

FAMILY PORTRAIT OF THE 1ST DUKE AND DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH

How to read a family portrait: Observations

In the painting, the artist has placed the Duchess in the centre to symbolise her importance in the family. Her wealth is illustrated by the elaborate decoration on her dress. She is sitting in a grand chair to show her importance and status.

The Duke is painted sitting off to the side. This is not to show that he did not care for his family - he loved them. A more likely reason was that the artist decided that the Duchess - being such a dominant power in the family - had to be in the centre. Originally, this painting was commissioned to be hung at Holywell House in St Albans - the family home of the Duchess. This may have been another reason for depicting her in the centre of the portrait rather than the Duke.

The artist uses bold colours for the clothes to clearly distinguish between the children who were important in the family history and those who were not. The two elder girls are painted in green and red. The girl in the green dress, Henrietta, was the next 'Duke' after her father died; this was because the Duke's son predeceased him and there was no male heir. Henrietta had a son, but he died before she did, so when Henrietta died, the title went to Anne's family - the girl in the red dress.

Anne, shown in the red dress, is painted holding on to a small branch of the plant in the background. This is to show that after Henrietta, the 'family tree' went through Anne and her sons.



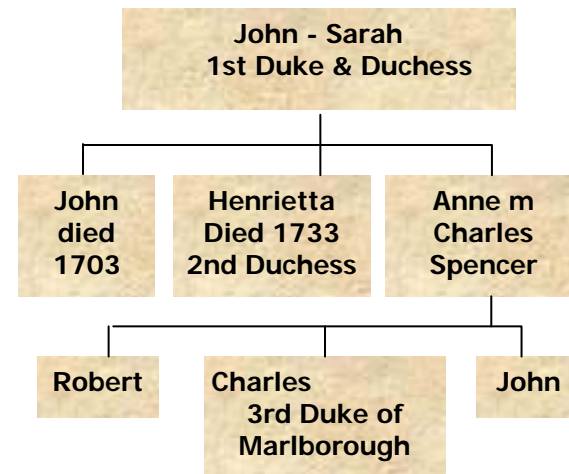
This family portrait was painted by John Closterman. The Duchess sits in the middle. Beside her in the green dress is the oldest daughter, Henrietta. Next to her in the red dress is Anne, and next to Anne is the Duke and Duchess' son, John - known as Jack. Standing to the right of Duchess Sarah is the youngest daughter, Mary and sitting beside Mary is another daughter, Elizabeth. The Duke is to one side.

The two youngest girls are dressed in shapeless white garments. This was done to show that they were the youngest and thus the least significant.

At the bottom of the painting with one of the daughters is a small spaniel. The Duchess favoured spaniels, as did later Dukes.

The background in the painting shows mainly drapes, a plant and a window showing a tree and sky. The red drapes represent wealth. Blenheim Palace is not shown in the background as it had not been built at the time the portrait was painted in c. 1698.

The Duke's only son points to his mother to draw attention back to her. Mary, the youngest daughter points at her father but looks at her mother, so once again, the mother seems more important.



**How to read a family portrait:
Questions**

**THE 9TH DUKE AND DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH
WITH THEIR TWO SONS JOHN ALBERT AND IVOR**

This magnificent portrait was painted by John Singer Sargent in 1905.

The setting for the painting is the Great Hall at Blenheim Palace.

Sargent spent a lot of time planning the painting. He visited Blenheim and the family visited Sargent at his studio. The Family did not always sit for the artist together. Quite often the artist sketched and studied them individually. The two boys found it difficult to sit still!

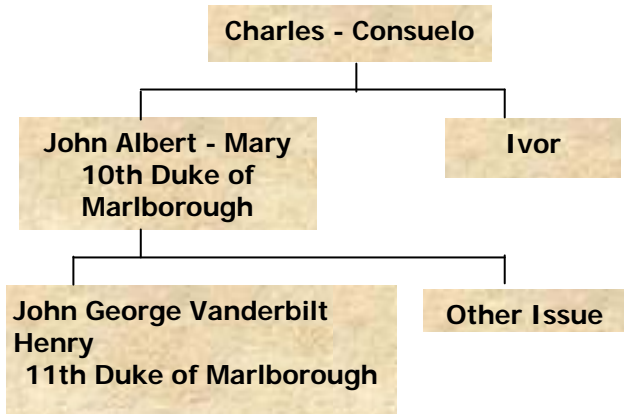
Charles Richard John Spencer-Churchill became the 9th Duke of Marlborough in 1892. He married Consuelo Vanderbilt in 1895 and they had two sons.

John Albert was born in 1897 and, being the heir, he held the title 'Lord Blandford'. The younger son, Ivor, was born in 1898.

