



**Mary Beale**

SAMUEL WOODFORDE  
& MARY WOODFORDE

Portraits Rediscovered

PHILIP MOULD

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**Portraits of Samuel Woodforde (1636-1700) and  
Mary Woodforde (née Norton) (c.1648-1730)**

**c.1667**

Oil on canvas, 35 1/4 x 28 in (89.5 x 71.1 cm)

*Provenance*

F.H. Bresler Fine Arts, Milwaukee (acquired between 1899 and 1931);  
Private Collection, Chicago;  
Sotheby's, Chicago, 4 April 2000, lot 946 [as 'Manner of Michiel van Musscher' 'Portrait of a Man and Portrait of a Woman: Two Paintings'];  
Private Collection, Chicago;  
Hindman, Chicago, 23 April 2024, lot 242 [as 'Portrait of a Lady and a Gentleman (Two Works)' in the manner of Michiel van Musscher];  
Philip Mould & Company, acquired from the above.





## Preface

*Between 25 April and 19 July 2024, Philip Mould & Company staged Fruit of Friendship: Portraits by Mary Beale. Over the preceding decade, we had often discussed staging an exhibition on Beale, but a combination of time pressures and other gallery commitments had stubbornly stood in our way. This time, however, the stars aligned; not only were we in the very fortunate position to own several key works by the artist, but we were also made aware of a group of fascinating works in public and private collections that we could take on loan. As the exhibition opening approached, we were frantically trying to complete our research and submit the text to our printers. It is usually at this moment, much to the chagrin of our catalogue designers, that we find some new piece of information or recently discovered work to include. In this instance, however, we felt that we had included everything pertinent and there were no further works in existence that could help us navigate our audience through the life and work of Britain's first successful woman artist. How wrong we were, for less than a week after our exhibition opened, we were offered the chance to acquire the two works described below, which I firmly believe to be*

*two of Beale's most technically accomplished and important works. We hurriedly received them at the gallery, and after a light clean and revarnish, we decided to include them in our exhibition, much to the delight of our attendees – which numbered a little over 5,000 over the three-month period. Following the closure of the exhibition, the portraits were acquired by a private collector and will join an enviable assemblage of British masterworks here in the UK. We thought it a shame, however, for two works of such interest to disappear from sight without us somehow recording their existence in written form. It is for this reason that we have put together this short online document for your enjoyment.*

Lawrence Hendra  
Director

## Portraits Rediscovered

This exceptional pair of recently discovered portraits can be considered among Mary Beale's most accomplished formal works. They depict Samuel and Mary Woodforde, close friends of the Beale family, and were painted around five years before Beale established a professional portrait practice in London. They represent a highly important addition to Beale's oeuvre and are rare surviving examples of works dateable to her time in Hampshire between 1664 and 1670. The outstanding condition of both works allows a privileged insight into her lyrical painting style at this date – a characteristic absent in many of her later works, which were often painted in collaboration with assistants.

The clergyman and prolific diarist Samuel Woodforde was a beloved friend and confidante of the Beale family. Their lives became intertwined when he fell in love with Charles Beale's first cousin, Alice Beale, whom he married on 10 October 1661. The young couple became lodgers at the Beale home, living communally at Hind Court, London. The diaries kept by Woodforde during this period are revealing; Dr. Helen Draper notes: 'From Woodforde's diary we come to understand the independence and agency that Mary

exercised, not only in her work, but in everyday life. Possessed of her own set of house keys, she came and went as she pleased, visiting friends and going to hear ministers preach in other parishes.' Through his diaries, we also know about Beale's artistic practice in these early years in London and that sittings by friends and family were commonplace in the Beale household.

Samuel and Alice Woodforde had two children, Alice and Heighes, but tragically, Alice died following the birth of their son. As recorded in his diaries, the Beales extended profound kindness and support to Woodforde and his children; while themselves grieving the loss of their friend and family member, they opened their home to Woodforde, who stayed with them at Hind Court, and later at Allbrook Farm, Hampshire, where they lived between 1664 and 1670. In 1666, Woodforde married Mary Norton, daughter of John Norton of Benstead. Mary was herself a diarist and kept a personal diary between 1684 and 1690, which is now held at New College, Oxford. This portrait pair, painted in the years immediately after Samuel and Mary's marriage, was likely commissioned to celebrate both their union and Woodforde's recent literary achievements.



Fig. 1:  
Detail Portrait of Samuel Woodforde

Woodford is shown seated on a stone scroll-arm bench, his right arm gesturing towards the book on which his left hand rests. The book is most likely a reference to his *Paraphrase Upon the Psalms of David*, which was written while he was lodging with the Beale family and in which he included five poems written by Beale. Published in 1667, *Paraphrase Upon the Psalms* aimed to make the Psalms more accessible and engaging to contemporary readers. In the preface, Woodforde hailed Beale as 'the truly virtuous Mrs Mary Beale, amongst whose least accomplishments it is, that she has made painting and poetry which in the fancies of others had only before a kind of likeness, in her own to be really the same.' Such were Beale's literary ambitions at this time – possibly encouraged by the Woodfordes – that she penned her *Discourse on Friendship*, a lengthy and highly progressive prose in which Beale advocated for equality in friendship and marriage. The portrait of Woodforde, therefore, is both a celebration of friendship and a statement of mutual respect for intellectual endeavours which aim to educate and enrich human connections.

