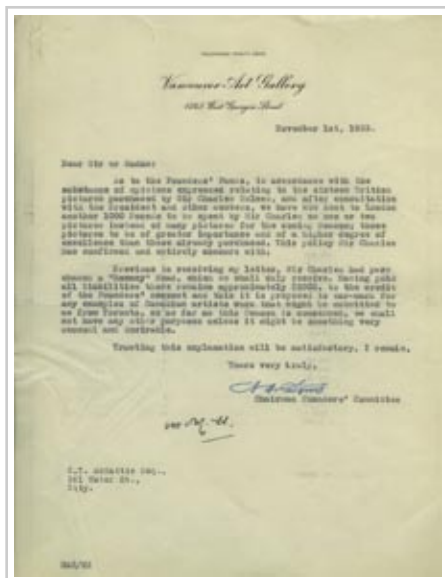
Sept. 20th 1933

Dear Mr. Stone

I happened to be up in London for a few days when I saw a head of Major Peirson by Romney. (an engraved subject described in the big Romney book) which I got reduced to £125 and decided to buy. It's not very exciting, but it's a strong piece of work and so typical of Romney in colour, canvas pigment and brushwork as to be useful as an illustration of his method and style.

I trust you are well again

Yours Sincerely  
Charles Holmes



## H.A. Stone Correspondence

Correspondence  
1933-11-01

[transcription]

Telephone Trinity 2050  
Vancouver Art Gallery  
1145 West Georgia Street  
November 1st, 1933

Dear Sir or Madam:

As to the Founders' funds, in accordance with the substance of opinions expressed relating to the sixteen British pictures purchased by Sir Charles Holmes, and after consultation with the President and other members, we have now sent to London another 1000 Pounds to be spent by Sir Charles on one or two pictures instead of many pictures for the coming Season; these pictures to be of greater importance and of a higher degree of excellence than those already purchased. This policy Sir Charles has confirmed and entirely concurs with.

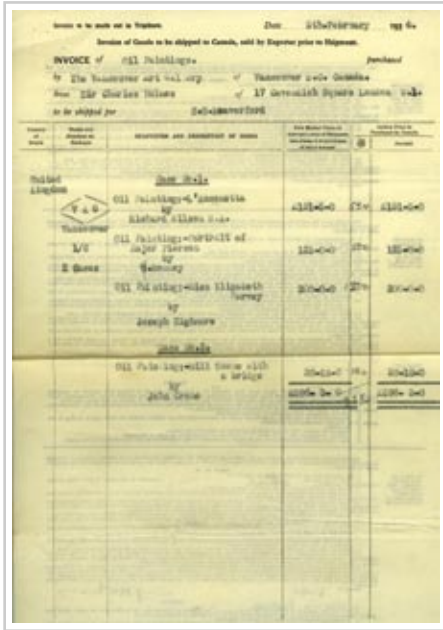
Previous to receiving my letter, Sir Charles had purchased a "Romney" Head, which we shall duly receive. Having paid all liabilities there remains approximately \$2000. to the credit of the Founders' account and this it is proposed to ear-mark for any examples of Canadian artists work that might be submitted to us from Toronto, so as far as this Season is concerned, we shall not have any other purposes unless it might be something very unusual or desirable.

Trusting this explanation will be satisfactory, I remain,

Yours very truly,

H.A. Stone  
Chairman Founders' Committee

**George Romney**  
*Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771*



**Invoice**  
 Acquisition Record  
 1934-02-05

**[transcription of excerpt]**

Date 5th February 1934

Invoice of Oil Paintings *purchased*  
 by the Vancouver Art Gallery of Vancouver B.C. Canada.  
 from Sir Charles Holmes of 17 Cavendish Square London W.1.  
 to be shipped per S.S. Beaverford

Case No. 1

Oil Painting: L'Anconetta by Richard Wilson R.A. £131.50  
 Oil Painting: Portrait of Major Pierson by G. Romney £125.00  
 Oil Painting: Miss Elizabeth Harvey by Joseph Highmore £300.00

Case No. 2

Oil Painting: Mill Scene with a bridge by John Crome £39.18.0



**The Art Gallery Bulletin**  
 Publication  
 1934-04-01

**[transcription]**

THE ART GALLERY BULLETIN

VANCOUVER, B.C.

VOL. 1  
 APRIL, 1934.  
 NUMBER 8

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PORTRAITURE

**GIFT FROM THE FOUNDERS**

The section of the Permanent Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery illustrating the history of British Painting has recently been enriched by a gift from the Founders of four additional pictures by well known artists not hitherto represented in the collection. These examples have been bought for the Founders in London by Sir Charles Holmes; late Director of The National Gallery in London, acting as the Founders adviser.

The four paintings are now hanging in the gallery. The addition is notable one composed as it is of works by Joseph Highmore, George Romney, Richard Wilson and John Crome.

