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Herald

Oldest painting of Plymouth explorer Sir Francis Drake to go on display at former Devon home

By Herald_AlexW | Posted: March 31, 2016

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The oldest known painting of Plymouth explorer Sir Francis Drake has gone on display at Buckland Abbey VIEW GALLERY

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THE oldest known portrait of Plymouth seafarer Sir Francis Drake has gone on display at his former Devon home.

A 16th century painting of the famous explorer, who is best known for circumnavigating the globe, his exploits in the Americas and playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe, is now on show in the Drake Chamber at the National Trust's Buckland Abbey.

It will remain on public display until early 2017, having been loaned for 12 months by private collector Dirk T Griffin, and experts believe the absence of Drake's coat of arms in the painting would suggest it was drawn prior to his knighthood in 1581.



Although the original artist is unknown, independent curator and art historian, Angus Haldane believes this painting was completed during the mid-1570s, shortly before Drake's voyage around the world.

Mr Haldane said: "It gives me enormous pleasure to see this portrait of Drake hang on the walls of his family home.

"Drake was one of the most important figures of Elizabethan England and it is these art discoveries which keep my appreciation of painting and history ever fresh and exciting."



Mr Haldane immediately suspected the man in the painting was Sir Francis Drake after discovering the artwork in 2014.

He noticed physical similarities to other portraits of Drake, including his facial warts, hair colour, eyes and stature.



The portrait also underwent paint analysis, alongside digital X-radiography and digital infrared to help pin point more closely the date of the painting.

The style of the armour and its iconography also helped date the painting and added to the likely identity of the sitter.

Emma Jones, curator at the National Trust in the South West added: "This is not the first time we have displayed an art discovery at Buckland - our visitors will remember the Rembrandt self-portrait that was identified two years ago - so it's exciting to be able to share another discovery around an iconic figure.

"This striking and colourful painting now has a chance to be seen and enjoyed in the home of Sir Francis Drake himself.



"Our visitors can see this new discovery up close as well as other notable pieces in the collection relating to Drake's life."

The painting will be on display in the Drake Chamber from March 31 until early February 2017.

For opening times and more information, visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/buckland-abbey