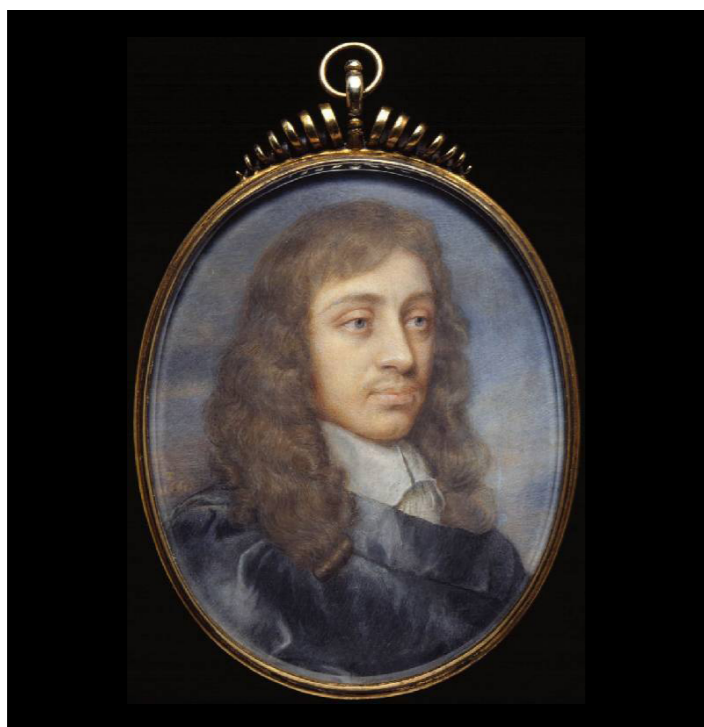
The supreme confidence and masterful execu-

tion of these portraits are arguably unparalleled within Beale's oeuvre. Both sitters, depicted seated in half-length, are painted with confidence seldom seen in Beale's later work following her return to London. One striking characteristic is their fluidity; the paint is of a thinner consistency than that normally observed and is built up quickly over thin, washy preparation layers beneath. This same light yet assured brushwork is seen again in the brickwork backdrop in the portrait of Woodforde and throughout the folds of his gown [fig. 1]. In the portrait of Mary, smooth sweeping strokes deftly delineate with haste an area of folds within her blue shoulder drape, revealing a complex combination of subtle tones [fig. 2]. The same refined use of colour is seen within the facial features of Mary and likewise in the portrait of Woodford and demonstrates a considerable advancement on Beale's more simplified style of painting exemplified in the earlier triple portrait of the artist with her husband and son.

Beale was a particularly observant portraitist, often including slight marks or blemishes that most artists would ignore. A tiny birthmark is indicated beside Mary's nose, instilling a sense of authenticity and realism within an otherwise

Fig. 2:  
Detail Portrait of Mary Woodforde (née Norton)





**Fig. 3:**  
Thomas Flatman  
*The Rev. Samuel Woodforde, D.D., F.R.S.,*  
1661  
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

flawless complexion. This is enhanced by an obvious dialogue between the two portraits, conceived as companion works; Mary, who makes eye contact with the viewer, gestures with a raised arm towards her husband, who returns her affections with a nonchalant glance and gestures down towards his magnum opus.

It is known that Woodforde had previously sat to Beale earlier in 1664, before his marriage to Mary, the details of which he described in his diary; 'I sate some part of yesterday & this day to Cosen Beale for my picture, she hath done it very like as all say that see it & are better judges of its likeness then myself.' Woodforde had a distinctive appearance, and his likeness in the present work is directly comparable with two portrait miniatures, one attributed to Samuel Cooper and the other by Thomas Flatman – another of Beale's close friends – in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge [fig. 3]. The portrait by Flatman was painted earlier in 1661 and showed the same distinguishing facial features, notably the blue eyes, long nose, and dimple on the chin. The miniature by Samuel Cooper is known only from a black and white image but bears the same facial idiosyncrasies, albeit on a smaller, less defined scale.

Until recently, the authorship of the present portraits had been overlooked. Their earthy colouring had led to a misleading attribution to Michiel van Musscher, a Dutch painter active in the late seventeenth century. Due to these past confusions, their early history remains stubbornly obscure, although we know they were previously handled by the prestigious art dealers F.H. Bresler Fine Arts in Milwaukee. This gallery was established by Frank H. Bresler in 1899, who ran the business until he died in 1931. It was then managed by his daughter until it was sold in 1955. During his career, it is known that Bresler made over thirty trips to Europe to acquire art to sell in his gallery, and we can presume that it was on a trip to England that the present works were acquired.