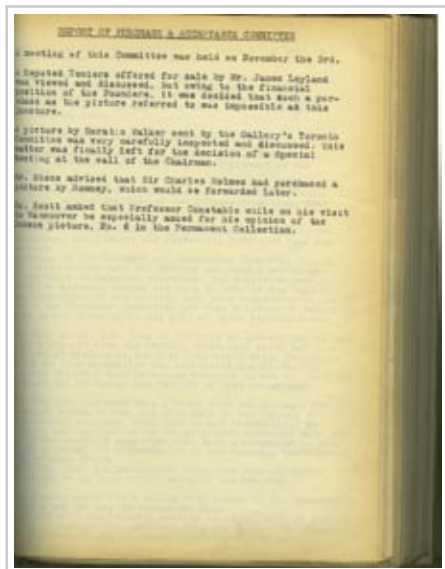
# George Romney

## Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



### George Romney (1713-1784)

Probably no English portrait painter is so well known to the man in the street as George Romney. His pre-eminence as a painter of lovely women and of one woman in particular, that famous beauty, Lady Hamilton, was sufficient to give him such a place. A contemporary of Reynolds and Gainsborough he ran these two artists a close race for the honours of the day. Later days however, do not place him quite so close. The Romney portrait is that of a gentlemen named Major Peirson and was painted about 1771. It is a profile study painted in rich golden browns with a fluent brush. Simple in modelling it reveals the painter more than the psychologist.



### Report of Purchase and Acceptance Committee

#### Acquisition Record

1934-11-03

[transcription]

#### REPORT OF PURCHASE & ACCEPTANCE COMMITTEE

A meeting of this Committee was held on November the 3rd.

A Reputed Teniers offered for sale by Mr. James Leyland was viewed and discussed, but owing to the financial position of the Founders, it was decided that such a purchase as the picture referred to was impossible at this juncture.

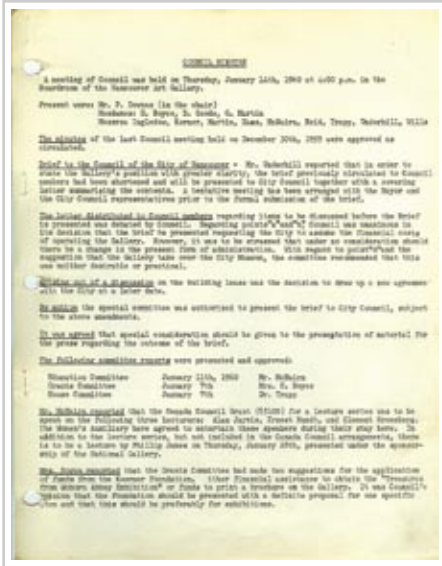
A picture by Horatio Walker sent by the Gallery's Toronto Committee was very carefully inspected and discussed. This matter was finally left for the decision of a Special Meeting at the call of the Chairman.

Mr. Stone advised that Sir Charles Holmes had purchased a picture by Romney, which would be forwarded later.

Mr. Scott asked that Professor Constable while on his visit to Vancouver be especially asked for his opinion of the Dobson picture, No. 6 in the Permanent Collection.

# George Romney

## Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



### Council Minutes

Miscellaneous History  
1960-01-14

#### [transcription of excerpt]

#### COUNCIL MINUTES

A meeting of Council was held on Thursday, January 14, 1960 at 4:00 p.m. in the Boardroom of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Present were: Mr. P. Downes (in the chair)

Mesdames: H. Boyce, D. Goode, G. Martin

Messrs: Ingledew, Korner, Martin, Haas, McNairn, Reid, Trapp, Underhill, Wills

Dr. Dale reported on the recent theft of art works from the Gallery. On Monday January 11th 1960 it was discovered that 8 Old Masters and 14 Byzantine Icons had been stolen. It was assumed that the thieves had hidden themselves in the Gallery on the Sunday afternoon (Jan. 10th) and evidence was found that they had broken out by the fire doors at the rear of the Gallery. Local police and the R.C.M.P. were investigating the case, and the Insurance company had posted a reward of \$1,500. Dr. Dale stressed that such a loss jeopardized our borrowing position, and that already a scheduled loan exhibition from the East had been canceled.

Security precautions are now in effect to ensure that the building is guarded at all times and involve the use of the Corps of Commissionaires, Pinkerton's guards, the Chief Handler and his dog, and the continued use of the two men on night maintenance. Council was informed that the method of insuring the collection was based on the current selling prices for contemporary painting, and that the more valuable section of the collection was based on world markets at the time the policy was drawn up. In view of the fact that the present insurance values would not begin to cover the actual worth of the paintings stolen, the Gallery will therefore suffer a loss.

