

PETER OLIVER AND SIMON DE PASSE

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HAVING recently purchased a portrait miniature of Charles I (1625–49) attributed to Peter Oliver,¹ I was struck by the similarity between the portrait on the miniature (Fig. 1) and that used by Simon de Passe (or van de Passe) for his gaming counter depicting Charles with a small beard (*MI* i, 376/272)² (Fig. 2). Both are head and shoulders images of Charles showing him wearing the Garter ribbon and a ruff. The angle of his head and the depiction of his hair and features are very closely related. Simon de Passe (1595–1647) and Peter Oliver (c.1589–1647) were contemporaries, and de Passe was evidently aware of the work of the Olivers since he used a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) by Isaac Oliver (Peter's father) as the basis for a line engraving.³



Fig. 1. Portrait miniature of Charles I (by permission of Philip Mould & Company) (original size 61 × 48 mm)



Fig. 2. Gaming counter of Charles I by Simon de Passe (author's collection; images courtesy of Owen Davies)

Simon de Passe produced a series of counters depicting Charles I, and Helen Farquhar suggested that a plaque by de Passe is probably the prototype for the earliest (clean shaven) Charles I counter.⁴ It is not known whether the plaque was produced *ad vivum* or with the aid of a painting or drawing. Herbert Grueber argued that Simon de Passe's portraits were 'often taken from life', but he gave no evidence for his statement.⁵ Antony Griffiths states that '[f]ew of Simon's portraits give any indication of whose paintings or drawings they were based on. It is reasonable to assume that such unattributed designs were made by Simon himself although it has to be admitted that no such preparatory drawings by him are known'.⁶ It is interesting that on his engraving of Ernest, Count of Mansfield 1623, Simon de Passe states that the portrait is made from life.⁷ As de Passe does not inscribe this on other portraits it might suggest that they were not made from life.

From c.1620–23 Peter Oliver produced a series of portrait miniatures of Charles as Prince of Wales, wearing a ruff and the Garter ribbon. Several are now in the Collection of Her

¹ This attribution was made by Emma Rutherford at Philip Mould & Company, based on technique, materials and style. She states: 'The sketched ruff in this miniature suggests that this is perhaps an unfinished *ad vivum* portrait, although Peter Oliver is clearly basing the image on the portrait type begun by his father, Isaac' (*pers. comm.* 2015).

² The counter design is generally considered to be by Simon de Passe although Helen Farquhar comments that '[i]t is seldom that this slightly bearded type is sufficiently well engraved to be attributed to Simon van de Passe': Farquhar 1916, 163–4.

³ National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG D42191.

⁴ Farquhar 1916, 163, suggests that the counters 'resemble the plaque (*Med. Ill.*, Pl. xvi, No. 5)'.
⁵ Hawkins, Franks and Grueber 1885, xiii.

⁶ Griffiths 1998, 59.

⁷ Griffiths 1998, 62.

Majesty the Queen.⁸ Although these show some similarity with the first-issue clean shaven Prince Charles counter by Simon de Passe,⁹ the miniatures depict Charles with the beginnings of a moustache. They also show Charles with a much rounder face and less pronounced chin than that shown on de Passe's 'prototype' plaque. Jeremy Wood suggests that Peter Oliver entered the household of the Prince of Wales in about 1620,¹⁰ and he is known to have been a member of it in 1625, as he is recorded as attending the funeral of King James I as such.¹¹ He was, therefore, in a position that could have given him access to Charles between c.1620 and 1625. Farquhar suggested that the earliest Simon de Passe counters were produced in 1616,¹² and therefore pre-date Oliver's time at court and his series of miniatures. It is interesting to note, however, that Simon de Passe's engravings and Peter Oliver's miniatures do in several instances show some similarity. For example, the second state of Simon de Passe's engraving from *Baziliologia*,¹³ compared to a portrait in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen (RCIN 420049),¹⁴ and the engraving attributed by Griffiths to Simon de Passe¹⁵ (although attributed by Hind to Crispin the Elder)¹⁶ compared to another portrait in the royal collection (RCIN 420942) (which Reynolds suggests is an *ad vivum* portrait).¹⁷ However, in both instances, Oliver depicts Charles with a rounder face, and although the Prince is believed to be of a similar age in RCIN 420049 and the second-state engraving,¹⁸ Oliver's rounder face gives more of an impression of youth.