- Questions**
1. Suggest 2 ways in which the artist draws attention to the eldest son.
 2. The Duke's hand is resting on top of his sword and the eldest child is holding the sword. Why do you think the artist has included this detail in the picture?
 3. Look at the younger boy and compare the way he has been painted with the way his older brother has been painted. Give 3 differences.
 4. Why might the artist have painted the younger boy in this particular position i.e. bottom corner?
 5. Look at the way the Duke is dressed. Give 2 ways that we can tell that he was important from his clothes and decoration.
 6. Look carefully at the Duchess and how she is dressed. Give 2 ways in which her clothes show that she was a wealthy woman.
 7. It is unusual for the artist not to include any jewels around her neck: she often wore a pearl choker - which she referred to as a 'dog collar'. Why do you think the artist has left this out?
 8. Look at the background of the painting. What can you see in the background which shows that this family was wealthy and important?
 9. Why do you really think the artist included the Blenheim Spaniels?
 10. Consuelo, the Duchess, was taller than her husband. How has the artist attempted to hide the fact that the Duke was shorter than his wife?



When the Duke asked Sargent to paint this huge portrait, Sargent was worried, how could he fill such a huge painting with just four people? "I suppose I might add some Blenheim Spaniels" he said crossly.



THE COUNTESS OF SUNDERLAND, ELIZABETH TREVOR, LATER 3RD DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH

How to read a portrait: Observations

Elizabeth Trevor and her husband, Charles Spencer became Duke and Duchess of Marlborough in 1733 upon the death of the 2nd Duchess, Henrietta. When they were the Earl and Countess of Sunderland, they attended the coronation of George II (George II reigned from 1727 - 1760). This portrait hangs at Blenheim Palace in the Green Writing Room. It was painted by Jean-Baptiste Van Loo. Elizabeth is wearing her coronation robes.

The distant view from the window could be there to indicate that Elizabeth lived on a large estate; this also serves to show that she was wealthy.

Elizabeth's hand is placed on the coronet to show that it belongs to her. It shows her status as a Countess.

The main body of every coronation dress is white. As the dress is white, it gives emphasis to the richly decorated hem and the gold tassels.

The robe and train are trimmed with ermine and sealskin spots. This echoes the use of ermine in the royal robes worn by the Monarch during the coronation.

The gold decoration at the hem of the dress once again demonstrates Elizabeth's wealth. The lace on the sleeves of her dress are a more personal touch and may show that Elizabeth herself chose the embellishments.



The pillar suggests strength and that Elizabeth is sitting in a very grand house. This shows both her wealth and her status.

The hairstyle is quite simple and with minimal decoration. This is so that all the attention is focussed on the Coronation robes and dress.

The expression on her face is serious as befits the occasion, but there is the hint of a smile.

The chair has elaborate gold decoration. This is a further indication of Elizabeth's wealth.

Elizabeth Trevor and Charles Spencer married without the knowledge of the 1st Duchess (Charles' grandmother). Sarah disliked Elizabeth and said of her, "[She] has been bred in a very low way and don't know how to behave herself upon any occasion...and has a mean, ordinary look...she has very bad teeth, which I think is an objection alone in a wife, and they will be sure to grow worse with time."

JOHN ALBERT AND MARY SPENCER-CHURCHILL 10TH DUKE AND DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH

How to read a portrait: Comparing portraits

Kings and Queens of England early 20th Century.

George V	1910 - 1936
Edward VIII	1936 (Jan-Dec 1936)
George VI	1936 - 1952
Elizabeth II	1952 - present

Questions

- How many Coronations did the 10th Duke and Duchess attend?
- Compare the Coronation robes of the 10th Duchess with those of the 3rd Duchess, Elizabeth Trevor.
List 3 similarities
List 2 differences
- Compare the 10th Duke's Coronation robes with those of the 10th Duchess.
List 3 differences
List 2 similarities
- Look at the clothes worn by the 10th Duke under his Coronation robes. What do they tell you about his profession?
- Look at the dress worn by the 10th Duchess under her Coronation robes. How is it different from the dress worn by the 3rd Duchess?
- Compare the coronet of the 10th Duchess with that of the 3rd Duchess. Give 2 ways in which they are different then give 2 ways in which they are similar.
- Look at the background of the pictures. List 2 differences and state why these differences might occur.

