

DUKE STREET GALLERY

INFORMATION SHEET



JOHN FREDERICK HERRING SNR (1795–1865)
THE COLONEL

Materials

Oil on Panel, Signed and Dated 1828
10" x 12"

The Colonel, a blaze face chestnut bred at the Wyvill Constable Burton Stud, Yorkshire, in 1825. He was by Delpini out of the mare My Lady's dam.

The Colonel was purchased by Edward Petre as a yearling and was sold after his St Leger win, to King George IV for the sum of £4,000.

The Colonel stood at stud at Hampton Court and when the King's herd was dispersed at auction in 1837 by Tattersall's was purchased for 1,550 guineas by Richard Tattersall and sent to the Tattersall farm at Dawley, near Uxbridge. He was sent to Brunswick Germany in 1838; he was returned to Tattersall in 1843 and placed at Tattersall's Willesden Paddock's in Kilburn, where he ended his racing days in 1847.

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John Frederick Herring Senior 1795 – 1865

Herring snr was descended from a family of merchants who appear to have been settled in Curaçao, in the Dutch East Indies in the 18th century. They made their way to England via New York. John Frederick Herring snr was born in Surrey and first found employment in London as a sign writer who specialised in Inn signs. He also worked on Royal Mail coaches, painting the Royal Cipher on the carriages. This humble beginning opened the door for him to become one of the leading sporting artists of the 19th century in a strange but rather wonderful way. He noticed that the young bloods who travelled between London and Leicester (Melton Mowbray, the centre of the hunting fraternity) loved to ride along side the coach drivers, outside in all weathers. They would regale themselves with spirits and tales of hunting and racing incidents and John Frederick Herring listened avidly, and learned to drive a four-in-hand. Soon he had a list of titled names of owners and breeders of thoroughbreds and hunters, and an impressive list of potential patrons.

In 1826, at the age of 31 John Frederick Herring exhibited the first of many works at the Royal Academy. From such exposure he became noticed and commissioned by King George IV and Queen Victoria and had also become firmly established with the aristocracy, painting the winners of the three Classics, the Derby, the 2000 Guineas and the St Leger. His hunting subjects adorned the great country houses, often in sets of 12 or 16 and sometimes sized up to 40" x 50" – these would depict a whole day's sport with changes of horses, dramas, some disasters and never less than two kills. His racing subjects at Ascot, Epsom and Newmarket often were the result of co-operation with James Pollard, who supplied the background of stands, enclosures and literally hundreds of race goers. Many of Herring's subjects were engraved and became much sought after by those who could not purchase his original work.

As well as the huge output of commissioned work relating to the track and hunt, John Frederick Herring found time to paint a whole series of 'mother and child' subjects – pigs, chicken, ducks, donkeys, cows – the list is endless. Then he became fascinated by the Arabian breed – indirectly influenced by Queen Victoria, who was often given Arabs by ruling potentates from the Middle East. Her Majesty was not keen on the breed and usually sold these gifts – John Frederick Herring bought one that featured in many of his paintings. It is a little known fact that he painted part of a mural for the Explorers Club – the subject being the Overland Route to India. He printed a party of mounted Arabs passing the Great Pyramid at Giza. Some forty leading artists worked on this mural, which was an astronomic undertaking in that the scale was life size. Alas, the building burnt down in the 1880s and, with the exception of one or two oils no record of the part that Herring took remains.

As old age approached John Frederick Herring snr became a typical elder statesmen figure at the head of the Herring clan. He returned to his farm at Meopham and, following his habit of painting in series, started on those wonderful farmyard subjects which tell us so much about 19th century rural life. His daughter, Jenny, frequently appears as his model where the human figure is introduced into these idyllic subjects, often painted large and typical of everything he did.

John Frederick Herring snr was an iconic figure of a Victorian. A large gentleman in his prime, he wore a bushy beard and, in the manner of his age, his undertakings were on the grand scale. Without the distractions of telephones or television, he, like so many of his contemporaries, appeared to fit more achievement into one life, than we can in ours!

John Frederick Herring snr was a highly technical painter who perfected the art of glaze painting. Rather than following the Old Masters who worked from dark to light, producing solid shadows, the glaze painters introduced a transparent medium to thin their paint. This dried translucent when applied over white priming and, in effect, produced an inner light or gloss in shadow. The overall result produced a shimmering light to subjects, which had previously been seen as sombre and dull. Unfortunately, this technique was lost with the advent of Impressionism in the latter half of the 19th century, but we can still admire it as a technique perfected by John Frederick Herring, his family and his many contemporaries.