

The Stour Valley Heritage Compendia

Artistic Heritage Compendium

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Introduction

This work aims to look at how major artists who have lived and worked in the Stour Valley have interpreted the area and have contributed to our knowledge and understanding of the Stour Valley landscape, its management, and the working practices, labour and industry of the area.

The artists and the selected paintings included in this work provide a series of snap shots that catalogue the gradual changes over a period of two hundred years. The landscape that John Constable knew, loved and painted can still be glimpsed, but that world of manual farming and living at one with the landscape has long since gone. These paintings are the voice of another age, which has been replaced by the larger fields and more intense and mechanised farming of 'agri-business'.

The Second World War was to effectively wipe away the last vestiges of that world, to revitalise what had become an industry in 'depression', but at a cost. Adrian Bell and John Nash in their collaborated book 'Men and the Fields' were to unconsciously record the last scenes of intense manual farm labouring of an old rural economy soon to become extinct. Nash's later post war paintings capture the Stour valley after these changes had occurred.

Thomas Gainsborough 1727 – 1788

He was born in Sudbury in 1727 and baptised at the Old Meeting House on 14th May. His family were connected to the textile trade and his portraits of women in fashionable elegant clothes reflect this interest in fabrics. By 1744 he had his own studio in London and two years later was married to Margaret Burr. In his early years in London and in Bath his chief source of income was his portraits, particularly the "full length". He was in constant demand from the aristocrats of the period. But also at this time he painted landscapes for his own satisfaction, although he rarely sold one. He visited many of the great houses in the west of England and saw works by the great European artists, especially admiring Claude Lorraine and Rubens. From Claude he absorbed the compositional skills of balance and design in a painting, and from Rubens his use of rich dramatic colour, how to convey a sense of distance and grandeur in landscape, which was not present in other work he had seen. And he used landscape in portraits. There is an extreme example of this in his double portrait of Mr. & Mrs. Andrews where about half the painting is a celebration of the fruitful countryside. This format was not repeated but there are landscape elements in many of the full-length portraits of both men and women, sometimes with sinister dark skies and threatening trees, these were highly regarded as examples of "Romantic" painting. Gainsborough is the first English artist for whom a large body of landscape drawings survives, they date from the 1740's and 1750's and it is thought that he sketched but not painted out of doors. Like his later landscape paintings they show the effects of light on trees and water. Other influences come from his interest in Dutch paintings, particularly Wynants and Ruisdael. His work paralleled their subject matter, plants and trees and above all skies. Ruisdael uses great massing clouds, which mirror the shape of the hills; he introduces a scrap of bright blue sky and a patch of sudden sunlight, a momentary break in the clouds before the scene changes. These effects are shown in many of Gainsborough's paintings. We know from Gainsborough's letters particularly one to Lord Hardwicke about 1764 that he was not interested in painting specific views but preferred instead to paint views "of his own brain", in other words imaginative views. However Sir Joshua Reynolds describes how he set up little scenes using natural objects: "from the fields he brought into his painting room stumps of trees, weeds and animals of various kinds and designed them not from memory but immediately from the objects...broken stones, dried herbs and pieces of looking glass, which he magnified and improved into rocks, trees and water"

A friend in Bath similarly describes him setting up:

"coke and coal as foreground, middle ground of sand and clay, bunches of moss and lichen and distant woods of broccoli"

Gainsborough saw the painting by Rubens "The Watering Place" in the collection of the Duke of Montague, he went on to make his own adaptation of the painting in 1777 and, as if in homage to Rubens, gave it the same title. He incorporates in this imaginary work the grandeur showing the distant hills, but includes the detail he found in Dutch landscape paintings of rural life showing cattle and peasants by a stream. These motifs he united in the effects of natural light. We can see these ideas later in the work of John Constable. He died in 1788 and was buried in Kew churchyard.

Chronology of Gainsborough's Life and Work

EARLY YEARS

- 1727** Born in Sudbury - baptised in the Old Meeting House
- 1735** Hogarth opened St. Martin's Lane Academy Meeting place for artists.
- 1740** Gainsborough moved to London (1st self-portrait)
- 1744** He opened his own studio in London
- 1746** Married Margaret Burr
- 1748** Death of his father, returned to Sudbury
- 1750** Lived in Suffolk, including time in Ipswich
- 1752-9** Based in Ipswich
- 1755** Spent time in London

BATH & LONDON

- 1759** Settled in Bath
- 1760** Exhibited in London for first time, Society of Artists Artists.
- 1768** Elected a founder member of the Royal Academy
- 1769** Exhibited at the Royal Academy for the first time.
- 1770** "Blue Boy" exhibited
- 1773** Dispute with the Royal Academy
- 1774** Moved to London, Pall Mall (portrait painting)

LANDSCAPES IN PORTRAITS

- 1777** Exhibited portraits and landscapes at the Royal Academy
- 1781** Commissions from the King (George III) and Queen, also the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland
- 1782-3** Toured the West Country with Gainsborough Dupont and the Lake District with Samuel Kilderbee, spent October 1783 in Antwerp.
- 1784** Final quarrel with the Royal Academy
- 1788** Gainsborough died — buried at Kew

Thomas Gainsborough – Paintings

Wooded landscape with peasant resting	c 1747	Tate Britain
Comard Wood	1747-8	National Gallery
Mr. & Mrs. Andrews	1748	National Gallery
The Harvest Wagon	1767	Barber Institute Birmingham
The Watering Place	1777	National Gallery
Wooded landscape, cattle by a pool	1782	Gainsborough's House, Sudbury
The Market Cart	1786	National Gallery
Wooded Landscape with Wagon in a Glade	1760-1765	British Museum

Wooded Landscape with Peasant Resting

The peasant rests on the left-hand side of the painting, leaving the composition to centre round the faraway church encircled by foreground trees. The trees themselves form the subject matter of the painting, as he shows their colouring, grouping and outlines against the cloudy sky. The cultivated fields that lie between us and the church are intersected by dark green hedgerows which lead us to the village beyond.

