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Portrait of Benjamin Lester



Portrait of Benjamin Lester, British School, 1780s (oil on canvas)

Benjamin Lester was one of the most successful of Poole's Merchant Princes, the wealthy merchants who made huge fortunes at the peak of the town's trading boom in the 18th century, mostly through the Newfoundland fishing trade. He followed his father Francis into the Newfoundland trade and set up in partnership with his brother Isaac in Trinity.

The business, based on fishing, shipbuilding and the fur trade, thrived and by 1793 Lester's fishing fleet was the largest owned by a Poole merchant. In 1776 he returned to Poole with his family and he became involved in local politics.

He was elected mayor in 1779 and from 1781-1783 and was MP for Poole between 1790 and 1796. This portrait, which shows him as an older man, was probably painted during this period; the artist is not known.

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