After discussion it was agreed that the Fine Arts policy be reviewed as frequently as possible, to avoid such a loss. It was also agreed that the House Committee should enquire as to possible alternatives for the future security of the Gallery, and that Mr. Reid consult with the Director on the present insurance policies held at the Gallery. The Director was asked to formally notify the City Council of theft.

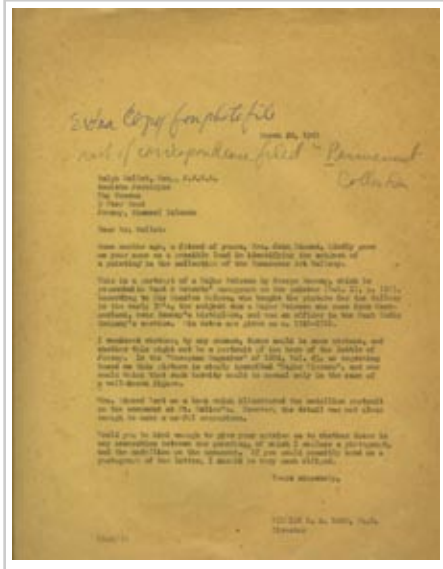
They were as follows:

- Oil GEORGE ROMNEY 'Portrait of Major Pierson'
- Oil W. HOGARTH 'Portrait of Mr. Bridgeman'
- Oil JOHN CROME 'Mill Scene with a Bridge'
- Oil T.S. COOPER 'Canterbury Meadows'
- Oil JOHANNES VAN RAVESTEIN 'Portrait of a Woman'
- Oil ADOLPHE MONTICELLI 'The Bathing Pool'
- Oil W. HOARE 'Portrait of Sir Watkin Wynn'

Watercolour J. TURNER 'The Custom House, London Bridge'

From the private collection of Ian Vorres, on loan to the Vancouver Art Gallery  
14 Byzantine Icons

George Romney  
Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



**Correspondence**

Correspondence  
1961-03-22

**[transcription]**

March 22, 1961

Ralph Mollet, Esq., F.R.H.S.  
Societe Jersiaise  
The Museum  
9 Pier road  
Jersey, Channel Islands

Dear Mr. Mollet:

Some months ago, a friend of yours, Mrs. John Edmond, kindly gave me your name as a possible lead in identifying the subject of a painting in the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

This is a portrait of a Major Peirson by George Romney, which is recorded in Ward & Roberts' monograph on the painter (Vol. II, p.12). According to Sir Charles Holmes, who bought the picture for the Gallery in the early 30's, the subject was a Major Peirson who came from Westmorland, near Romney's birthplace, and was an officer in the East India Company's services. His dates are given as c. 1740-1781.

I wondered whether, by any chance, there could be some mistake, whether this might not be a portrait of the hero of the Battle of Jersey. In the "European Magazine" of 1804, Vol. 45, an engraving based on this picture is simply inscribed "Major Pierson", and one would think that such brevity would be normal only in the case of a well-known figure.

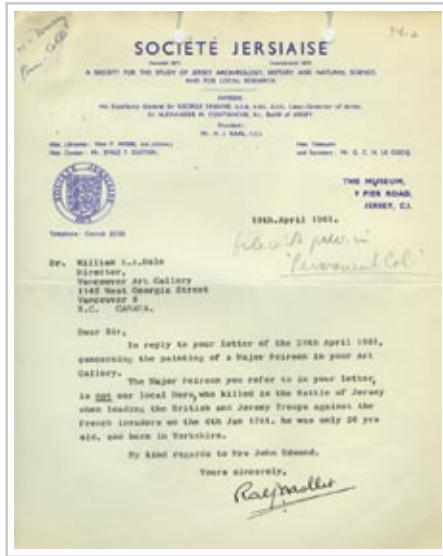
Mrs. Edmond lent me a book which illustrated the medallion portrait on the monument at St. Helier's. However, the detail was not clear enough to make a useful comparison.

Would you be kind enough to give your opinion as to whether there is any connection between our painting, of which I enclose a photograph and the medallion on the monument. If you could possibly lend us a photograph of the latter, I should be very much obliged.

Yours sincerely,

William S.A. Dale, Ph.D.  
Director

George Romney  
Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



**Societe Jersiaise Correspondence**

Correspondence  
1961-04-18

[transcription of excerpt]

Société Jersiaise  
A Society for the Study of Jersey Archeology, History and Natural Science and for  
Local Research

The Museum,  
9 Pier Road  
Jersey, C.I.

18th. April 1961.

Dr. William S.A. Dale  
Director,  
Vancouver Art Gallery  
1145 West Georgia Street  
Vancouver 5  
B.C. CANADA

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 28th April 1961, concerning the painting of a Major Peirson in your Art Gallery.