The trees are very delicately painted in contrast to the sky, whose mountainous clouds are built up in grey masses on the right but clearing to deep blue on the left. The influences from Claude can be seen in the "peep-hole" gap in the trees which brings the church into view.

This is an early landscape painting before his work incorporated rococo figures and ideas.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH
Wooded Landscape with Peasant Resting
c1747
Oil on canvas, 62.5 x 78.1 cm
© Tate, London 2013

Cornard Wood

Although given a "local" title, and probably painted when he was back in Sudbury, this painting is thought to be based on the composition of earlier artists. Landscape paintings were not highly favoured in this period but the work of artists like Claude Lorraine were popular and many writers think that Gainsborough used his ideas in this painting.

The trees conform to a balanced arrangement within the picture frame, the eye leads through tunnels of trees to the far distance. Peasants are "arranged" on a winding path, and our attention is focused on a graceful tree in the foreground. The peaceful effect is achieved with soft muted colours and surrounded by a cloudy sky.

It could be based on Ruisdael's "The Forest", and it contains many features which are found in the work of other Dutch artists of the 17th century. These include a woodsman binding his twigs, man and a dog on a path, pool and reflections, autumnal trees and dark skies. An earlier version c1740 (63.5 x 76 cms.) now exists in a private collection. At the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester there is a sketch dated c1746/8 entitled "Landscape after Ruisdael" which resembles this painting of Cornard Wood. It is in black and white chalk on buff paper (40.8 x 42.2 cms.)

Gainsborough went to London to study in 1740 but he was home in Sudbury by 1748. Dutch landscapes entered the London Art market in the 1740's.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH
Cornard Wood, near Sudbury, Suffolk
c1748
Oil on canvas, 122 x 155 cm
© The National Gallery, London 2013

Mr. and Mrs. Andrews

This is an early double portrait by Gainsborough painted when he was in his early 20's. The subject is Robert Andrews who knew Gainsborough. They were the same age and both attended Sudbury Grammar School. It is probably a wedding portrait, the bride is Frances Mary Carter, she was 16 and the marriage joined two neighbouring estates. The painting shows Robert Andrews' Auberries estate, looking from the farm at Bulmer over the fields to Sudbury. It is unfinished, she should have had a dead game bird in her lap, perhaps she objected!

This is an asymmetrical composition, the couple gaze out from the great tree on the left, which gives a sense of tradition and permanence to the land. The drapery of her gown and the unbuttoned jacket he wears are painted with great skill. Many artists of this period employed "drapery assistants" for articles like this but Gainsborough undertook garments himself, he particularly revelled in painting silk and satin, perhaps because his family had been in the textile trade.

The painting shows the agricultural improvements of this period of the 18th century, the use of the seed drill, the planting of corn in rows, the neat stacking of the harvested sheaves. The sunlit fields and the abundant crops indicate the wealth of the countryside, sheep graze in the fields beyond. The hunting dog and gun confirm his status in this agricultural setting. The fields stretch into the distance, dark green and light indicating the rolling countryside, a shaft of sunlight from the right strikes the tree just above Frances Andrew's head. On the left, Robert Andrews is silhouetted against a stormy sky, whereas to the right billowing clouds cross over in a pageant of cream, blue and grey.

The painting remained in the family until 1960.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

Mr and Mrs Andrews

1748-50

Oil on canvas, 70 x 118 cm

© The National Gallery, London 2013

The Harvest Wagon

Initially this seems to represent a idyllic harvest scene, it does not relate to a topographical location but is thought to be inspired by the area near Shockerwick Park, near Bath. The grouping of the characters refers to Rubens painting "Descent from the Cross". Gainsborough made a copy of this painting. The shaft of light coming in from the left is typical of Ruben's work, the trees are like those of Claude. There are also traces of the ideas of Watteau in this work. The girl being pulled up on the wagon resembles Gainsborough's daughter Margaret, and the other girl, looking up, could be her older sister Mary. In 1774 Gainsborough gave the picture to his friend, Walter Wiltshire, the Bath carrier who lived at Shockerwick Park in exchange for the horse in the picture.

The painting was exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1767. Taking "quotations" from earlier art was quite acceptable in the 18th century it almost legitimized it, making it acceptable to the Establishment, later the Royal Academy.

There is a second version in Toronto dated 1784/5.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

The Harvest Wagon

1767

Oil on canvas, 120.5 x 144.7 cm

© The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

The Watering Place

1777

Oil on canvas, 147.3 x 180.3 cm

© The National Gallery, London 2013

The Watering Place

The painting shows a group of brown and white cattle, together with some goats drinking from a stream. On the left a man, a child and two country girls are resting on a sandy ledge.

The composition sweeps from top left across the canvas to bottom right. Between the trees the horizon is lighter and the trees are lit by the sunlight which permeates the painting.

Gainsborough painted this sometime after his return from Bath to London in 1777. Based on a drawing he made then it echoes a Rubens owned by the Duke of Montagu which Gainsborough saw in his collection.

The painting was still in Gainsborough's possession at the time of his death and was not sold until 1797. It was praised by the critics especially Horace Walpole.