The Simon de Passe counter we are considering shows Charles with a beard, and Colin Narbeth states that Simon added the beard of Charles to his counter image in progressive degrees 'over the ten years of production'.¹⁹ Michael Mitchiner divides the counters into three groups 'a. Prince Charles clean shaven: 1616–c.1620, b. Prince Charles has a moustache and a beard: circa 1620–1625, c. Prince Charles has a more mature portrait, with larger moustache and beard: c.1628'.²⁰ Our counter is from group b. Mitchiner correctly states that the whole series is derived from a single master design (he draws attention to 'the strokes of Prince Charles' left shoulder, the fine stroke that links his hair with the letter 'A' of 'and', the junction between 'NE' of 'sonne' and the Prince's hair'), but as he also points out aspects of the design vary from one counter to another, and the 'most readily appreciated variation concerns Prince Charles' portrait'. Further, Mitchiner suggests that '[t]he majority of counters with a bearded portrait are from the same master design as those with a clean shaven portrait – the details of moustache and beard having been engraved on the flans after manufacture of the counters'.²¹ Mitchiner considers the counters of Prince Charles with a beard to have been manufactured by striking with dies and subsequently refining some details by engraving and chasing. However, Mark Jones believes that the counters were cast.²² These cast counters could equally have been subsequently refined by engraving and chasing. Referring to Simon de Passe's medals Jones believes that it is probable that Simon de Passe engraved the models for his medals. As noted previously, although the design for the counter with a small beard is considered to be by Simon de Passe, Farquhar believes that it is seldom that individual counters are

⁸ Reynolds 1999, 102–3, Pl. 66–9 (two dated 1621).

⁹ For example, RCIN 420055 in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen (Reynolds 1999, 102) and counters sold at Dix Noonan Web on 11 June 2014, lot 472, and Woolley and Wallis, 16 October 2014, lot 188. For the counter see also Farquhar 1916, Pl. V, 1.

¹⁰ Wood 1998, 126.

¹¹ Edmond, 1983, 184.

¹² Farquhar 1916, 136, n.5.

¹³ Hind 1952–64, Pl. 65.

¹⁴ Reynolds 1999, 102, Pl. 66.

¹⁵ Griffiths 1998, 62, Pl. 19.

¹⁶ Hind 1952–64, 42, no. 5.

¹⁷ Reynolds 1999, 103, Pl. 69.

¹⁸ Reynolds 1999, 102.

¹⁹ Narbeth 2003, 59.

²⁰ Mitchiner 1998, 1661–4.

²¹ Mitchiner 1998, 1661.

²² Jones 1983, 229–30 and n.16.

sufficiently well engraved to be attributed to him.²³ These counters may have been produced by a workshop.

In discussing the counter of Charles with a small beard, Farquhar mentions that Crispin (or Crispijn) de Passe, Simon's brother, produced a print that 'throws some light on the question'.²⁴ She says that the first state of the print may follow or precede Simon de Passe's 'prototype' plaque and the second state of the print 'shows Charles with a very small beard'. Farquhar gives the date of the second state of Crispin's print as 'circa 1620' and Mitchiner repeats this, saying that 'Farquhar considered that Prince Charles' bust was copied from Crispin's portrait executed about 1620'.²⁵ In fact Charles, as can be seen from Peter Oliver's miniatures dated 1621, did not start sporting a beard until 1623–4, when he had returned from Spain. Simon de Passe's brother Crispin was resident in Paris between 1618 and 1629, with visits to the Netherlands in 1621 and 1624,²⁶ so he cannot have based the bearded image of the second state of his print on personal access to the Prince at the English court. Farquhar does not speculate on any paintings that he may have used.

Simon de Passe worked in London between 1615 and 1622, but he was then based in Utrecht for two years, and in 1625 he moved to Copenhagen. The miniature of Charles in Fig. 1 was probably painted in about 1624, as it shows Charles with more facial hair than in the earlier Peter Oliver miniatures or in Daniel Mytens' portrait of 1623.²⁷ When Simon de Passe produced his counter showing Charles with a beard he must already have left London. Simon de Passe was living in Utrecht and his brother Crispin visited Utrecht at this time. The de Passe brothers may have produced the counter and the second-state engraving showing Charles with a beard while they were both resident in Utrecht, using a source also available to Peter Oliver. Alternatively, Peter himself may have provided a portrait. We do not know whether there was a friendship between Peter Oliver and Simon de Passe but, if there was, it is possible that Simon asked Peter if he had any images available of Charles that he could use to produce a new counter. Referring to an engraving of Prince Henry (Charles I's brother), Farquhar notes that it has been suggested that Simon de Passe executed the engraving in Utrecht "from some drawing supplied to him from England for the purpose".²⁸ It is possible that Peter Oliver produced a drawing of Charles which the de Passe brothers were able to use as the basis for their works. However, although Peter Oliver did produce drawings²⁹ they were not related to his miniatures. There are drawings of himself and his wife³⁰ which are 'close to the format of miniature portraits',³¹ but no corresponding miniatures are known. There is also a small oval plumbago drawing of King Charles I, head and shoulders, after van Dyck.³²

When considering Peter's father Isaac, Roy Strong comments that it is a puzzle that Isaac Oliver's known drawings have no connection with finished works. But he adds that 'Within the limning tradition this should be no reason for surprise because preliminary studies had no place in the process of creation'.³³ (Strong notes that Holbein is an exception as his drawings were preliminary studies for portraits on any scale.) Miniatures were produced directly during the sittings. Edward Norgate, who was a limner of state letters for James I and Charles I, in around 1627 wrote a treatise, *Miniatura, or the Art of Limning*.³⁴ Norgate advised the preparation of vellum with different types of carnation (the flesh colour of the face) before a sitting so that the sitter didn't get bored while the artist was mixing up the appropriate colour of carnation.³⁵ Interestingly, there is only one instance where Peter Oliver is known to have

²³ See n.2.

