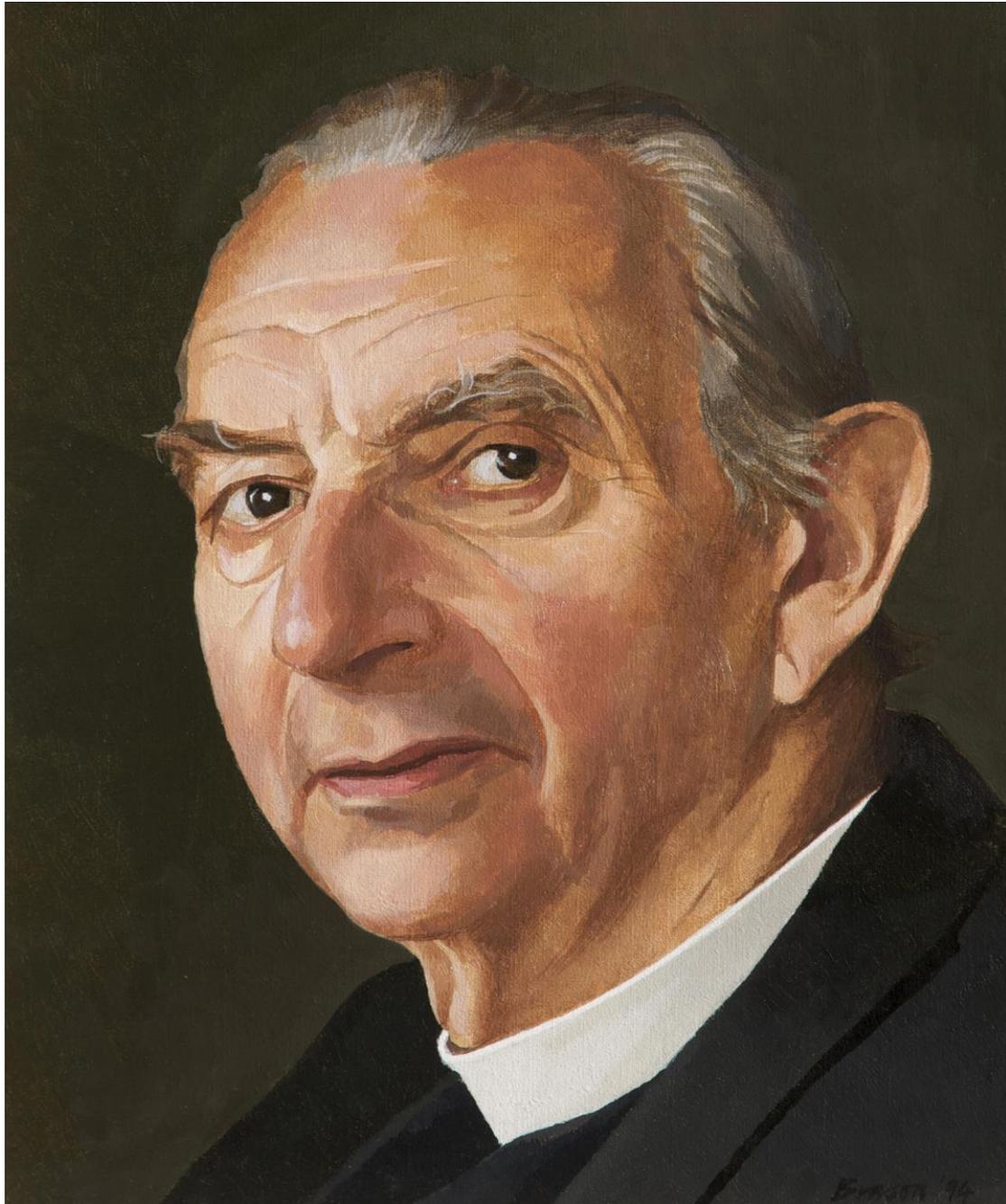


Paul Brason (born 1952)

CANON MAURICE RIDGWAY, 1994

Oil on linen canvas 30.4 x 25.2 cm

Commissioned with support from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund 1994.39



The Sitter

Canon Maurice Ridgway (1918-2002) was the paramount scholar of Chester silver.