Gainsborough was never commissioned to paint a landscape, this was an imaginary composition.

Wooded Landscape with Cattle by a Pool

This canvas, which was first exhibited in 1782 is based on a painting by Rubens, "Landscape by Moonlight" now in the Courtauld Gallery). John Constable admired "romantic" landscapes like this and wrote in 1836:

"the lonely haunts of the solitary shepherd.. .the sweet little cottage girl at the spring with her pitcher.. .were things he delighted to paint, and which he painted with exquisite refinement, yet not a refinement beyond nature"

Shortly after Gainsborough's death Sir Henry Bate-Dudley wrote:

"The brilliance of Claude and the simplicity of Ruysdael, appear combined in Mr. Gainsborough's romantic scenes."

This painting resembles one of the scenes Gainsborough made for his "light box" when he was friendly with de Loutherbourg. In this arrangement, painted glass transparencies were seen through a magnifying lens, lit from behind by candlelight and filtered through a silk screen. By this means a flickering effect of light and shade was achieved which imitated the scenes in nature together with the atmosphere of a soft summer evening.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH
*Wooded Landscape with
Cattle by Pool*
1782
Oil on canvas, 120.4 x 147.6
cm
© Gainsborough's House
Society

The Market Cart

This painting represents the climax of Gainsborough's theme of peasants going to and from market. It is thought that he painted it using ideas from a visit to Lulworth Castle in 1782.

The composition is dominated by the trees and the mountains in the distance are like those in the background of "The Harvest Wagon". The grey horse is also shown again. It is a theme often treated by Dutch and Flemish artists and so shows a blend of the work of the Old Masters and natural observation.

The cart is laden with autumnal produce, turnips, carrots and apples. The bright colours of red and orange occur many years later in Constable's work, in opposition to the green of the natural landscape. The faggot carrier was added later, in 1787.

This is one of Gainsborough's last works and it was exhibited in Schomberg House in Pall Mall, London in December 1786 and bought by Sir Peter Burrell in May 1787. Later it was bought by the Governors of the British Institution who presented it to the National Gallery in 1830.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

The Market Cart

1786

Oil on canvas

184 x 153 cm

© The National Gallery, London 2013

Wooded Landscape with Wagon in a Glade

This is an asymmetrical composition with a low viewpoint. The painting is divided into approximately two-thirds sky and trees and one third the path. The wagon is roughly one third in from the right hand side, so a very carefully considered and balanced design.

A watercolour wash is used which gives the effect of a warm summer afternoon. The black chalk and watercolour is heightened with white.

There are four horses, unhitched from the cart, one with its rider is silhouetted against a sunlit bank. The whole composition is made up of contrasting areas of light and shade.

The fact that the work is stamped with a gold monogram may denote the fact that this was a presentation drawing.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH
Wooded Landscape with Wagon in a Glade
Early to mid 1760's
Black chalk and watercolour
23.7 x 31.7 cm
© British Museum

John Constable 1776-1837

John Constable is a true East Anglian artist and unquestionably one of the world's finest landscape painters. His work has had a considerable influence on European painting and, more widely, on the cultural appreciation of the British landscape. In this, his influence has transcended the boundaries of art to become, along with other cultural icons such as Elgar, Wordsworth and Shakespeare, part of the key references that define 'Britishness' and our national identity.

Constable was born at East Bergholt in 1776 and, in later years, wrote nostalgically of his careless boyhood: "all those things that lie on the banks of the Stour, they made me a painter". Later, as a professional artist based in London, he returned to his Suffolk roots by way of his paintings, in particular the great "six footers" which he created between 1819 and 1830 and which made his reputation. These have become among the best known oil paintings by an English artist and the majority of them are linked to his early observations made while he was in Suffolk.

Constable's father was a prosperous miller with a large house, 37 acres of land, gardens and outbuildings. He wanted his son to be a clergyman but John had no inclination for clerical life so he went into the family business. As a miller he grew up to be observant of the weather, wind direction and cloud conditions were all important to the working life of the mill. He also had an intimate knowledge of locks, sluices and the barges which were the commercial transport of his day.

By 1799 his father allowed him to go to London to study art, but his heart was still in the Suffolk countryside, he wrote: " I shall shortly return to Bergholt where I shall make some laborious studies from nature - and I shall endeavour to get a pure and unaffected representation of the scenes that may employ me; with respect to colour particularly... drawing I am pretty well master of".

During his time away from Suffolk he wrote copious letters to Maria Bicknell, who he had first met when she was 12. In 1815, after a long courtship they were eventually married. John had inherited money from his father's estate and Maria's grandfather eventually gave his consent to their union. They went to Dorset for their honeymoon and then settled in London. Many of his most famous paintings were created in this happy period of his married life and he only returned to Suffolk on family business.

In 1817 he painted "Scene on a navigable river", this painting was never sold and he kept it all his life. In 1819 he painted "The White Horse" now in the Frick Collection in New York. By now his paintings were beginning to be admired by a wider audience. In 1824 "The Hay Wain" was exhibited in the Paris Salon where it was awarded a gold medal by the King of France and caused a sensation. Constable's art was admired because it contrived to present the landscape 'as it was', a subject worthy of depiction for its own sake, free from Romantic or Classical influences. French dealers ordered 25 of Constable's paintings and his work was to have a considerable influence on the future development of French painting, most notably the Barbizon School and the Impressionists. No less a painter than Delacroix called him the "father" of French landscape! In the late 1820s engravings were made of his paintings by David Lucas for 'English Landscape Scenery' and enabled his paintings to reach a mass audience.

