

The Eliots of Port Eliot

The Eliot family were great supporters of Sir Joshua Reynolds' talent, and were among his first and most important patrons in the South West. 'Ever upon the strictest terms of intimacy', Reynolds painted many of the family throughout his long career.

Port Eliot House

Port Eliot is the ancestral home of the Eliot family near St Germans in East Cornwall. Originally a monastery, the estate came to the Eliot family under John Eliot (1565-1577). At the end of the 18th century, the Eliots used their considerable wealth to remodel the house and park with the foremost talents of their day; Sir John Soane the architect and Humphrey Repton, landscape designer.

The Eliot Family

Following his aborted London apprenticeship to Hudson, the young Reynolds returned to Plymouth and was commissioned by Richard Eliot I to paint his young son (also called Richard) in 1743. New research suggest that this job was followed by a further commission around 1746 for The Eliot Family, an unusual group portrait of the Eliots and their closest friends.

Reynolds became great friends with the eldest son, Edward 1st Baron Eliot, and frequently met up with him in London at their Literacy Club. Reynolds painted Edward three times, chronicling him from his youth to maturity as a political figure at Parliament. He also painted Edward's mother, sisters, brothers, step-father and son. Many of these portraits are on show here.

When Reynolds died, Edward Eliot was one of the pall bearers for his coffin, a great tribute to a family friend.