

Franks Forage No 3A

The Da Pozzo Portraits

I find the portraits of Henry Spencer and Christina in the Billiard Room fascinating. What story lies behind their expressions? Perhaps the year they were painted gives us a clue! Records show that they were painted c1890¹ and very likely done at the same time.

Spencer died on November 6th of that year and the picture would suggest that it was painted earlier in the year, after the death of Mary Elizabeth on March 15th, hence his reflective rather pensive look.



And Christina? She is in mourning clothes. Victorian women dressed thus for several months (the duration depending on the family relationship) following the death of a family member ; could also be mourning the death of Spencer or her mother-in-law. It has been suggested that the portrait of Spencer was done from a photograph² which would explain that if the portraits were done at the same time, Spencer had already died.

Giuseppe Antonio Da Pozzo was born in 1844 near Udine in North eastern Italy. He attended the Accademia di Belle

Arti in Venice and worked mainly in water colours. He travelled extensively abroad and became acquainted with the Impressionists in Paris, especially Manet. He also travelled to Northern Europe and lived for some time in Scotland.³ He exhibited throughout Italy in the 1880s and 1890s and settled in Rome in 1887, setting up a school of painting there where he concentrated on portraiture in oils and pastels. He signed the Billiard Room portraits in the bottom left hand corner "G Da Pozzo Roma" but didn't date them unfortunately. In 1902, aged 58, Giuseppe married Isabel Cargill, who with Anna Maria Babington founded Babington's Tea rooms in the Piazza Spagna in 1893 which is still there today.⁴ In 1914 Giuseppe became ill with a heart condition but was able to help out with the family business until he died in 1919 (same year as Christina).

It is interesting that the frame to the painting of Ada, Constance and Joyce in the same room is of the same design as the Da Pozzo portraits. Although the artist is unknown, it could have been done around the same time or just prior to Ada's marriage to Sir Henry Fairfax in 1892.

Notes

1. www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/533857 & 533859
2. Hearsay; needs verification.
3. www.friul.net/dizionario_biografico/?id=1208&x=1 (in Italian)
4. www.babingtons.com/PBCPPlayer.asp?ID=1078236