By now the family had moved to Hampstead and later to Brighton, in an effort to improve Maria's health. This was in vain and, in 1828, Maria died leaving seven children. After his wife's death Constable's painting developed a more stormy and turbulent quality, with sombre colours and heavy layers of paint,

quite different to the sunny freshness of his early work. Although he was made a Royal Academician in 1829 it brought him little pleasure and he died in 1837.

Constable's influence and reputation has continued to grow since his death. His best works, including the ubiquitous Hay Wain, can be considered genuinely iconic and have entered the public consciousness, becoming synonymous, not just with the Dedham Vale, but with everything that is best about the English landscape. In this, their influence cannot be other estimated and the resonance of these paintings continues to be felt today, informing our continuing relationship with the British landscape.

Chronology Of Constable's Life and Work

- 1776** Born 11th June at East Bergholt
- 1795** Probably his first meeting with Sir George Beaumont (Hagar & the Angel)
- 1799** Entered the RA schools as a student in March
- 1802** Exhibited for the first time, resolved to paint directly from nature in Suffolk.
- 1803** Sailed from London to Deal in April, in East Indianman, "Coutts"
- 1804** Saw Rubens "Het Steen" in collection of Sir. George Beaumont.
- 1806** Toured the Lake District, September and October
- 1808 -10** Developed new sketching style, outdoors, near Bergholt
- 1811** Exhibited "Dedham Vale - Morning"
- 1812** Made summer sketches in the open air in Suffolk exhibited "Flatford Mill", paintings accepted, one was "Flatford Mill from the Lock"
- 1813** Worked in the open air with a small pocket sketchbook
- 1814** Began "on the spot" paintings in Suffolk & Essex "Boys Fishing" Flatford, (small ferry boat crossing)
- 1815** 8 works exhibited at the PA including "Boatbuilding" "Stour Valley with Dedham in the distance" & "Ploughing" (5 paintings and 3 drawings)
- 1816** Married Maria BickneU. 2nd October. Painted "Scene on a navigable river", "Wivenhoe Park", "Weymouth Bay" and "Cottage in a Cornfield"
- 1817** 10 weeks were spent at East Bergholt, (summer) "Flatford Lock" "Wivenhoe Park" & "Cottage in a cornfield" exhibited at the Royal Academy. Moved to Keppel Street, London.
- 1819** "White Horse" exhibited, bought byj. Fisher 110 guineas. Moved to house in Hampstead. Elected ARA.
- 1820** "Stratford Mill" exhibited at the Royal Academy. Family moved to Hampstead.

- 1821** "Hay Wain" exhibited at RA. Hampstead and sky sketches. Moved to Charlotte Street, London
- 1822** "View on the Stour near Dedham" exhibited at Royal Academy. Met French dealer John Arrowsmith
- 1823** "Salisbury Cathedral from Bishop's grounds" exhibited at the Royal Academy
- 1824** "Hay Wain" , "View on the Stour near Dedham" and "View of Hampstead" all exhibited at the Paris Salon "Hay Wain" received gold medal from Charles X, King of France "The Lock" exhibited at the Royal Academy . Moved to Brighton
- 1825** "Leaping Horse" exhibited at Royal Academy . "White Horse" exhibited at Lille and received a gold medal.
- 1827** "The Chain Pier, Brighton" on show at the RA, "The Cornfield" at the Paris Salon
- 1828** "Dedham Vale" & "Hampstead Heath" exhibited at Royal Academy. Maria died.
- 1829** Elected to the RA on 10th Feb. "Hadleigh Castle" exhibited at the Royal Academy (based on sketch dated 1814)
- 1831** "Salisbury Cathedral from the meadows" exhibited RA
- 1832** Eight works exhibited including "The Opening of Waterloo Bridge from Whitehall Stairs" at the RA.
- 1837** Constable died 31st March at Charlotte Street, and buried at Hampstead Parish Church.

John Constable – Paintings

Boatbuilding	1814	Victoria & Albert Museum
The Mill Stream	c1814	Ipswich Museum
Golding Constable's Flower Garden	1815	Ipswich Museum
Golding Constable's Kitchen Garden	1815	Ipswich Museum
Scene on a navigable river	1816-7	Tate Britain
Fen Lane- East Bergholt	c1817	Tate Britain
Stratford Mill	1819	National Gallery
The Hay Wain	1821	National Gallery
The Leaping Horse	1825	Royal Academy
The Cornfield	1826	National Gallery
The Glebe Farm	1830	Tate Britain
Vale of Dedham	1828	National Gallery of Scotland
The Valley Farm	1835	Tate Britain
Dedham Vale	1802	Victoria & Albert Museum

Boatbuilding near Flatford

John Constable painted this during the summer and autumn of 1814 and exhibited it in 1815.

It is thought that this was painted entirely in the open air and in the afternoon, and that he left off painting when he could see the smoke in the distance from the fires that were cooking the labourers' suppers.

At this time he was endeavouring to combine a careful "finish" with fidelity to nature.

It shows a large barge being built in his father's boatyard. On the left are the beams of Flatford Lock, the forked tree in the centre of the painting also appears in "Scene on a navigable river". The subject would be one that Constable was very familiar with and would have depicted with considerable accuracy and attention to detail. Barges such as these continued to be used on the river into the early 20th century, the Stour providing an important means of moving goods inland from the small port of Mistley, a few miles downstream on the tidal estuary.

The foliage, composition and colouring do not follow the conventions of landscape painting in this period. When this area was excavated in 1985 the remains of a barge were found, they are now re-buried behind Willy Lott's house. The new dock gates, now in place, were based on Constable's drawings, and new bricks were made at Sudbury.