²⁴ Farquhar 1916, 163.

²⁵ Mitchiner 1998, 1662.

²⁶ Veldman 2001, 258–70.

²⁷ Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, RCIN 405790.

²⁸ Farquhar 1916, 192.

²⁹ Wood 1998.

³⁰ For examples see Edmond 1983, Pl. 47 and 48. National Portrait Gallery, NPG 4853a and NPG 4853.

³¹ Wood 1998, 123.

³² Oppé 1950, Cat. 469.

³³ Murdoch, Murrell, Noon and Strong 1981, 64.

³⁴ Dmitrieva and Murdoch 2013, 54.

³⁵ Coombs 1998, 41.

produced a preparatory drawing, and it is for a print not a miniature. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge holds a print of a seated woman reading a book.³⁶ This print is thought to be the only known etching by Peter Oliver after his own design and there is a preparatory drawing by Oliver for this print.³⁷

It should be noted that Simon and Crispin de Passe's brother Willem was living in London at the time of the miniature in Fig. 1. In 1621 he drew and engraved a double portrait of James I and Charles, Prince of Wales, and around 1622 he produced a print of all the members of King James' family. Ilja M. Veldman suggests that 'Willem may have been granted access to the court on the recommendation of the Winter King [Frederick V, Elector Palatine] and his wife [Elizabeth of Bohemia, daughter of James I], or through Balthasar Gerbier, the Duke of Buckingham's confidant'.³⁸ Willem could have produced a drawing or engraving used by his brothers and Peter Oliver but no such work is known and Oliver, as we have seen, produced his own *ad vivum* portraits of Charles, with Emma Rutherford suggesting my miniature is one such example.³⁹

If there was no common source used by Peter Oliver and Simon de Passe, and if no drawing of Charles corresponding to the miniature was made, Simon de Passe could have used the miniature itself as the basis for his counter engraving. Miniatures were easy to transport. It is possible, but unproven as there is little documentation concerning the life of Peter Oliver, that Peter Oliver met the de Passe brothers while they were living or staying in Utrecht. Oliver continued to produce miniatures of Elizabeth of Bohemia and her husband who were in exile at The Hague,⁴⁰ so he may have travelled to the Netherlands, but this is not documented and the miniatures of her may have been produced in England.

Yet another possibility is that the counters of Charles with a small beard attributed to Simon de Passe were in fact produced by a workshop after he had left London, with the engraving and chasing of the beard and features overseen by someone other than Simon. That person (possibly Willem) may not have been working to a bearded design engraved by Simon himself but was still using the flan of the clean shaven counter. Simon may only have been involved in the production of the clean shaven counters. We simply do not have the necessary information about the working practices of Simon and his workshop to be certain.

The images of Charles as Prince of Wales on the Simon de Passe counter and Peter Oliver's miniature are not identical but they do bear a very close resemblance, and the two young men of similar age (one an expatriate, the other from an expatriate family) working in London on the production of images of the royal family would certainly have been aware of each other. If the attribution is correct and the miniature in Fig. 1 is an *ad vivum* Peter Oliver portrait of Charles as Prince of Wales, the marked similarity it bears to the Simon de Passe counter suggests that there could be a connection. The miniature may have aided Simon de Passe, or someone in his workshop, either directly or via an engraving by Simon's brother Crispin, in the production of a counter showing Prince Charles with a moustache and small beard. Alternatively, Simon or Willem or someone else from their workshop could have added a beard and moustache to the earlier counter, possibly without having seen the bearded Prince, and it is an uncanny coincidence that the image resembles that of Oliver's miniature so markedly. This coincidence is unlikely with Peter Oliver and Simon de Passe having been working in London on their earlier images of the Prince at the same time and the probability of their knowing each other's work. Historically there had been connections between limners and engravers. Hilliard collaborated with Derick and Charles Antony, chief-engravers at the Mint, and provided Francis Delaram with the model for his print of Elizabeth I.⁴¹ Peter Oliver's print of a seated woman reading suggests he had an interest in print making. Therefore, although we don't know the nature of the connection between Simon de Passe and Peter

³⁶ See Wood 1998, 137 and Fig. Also Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, P.2-1984.

³⁷ Griffiths 2000, 117 and Fig. 38.

³⁸ Veldman 2001, 250.

³⁹ See n.1.

⁴⁰ For example, see Dmitrieva and Murdoch 2013, Pl. 45.

⁴¹ Barclay and Syson 1993, 7-9.

Oliver I suggest that the similarity of the images of Charles as Prince of Wales that they produced, and those of the miniature and the counter of Charles with a small beard in particular, indicates there was a connection between the two men and their work.

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