Maurice Hill Ridgway was born in Stockport, where his father was vicar of St George's church. The family moved to Tarvin and he attended the King's School, Chester, followed by St David's College, Lampeter. He completed his training for the Anglican ministry at Westcott House, Cambridge, and served forty-two years in the diocese of Chester. After being ordained deacon in 1941 and priest in 1942 he served as curate of Grappenhall from 1941 and of Hale from 1944. In 1949 he became vicar of Bunbury, where he restored one of Cheshire's major Perpendicular churches following severe war damage, employing Marshall Sisson to rebuild the nave and aisle roofs in 1950 and commissioning three superb stained glass windows from Christopher Webb. He was vicar of Bowden from 1962 and became an honorary canon of Chester Cathedral in 1966. His gifts as a pastor and preacher won the admiration and respect of all who knew him, and he made a point of visiting every home in his parishes at least once a year, irrespective of the faith of their occupants. In 1983 he retired to Rhydycroesau near Oswestry, where he assisted in the local church.

Canon Ridgway's antiquarian interests began with his early association with Professor Robert Newstead, honorary curator of the Grosvenor Museum. He joined the Chester Archaeological Society in 1936 and served on its Council from 1949 until 1975. Together with the noted Cheshire craftsman Frederick H. Crossley he undertook a survey of screens with rood lofts in Wales, which in 1946 won the Clarke Prize of the Cambrian Archaeological Society for the best published medieval subject over a period of years. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1952. He was the editor of *The Cheshire Sheaf* and *The Bunbury Papers* and his numerous published guides, articles and reports include a survey of stained and painted glass in Cheshire and the history of Beeston Castle. He had a strong belief in the importance of protecting historic buildings, and for many years was involved in the preservation of the shrine of St Melangell, a small chapel in a remote part of mid-Wales. He became a member of the Chester Diocesan Advisory Committee for the care of churches in 1945, retiring as adviser on silver and metalwork in 2002. He was also chairman of the St Asaph Diocesan Advisory Committee from 1986 to 1993 and president of the Cambrian Archaeological Society in 1995/6.

Canon Ridgway's study of Chester silver began when Sir Leonard Stone, chairman of the Board of Trade's Departmental Committee on Hallmarking, asked him to do some of the background research on Chester for the 1959 report to Parliament, which led to the closure of the Chester Assay office in 1962. His *Chester Goldsmiths from early times to 1726*

(1968) and *Chester Silver 1727-1837* (1985) chronicled the history of silver in the city, elucidated all the marks, and presented the biography of each goldsmith along with a descriptive catalogue of every known piece of his silver. He rewrote the chapter in Chester for the revised edition of *Jackson's Silver and Gold Marks* (1989) and *Chester Silver 1837-1962* (1996) included a wealth of information from the Chester plate Duty Books of 1784-1840, which had been rediscovered by Philip Priestley. He published the first two articles in a projected series cataloguing the church plate of the diocese of Chester in the *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society* volumes 60 and 61, covering Acton to Chelford: a book of this title remained in manuscript at his death. His article on the early plate of Chester Cathedral appeared in the same Journal, volume 63, and his fourth book, *Church Plate in the St Asaph Diocese* (1997), was published after more than fifty years of research. His posthumous *Compendium of Chester Gold and Silver Marks 1570 to 1962* (2004), compiled jointly with Philip Priestley, provided a triumphant conclusion to a lifetime of meticulous and highly productive scholarship. Canon Ridgway's name will remain indissolubly associated with Chester silver, and his publications will be used as well as admired for many generations to come.

Canon Ridgway enjoyed a very long and fruitful association with the Grosvenor Museum. His scholarship fundamentally informed the development of the museum's pre-eminent collection of silver, which now forms a fitting celebration of one of the most distinctive features of Chester's cultural heritage. The collection is displayed in the Ridgway Gallery, named in his honour and opened by HRH The Prince of Wales in 1992. In 1994 the museum commissioned this portrait from Paul Brason, a brilliant likeness capturing perfectly his combination of alertness and sympathy. In 2000 he graciously accepted the dedication of the *Catalogue of Silver in the Grosvenor Museum*, and in the year of his death he presented a collection of topographical prints and contributed towards an important silver acquisition.

The Artist

Paul Brason was born in London in 1952. After a foundation course at Hastings School of Art, he studied at Camberwell College of Art, gaining a Diploma in Art & Design in 1972. His early career was as a stage designer for the Haymarket Theatre Leicester, Richmond Theatre Productions and Ballet Rambert. He began exhibiting in 1977 and also worked with Editions Alecto on two publishing projects. In 1980 he exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery's *A New Look at British Portraiture* and began accepting commissions for portraits. Painting became his full-time career

in 1982. He exhibited at the NPG's Annual Portrait Awards 1980-92, and at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibitions from 1988. Other exhibitions have included *Picturing People, British Figurative Art Since 1945*, a British Council touring exhibition. Important commissions have included HRH Prince Michael of Kent, Sir Roy Strong, the Duke of Westminster and Viscount Leverhulme, and his portraits are in the collections of the NPG, the Government Art Collection, Balliol College and Eton College.