Periodically the dock is flooded to keep down weed growth.



JOHN CONSTABLE
Boatbuilding near Flatford
1814
Oil on canvas, 51 x 61.5 cm
© Victoria and Albert Museum

Golding Constable's Flower Garden



JOHN CONSATBLE
Golding Constable's Flower Garden
1815
Oil on canvas, 33 x 50.8 cm
© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

extent to which views such as this can still be seen today. While Constable here painted a very specific location, the gently rolling countryside along the edge of the Stour valley, with its criss-crossed hedgerows, scattered trees and farms and small settlements remains remarkably untouched by the passage of time.

While Constable was first and foremost a landscape painter, his countryside is dotted with buildings that reveal the vernacular architecture of the area. The timber-framed buildings, with walls of lime-washed render or soft red hand-made bricks and roofs of thatch or clay tiles are typical of the area and are still a common sight in the valley. Paintings such as this, rich as they are in architectural detail, provide valuable tools for modern conservation and help to ensure that heritage of the Dedham Vale is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

The Mill Stream

The Mill stream is next to the mill owned by Constable's father at Flatford, and the viewpoint is from the parapet behind Flatford Mill the picture shows the channel connecting the mill to the main river. The house on the left is Willy Lott's cottage (a local tenant farmer) which can also be seen in "The Hay Wain". This painting is based on an earlier oil sketch to which he has added additional details from his sketch book, for example the ferryman on the left quanting his boat. The ferry ran from the Mill Stream near the cottage to the other side of the River Stour, through a cutting on the right of the picture.

This was probably the first painting Constable sold through an exhibition it was to the 6th Earl of Dysart for 30 guineas in 1810. The scene today is largely unchanged, testament to the careful conservation of the Flatford area.

Constable made two paintings of his father's gardens, pre-ceded by sketches. This painting looks at the view from his bedroom window, as seen to the left and in the sunshine of a late afternoon. We can look across Stable Meadow to the thatched barn, this was part of his father's home farmyard. We can see through the open door to the threshing floor. Beyond it and to the left is an old thatched barn, haystacks, and further round an old medieval house, "Commandree" which has a peg-tiled roof, white walls with lime and mortar daub and a high chimney stack. To the left of this is the single storey extension. Wren Cottage.

What is perhaps most remarkable about this painting and its companion (see next page) is the



JOHN CONSATBLE
The Mill Stream
c1810-1814
Oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.5 cm
© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Golding Constable's Kitchen Garden

John Constable's mother died in 1815 and his father was ailing, so it is probable that these two paintings, (the second is of his father's flower garden) were an attempt to remember life before the coming changes.

This painting shows the view of the right-hand side of the landscape as seen from the back of the second storey window of East Bergholt House.

The rectory, where Maria stayed, is in the centre of the painting, facing the evening sun. The fields beyond the vegetable garden are those of home farm, where he played as a boy. The family windmill, with white weather-boarding is on the horizon, to the left. When he worked at the mill, aged 16, he walked there and back, each day, from the family home.

The rectory was Maria's home when she came to East Bergholt. They first met in 1800 when she was 12 years old. Constable declared he loved her in 1809 when she was 21. They were married in St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London on 2nd October 1816.



JOHN CONSTABLE
Golding Constable's Kitchen Garden
1815
Oil on canvas, 33 x 50.8 cm
© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service



JOHN CONSTABLE
*Scene on a Navigable
River*
1816
Oil on canvas, 102 x
127 cm
© Tate, London 2013

Scene on a Navigable River

This scene at Flatford Bridge was the subject of a painting that Constable undertook in the summer of 1816. It was one of the first of his paintings on this larger size canvas and was an attempt to gain respect for landscape painting. Unusually for the period, much of the painting was done in-situ, rather than in the studio, although many details were added later.

It shows two boys and a horse engaged in bringing two barges under Flatford Bridge. Moving barges in pairs was the custom on the river Stour. They have just disconnected the tow rope and the boy on the barge is attempting to straighten the leading boat as it approaches the bridge. In the distance, on the left the stream is going into the mill, and the lock gates can be seen on the right.

We are looking down on the scene from a raised viewpoint and the characters are depicted as part of the landscape itself. It is a very balanced composition, the boy on the horse is the centre of attention, there is red on the horse's livery, the boy wears a red scarf and at the bottom right there is a moorhen with red legs, this distribution of colour leads our eye to "travel" through the painting.

The sky is the result of acute observation, throughout the painting there are alternate areas of dark and light and the cumulus clouds contribute to this. The sunlight comes in from the right hand side, creating shadows, but only on some parts of the path.

At the bottom left hand corner there is a rough beam of wood which has the effect of cutting off that edge and framing the picture. Constable adds his signature to the painting in the earth (bottom right) as if to tie himself to this part of the countryside where he felt so much at home. It was completed soon after his marriage to Maria, the happiest time in his career. He kept the painting all his life.

Fen Lane - East Bergholt

John Constable and Maria Bicknell married in London in October 1816. They spent three months of the following year in East Bergholt, the last of their long stays in Suffolk. During the summer of 1817 John painted out of doors in Suffolk and among the work he produced at this time is this unfinished oil painting of Fen Lane.

John would have known the subject very well. It is the route he would have walked to school from East Bergholt to Dedham, it shows the point where Fen Lane is crossed by Flatford Lane and the way the path winds down to the Vale. On the extreme right of the painting is Dedham Church. This is an example of where the artist has adjusted the

real landscape for compositional reasons. In reality the church would have been hidden by the trees in his day. He shows it here as spotlit by the morning sun, and it acts as an anchor to the painting, holding us within the frame. It appears in much the same way in "The Leaping Horse" painted in 1824.