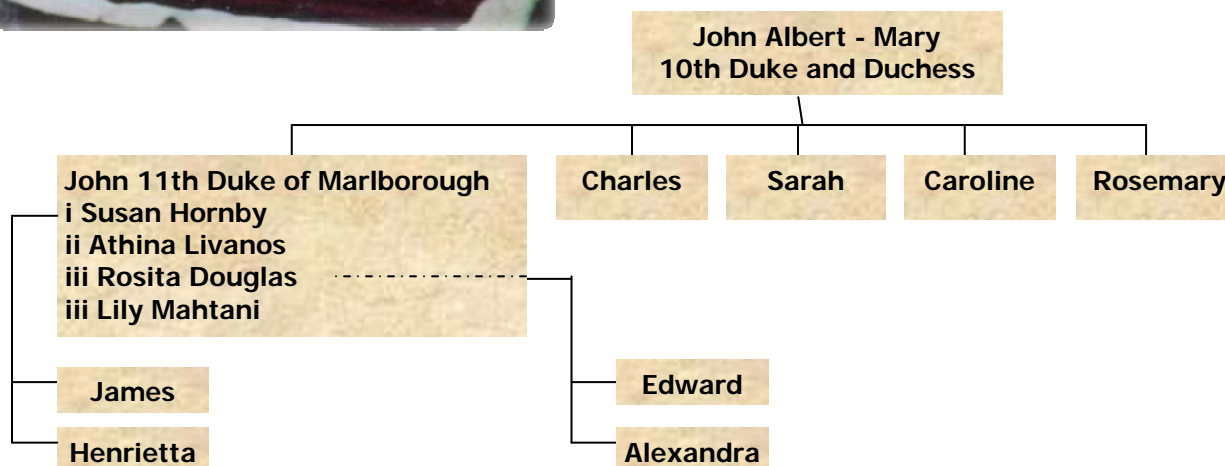


John Albert (known as 'Bert') and Mary Spencer-Churchill became Duke and Duchess of Marlborough in 1934. The Duchess died in 1961 and the Duke in 1972.

In this photograph, they are pictured wearing their Coronation Robes; it was on the occasion of the Coronation of George VI.

When Edward VIII became king, he declared his intention to marry a divorcee, Mrs Wallis Simpson.

The Government would not sanction this marriage and there was also much public opinion against it. Edward therefore abdicated on 11th December 1936. There had not been time for a Coronation ceremony.



JOHN SPENCER-CHURCHILL 11TH DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

John George Vanderbilt Henry Spencer-Churchill became the 11th Duke of Marlborough in 1972. This portrait was painted by Pavlenko and shows the Duke sitting at his desk. He is the present Duke of Marlborough.

Questions

1. Describe the Duke's clothes.
2. Do these clothes look like everyday clothes?
If YES give reasons for your answer.
If NO give reasons for your answer.
3. Give 2 ways in which the painting suggests that the Duke is studious or hard-working.
4. Look at the expression on his face. What does it make you think about his character?
(Does it look angry, worried, calm, thoughtful...)
5. Is there anything in the portrait to show that he is a Duke?
6. Study the Duke's clothes, his expression and the background of the painting. What overall impression does this give of the Duke?



The Duke has deliberately chosen to be painted in what is, for him, informal evening dress. He could have chosen to be painted wearing his Life Guards uniform as he was a Captain in the Life Guards. He could have chosen to be painted in front of the Palace to show he is a Duke. He elected to be painted at his desk in a casual pose.

Coronations are very formal occasions and maintaining rank among the aristocratic guests is important - the dress code is very strict

A **Duchess** - the highest rank below a queen - is entitled to wear a coronet lined with crimson silk velvet with a gold tassel in its centre. The coronet has a gold circlet with 8 strawberry leaves.

A **Countess** is also entitled to wear a coronet, but hers must have a silver gilt circlet with 8 strawberry leaves alternating with 8 silver balls.

Both a Duchess and a Countess may wear red velvet robes, but the train on a Duchess' robes has to be 2 yards long while that of a Countess must only be 1½ yards long!



THE 1ST DUCHESS, SARAH AND HER DAUGHTER, ANNE, COUNTESS OF SUNDERLAND

Questions

1. Bearing in mind the Coronation 'dress code' for Duchesses and Countesses, which of these 2 portrait is of Anne, Countess of Sunderland?
How can you tell?
2. At whose Coronation would both the Duchess of Marlborough and the Countess of Sunderland have been present?
3. Compare the 1st Duchess' Coronation dress & coronet with that of the Countess.
List 2 differences
List 2 similarities
4. Look at the background in each of the portraits, bearing in mind the observations on page 3, what might the background in the portrait of the Duchess tell you?
5. Given that the subjects of the portraits are mother and daughter:-
List 3 similarities in their pose and appearance.
List 2 differences in their pose and appearance.

Kings and Queens of England early 18th Century.

Queen Anne	1702 - 1717
George I	1714 - 1727
George II	1727 - 1760

The 1st Duchess was a very wealthy woman, but she had a reputation for being very careful with her money, sometimes to the point of meanness. It was said of her that she would never dot the letter *i* or cross the letter *t* in order to save the ink!

Anne (1684 - 1716) was the second daughter of Sarah, the 1st Duchess of Marlborough. She married into the Spencer family whose family home is at Althorp House, Northamptonshire.

Anne's husband, Charles was the 3rd Earl of Sunderland. One of their sons, also a Charles, became the 3rd Duke of Marlborough when Henrietta, 2nd Duchess, died in 1733 and the family name changed from Churchill to Spencer.



The 5th Duke was very keen to restore the illustrious name of his ancestor and so when he inherited the title in 1817, he was given permission to use the name 'Churchill' again and the family name became Spencer-Churchill from that day to this.