The Major Peirson you refer to in your letter is not our local Hero, who killed [sic] in the Battle of Jersey when leading the British and Jersey Troops against the French invaders on the 6th Jan 1781. he was only 26 yrs old. and born in Yorkshire.

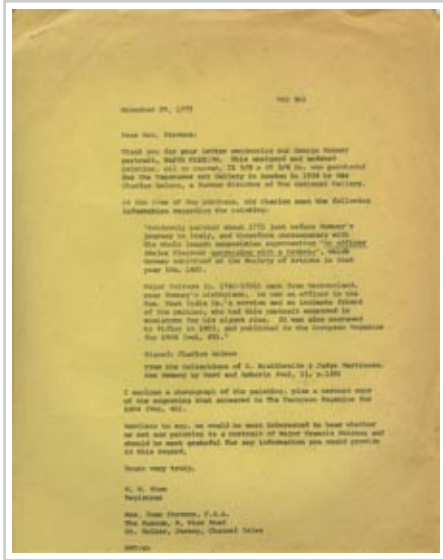
My kind regards to Mrs. John Edmond.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Mollet



George Romney  
Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



**Societe Jersiaise Correspondence**

Correspondence  
1973-11-29

[transcription]

November 29, 1973

Dear Mrs. Stevens:

Thank you for your letter concerning our George Romney portrait, MAJOR PEIRSON. This unsigned and undated painting, oil on canvas, 25 3/8 x 20 3/4 in. was purchased for The Vancouver Art Gallery in London in 1934 by Sir Charles Holmes, a former director of the National Gallery.

At the time of the purchase, Sir Charles sent the following information regarding the painting:

'Evidently painted about 1771 just before Romney's journey to Italy, and therefore contemporary with the whole length composition representing 'an officer (Major Pierson) conversing with a Brahmin,' which Romney exhibited at the society of artists in that year (No. 140).

Major Pierson (c.1740-1781) came from Westmorland, near Romney's birthplace. He was an officer in the Hon. East India Co's service and an intimate friend of the painter, who had this portrait engraved in miniature for his signet ring. It was also engraved by Ridley in 1803, and published in the European magazine for 1804 (vol. 45).'

Signed: Charles Holmes

From the collections of D. Braithwaite & Judge Martineau.  
See Romney by Ward and Roberts (vol. 11, p. 120)

I enclose a photograph of the painting, plus a Xeroxed copy of the engraving that appeared in The European Magazine for 1804 (Vol. 45).

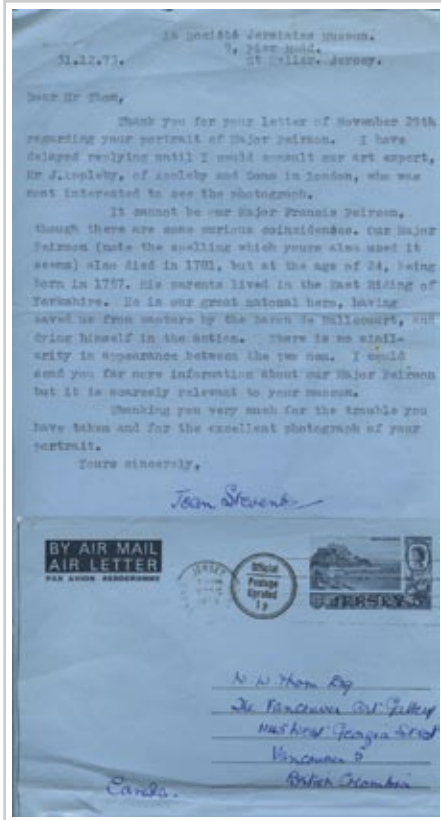
Needless to say, we would be most interested to hear whether or not our painting is a portrait of Major Francis Peirson and should be most grateful for any information you could provide in this regard.

Yours very truly,

W.W. Thom  
Registrar

# George Romney

## Portrait of Major Peirson, 1771



### Societe Jersiaise Correspondence

Correspondence  
1973-12-31

#### [transcription]

La Société Jersiaise Museum.  
9, pier Road.  
St. Helier. Jersey

31.12.73

Dear Mr. Thom,

Thank you for your letter of November 29th regarding your portrait of Major Peirson. I have delayed replying until I could consult our art expert, Mr. J. Appleby, of Appleby and Sons in London, who was most interested to see the photograph.

It cannot be our Major Francis Peirson, though there are some curious coincidences. Our Major Peirson (note the spelling which yours also used it seems) also died in 1781, but at the age of 24, being born in 1757. His parents lived in the east Riding of Yorkshire. He is our great national hero, having saved us from capture by the Baron de Rullecourt, and dying himself in the action. There is no similarity in appearance between the two men. I could send you far more information about our Major Peirson but it is scarcely relevant to your museum.

Thanking you very much for the trouble you have taken and for the excellent photograph of your portrait.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevens

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