Moving to the left there is a triangle of lush trees, which again leads us on to the meandering River Stour. In front of the trees is a hayfield known as Old Three Acres where we can just see a line of reapers led by the "Lord" of the harvest, they are moving smoothly across the field with their scythes. Constable's paintings contain many examples of agricultural activity that add to the bucolic nature of the scene. They can often appear idyllic and, from our modern standpoint, it is easy to forget the hard physical nature of the work being undertaken in the era just prior to farm mechanisation.

The field is bounded by a low hedge and the honeysuckle scents the morning air. Hedges were kept low in this way so that the morning sun would dry out the rutted track beyond. The track leads upwards, towards us where a five bar gate is propped open - perhaps there is a herd of cattle to come this way later for milking up at the farm. The gate is fixed open by a low post and hook and at the top is a catch that can be easily opened by someone on horseback with their crop.

Painted in a period of his life when things were going well - this painting must have represented all that he loved best about East Bergholt.



JOHN CONSTABLE
Fen Lane - East Bergholt
 c1817
 Oil on canvas, 69.2 x 92.5 cm
 © Tate, London 2013

Stratford Mill

This is the second of Constable's "6 foot paintings" and was originally just called "Landscape" the present title was given to it after Constable's death and is a reference to Sir Isaac Walton and "The Compleat Angler". It is one of the major paintings of the River Stour.

The watermill on the left was demolished in the last century. The right hand side has a hazy horizon, sunlit streaked pasture and shows animals grazing. In the centre of the painting a group of children bend over a low wall, one boy has a rod and the girl has a red petticoat and barefeet.

On the left there is a brick wheel house with an open window and a sunlit patch of grass in front. This painting evolved from an oil sketch Constable made out of doors at Stratford St. Mary in 1811. He extended it to include river, pools, shafts of sunlight, shadows and deep shades.

The painting was well received by the Press when it was shown in 1820.

John Fisher eventually bought this and "The White Horse" when they failed to attract other buyers.



JOHN CONSTABLE
Stratford Mill
1819-1820
Oil on canvas, 129 x 184.8 cm
© The National Gallery, London 2013

The Hay Wain

This is the third in the series of 6 foot paintings that Constable undertook. It is probably his most famous and was exhibited at the Royal Academy in May 1821. Originally known as "Landscape - Noon" it is a variation of "The Millstream" of 1815.

Constable made sketches of the cottage between 1810 and 1816, the full size sketch for this painting is in the Victoria & Albert Museum. It is said he stopped sketching at noon each day when the sun got in his eyes. The painting was undertaken in his London studio. It shows the view from Flatford Mill to the Stour. John Dunthome, plumber and glazier of East Bergholt, painted a Suffolk wagon (a scrove) for him to copy.



JOHN CONSTABLE
The Hay Wain
 1821
 Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 185.5 cm
 © The National Gallery, London 2013

The central incident is the Hay Wain which has delivered its load and is about to return to the fields through a cut which leads to the main river. In the fields another hay wain will soon take its place. It shows the mill-pond, the mill is out of sight, with storage sheds and outbuildings presumably housing machinery. Willy Lott's cottage is on the left. John Constable lived within a mile of this site, his family had leased and operated the mill for nearly a century.

The sketches work out the pattern of light and shade, in some places the brown canvas shows through. He made changes, a mounted rider, a barrel, and in the final version, a dog. The cart was normally used for carrying timber and other goods, when used for hay extra boards were added along the sides to accommodate it, these presumably come from John Dunthorne's sketch, together with a horizontal beam.

It was shown at the British Institution in 1822 but no-one was interested in it. The critics thought his colours too bright and the paint too thick. It remained in his possession until Constable sold it in 1823 to a Parisian art dealer, John Arrowsmith with two other paintings, "View on the Stour near Dedham" and "Yarmouth Jetty" for £250. In 1824 they were shown by Arrowsmith at the Paris Salon where they were widely admired and Constable received a gold medal from Charles X, the King of France. The French painter Theodore Gericault was "stunned by it" and Delacroix is said to have repainted parts of his "Massacre at Chios" after seeing it.

The Hay Wain was eventually re-sold for £400.

The Leaping Horse

This is the climax of the River Stour paintings, 6 foot in size. Originally known as "The Float Jump" it was addressed to an urban public and took five months to paint. By this period Constable had developed an annual pattern of work which culminated in May and the Royal Academy annual exhibition.

The view is from the Essex bank looking north. The tower of Dedham church on the right is incorrectly placed, but improves the composition. The weather and climatic conditions are recorded in his notebooks. Like other paintings in this series it shows the trading life of the river.

He used thinned oil paint with a reddish background, and various size brushes to achieve his effects.

He placed his horizon $\frac{2}{5}$ ths from the bottom of the picture, this would have been eye level when it was hung in the gallery. The boy on the horse resembles an equestrian statue, almost a heroic effect. In the finished picture Constable moved the tree from the right, to behind the horse to improve the composition. The horses were trained to jump the 3 foot fences that kept the cattle from straying. On the barge a mother cradles her baby. There are darker masses of trees to one side, this has the effect of making the lighter area in the painting recede. Instead of the "sunlit meadow", present in other paintings we get a glimpse of the river in the middle distance.

The River Stour was made navigable after an Act of Parliament of 1705.



JOHN CONSTABLE

The Leaping Horse

1825

Oil on canvas, 139.7 x 185.4 cm

© Royal Academy

The Cornfield

Constable originally called this "The Drinking Boy" but the new title was given to it by the subscribers who presented the painting to the National Gallery in 1837. The first of Constable's works to enter a public collection. It is more "finished" than other paintings of his of this date. Exhibited in 1826, Constable hoped to sell it straight away, but this did not happen.

The location is thought to be Fen Lane which leads down from Flatford Lane to the River Stour, the route Constable took to school. The church and houses in the distance are Higham and have been added to improve the composition; in reality they are not visible from the lane. The metal plough in the gateway is accurately portrayed, and the July flowers are botanically correct for their season. This painting probably shows the route that Constable took when he walked to school.

The trees frame the composition and zig zag lines lead back to the church, the boy's red waistcoat is a complementary colour to the green of the countryside and is repeated again at the gap in the hedge. The curving path holds the painting together, the huge sky has mounting clouds which echo the shape of the tree-tops. A shaft of rain from the top right drives a diagonal line through the sky.

A small flock of fifteen sheep with red markings are being driven through the gate, a boy is drinking from the stream which supplies water to a nearby cottage, he is watched by a donkey and her foal in a nearby bush.

As so often with Constable, this painting provides many clues to the way the landscape was managed in the early 19th century, as well as the rhythm of daily life in the Stour valley. In this period it was a well-populated landscape and many of the local residents, including children, would have been actively employed on the land. Constable painted through what was to be a turning point in the lives of the people who lived in the Dedham Vale and much of the wider British countryside. During his lifetime the rise of the Industrial Revolution, with its railways, mills, and increasing mechanisation began to sweep away patterns of life that had existed largely unchanged for centuries. In many cases this led to worsening poverty for the unfranchised poor and broke long-established relationships between country people and the land they inhabited. The gradual shift to urban living gained pace inexorably in the decades that followed, a process that has continued to today.

The sketch for this painting is in the Indianapolis Museum of Art, U.S.A



JOHN CONSTABLE
The Cornfield
 1826
 Oil on canvas, 143 x 122 cm
 © The National Gallery, London 2013

The Glebe Farm

In February 1830 Constable wrote to his biographer, C. R. Leslie, about a painting that he thought would be improved "for a little of John Dunthome's varnish". It could be that the painting was "The Glebe Farm", which Constable gave to Leslie.

Later, in 1836 the painting was sold to the collector, John Sheepshanks and Constable consulted Leslie about the price, suggesting £150. Constable visited John Sheepshanks at his mansion in Blackheath.

Constable's daughter Isobel died in 1888 and The Glebe Farm was one of five paintings she left to the National Gallery.



JOHN CONSTABLE
The Glebe Farm
c1830
Oil on canvas, 64.8 x 95.6 cm
© Tate, London 2013

Vale of Dedham

During 1828 Constable worked on his paintings for the exhibition at the Royal Academy in May. He sent two landscapes this, of Dedham Vale and another of Hampstead Heath.

This oil painting of Dedham Vale shows the middle distance with the bridge at Stratford St. Mary, the foreground shows an encampment of gypsies. This painting has compositional ties with "Hagar and the Angel" in Sir George Beaumont's collection, having a reversed "L" format and portrays the same scene as Constable's earlier painting of 1802.

Constable referred to the painting in his letters to Fisher, he described it as having a view from Gun Hill down to the estuary at Mistley. Possibly due to its "portrait" format it was hung in the Great Room at the Royal Academy in 1828. David Lucas made an engraving of it in 1836. It had been noted in the magazine "John Bull" but it was never sold in Constable's lifetime.



JOHN CONSTABLE
The Vale of Dedham
1828
Oil on canvas, 145 x 122 cm
© National Gallery of Scotland

The Valley Farm

A late painting in which Constable remembers his time near the Stour Valley. Some of the features are taken from Constable's earlier sketch books, the ash tree on the right come from a drawing from the early 1820's in Hampstead.

Brown autumnal tints predominate, the painting was altered by Constable after it was exhibited. The watercolour sketch of the little girl in the boat is particularly attractive and may be one of his daughters.

This is one example of the exhibits shown towards the end of his life, it stems from a faint sketch in his notebook of 1813. In this later period he only completed four exhibition canvases on a grand scale and this was one of them. It was a variation of a previous painting "The Ferry" of 1814 and in this way he returned to the River Stour as a subject for an exhibition painting.

It is in "portrait" format and was hung in the Great Room of the Royal Academy in 1835.



JOHN CONSTABLE
The Valley Farm
 1835
 Oil on canvas, 147.3 x 125 cm
 © Tate Britain, 2013



JOHN CONSTABLE
Dedham Vale
 1802
 Oil on canvas, 43.5 x 34.4 cm
 © Victoria and Albert Museum

Dedham Vale

This early painting represents the period when Constable resolved to "paint from Nature".

The prepared canvas has a brown ground which can still be seen.

The composition is based on "Hagar and the angel" by Claude Lorraine which Constable had seen in the collection of Sir George Beaumont. At the Royal Academy it was allocated a place in the Great Room but there was no reference in the press to the picture until 1807.

Constable was particularly interested in this view of the Stour Valley from Gun Hill, near Langham. He painted it again in 1828. Both examples show the bridge at Stratford St. Mary and a "group of gypsies camped inconspicuously in the foreground".

Constable painted this area with small dabs of paint and thin strokes, a similar technique to Gainsborough. The background and sky however are painted with wide long strokes which almost cover the ground. The design with a reversed L allowed space for a cloud study in the top left hand corner. The scene is composed of quiet cottages, water-meadows, a church tower in the distance, a silver birch tree, a variety of greens and the beneficial effect of sunlight.

Thomas Churchyard 1798-1865

Thomas Churchyard is not a Stour Valley painter but he had the same concerns for the countryside, agriculture and the rural way of life. He is a difficult man to understand. On the one hand he is a professional man, a solicitor, with a strong local following and he combined with that, his vocational life as an artist. But he was a poor business man with huge family responsibilities.

He was born in Melton, near Woodbridge in 1798 and he attended Dedham Grammar School which had been Constable's school twenty years before. Thomas' father was a butcher and grazier with property at Melton. The family came from a respected farming tradition and also owned land at Byng Hall at Pettistree in Suffolk.

When his father died very little capital was passed to him, the majority being left to his mother, the widow. Thomas had been articled to solicitors in Halesworth in 1816 and in 1820 went to London to complete his final year of training. He was then admitted to the Roll and became an attorney, a great source of pride to his family.

During his time in Halesworth he travelled to Norwich and became interested in the paintings of the Norwich School painters particularly those of John Crome and his son John Bemy Crome. He copied the paintings of these artists and in this way began to produce his own landscape style. He also started to collect the works of artists that he admired and continued to do this all his life, even when he could no longer afford to do so. In London he visited exhibitions and would have had an opportunity to study Constable's – "The Hay Wain" when it was exhibited in 1821.

His work as a County Court lawyer took him regularly to Ipswich, Bury St. Edmunds and Sudbury and for forty years he painted and drew his native landscape. Very few portraits have been attributed to him - watercolour of his wife - signed and dated 1825 is an exception.

It was said of his work "He knew exactly where he wanted to put his brush, he never put it down twice and he always put it in the right place"

With regard to his use of water-colours, he used a soft watery green, purple and grey for the distance, black mixed in with the blues - thinly painted touches of pink for the sky, his leaves touched with blue. In oil painting his technique was a scattering of light colours, often yellow and white in the trees. Sometimes in his work the weave of the canvas shows through, due to lack of preparation. The work is rarely signed or dated. Between 1819 and 1834 he exhibited eleven pictures in London, using a very simple style, the composition was drawn in with the brush and both oil and watercolours were very thinly painted.

In 1832 he decided to try his luck to earn his living as a painter and leaving his family behind he moved to London. He sent work to the Royal Academy but it was not well received. He had more success with the Society of British Artists. But in 1833 he had to admit defeat and returned to Woodbridge, taking a house for the family in Melton. His solicitors' business thrived and he moved to better premises in 1834. In this middle period of his life 1835 -1850 he had fifteen pictures exhibited in Ipswich.

One of his Woodbridge friends, Bernard Barton said of him- in 1847, "He will dash you off slight and careless sketches by the dozen, or score, but for touching and re-touching, or finishing, that is quite another affair, and has to wait, if ever it be done at all".

At Woodbridge he belonged to a group of like-minded men, who met to discuss local affairs, the arts and the Woodbridge community. Bernard Barton was a member of this group together with Edward Fitzgerald (who wrote Omar Khayyam) and the Revd. George Crabbe (son of the famous poet).

By this time Thomas Churchyard had nine children (one died in infancy), he acted as the local secretary to the Suffolk Fine Art Association, but he did not impress them with his artistic endeavours. He had a better reception in Norwich. It is said of his late works that they became "deeper and darker in expression, more sophisticated". But the late water colours were physically very light, almost casual sketches, "Echoing with gentleness and eliberation a lifetime of painting experience". There is an inventory of his art collection made in 1854 which includes work by Gainsborough, Crome, Constable, Richard Wilson, George Morland, Stothard, Turner, Dunthorne, Rowe, Rubens and Eddy. This extensive list shows the scope of Churchyard's interest, but also represents a great deal of capital.

Family worries mounted up and by 1865 he realised the situation. He made up albums of his water-colours and sketches and selected about 400 paintings — these he passed on to his daughters. He wrote their names on the back to avoid them being taken as part of his estate and wrote: "My dears they won't be any money for you but I will leave you my paintings which will one day be worth more than any money I could ever have hoped to make".

He died in 1865 and the obituaries that followed were fulsome in praise of him.

Thomas Churchyard sold only a few paintings in his lifetime and his daughters, who believed in his art, were loath to part with many of his works. As each daughter died, her collection was passed on to her sisters. The death of Harriet meant that Charley, the youngest son, inherited the collection. He had little regard for the paintings and in the 4,000 items he put in the auction, he included a lot of work by his sisters, not by Thomas. This considerably weakened the work for sale and resulted in raising about £600 for not only the paintings but furniture and china too. Today his work can be found in Tate Britain, British Museum, Norwich Castle Museum, Ashmolean Oxford, Fitzwilliam Cambridge, Christchurch Mansion Ipswich, Alexander Turnbull Library New Zealand, Dunedin Art Gallery New Zealand, Huntington Art Gallery California and Putman Museum Iowa.

Chronology Of Thomas Churchyard's Life And Work

- 1798** Bom at Melton, Suffolk
- 1808** Attended Dedham Grammar School
- 1816** Trained as a solicitor in Halesworth
- 1820** Moved to London to complete his training
- 1821** Began to practice as a lawyer in Woodbridge
- 1825** Married Harriet Hailes
- 1829** Exhibited in Norwich
- 1830** Exhibited with the Society of British Artists, Suffolk Street, London
- 1831** Exhibited with the Royal Academy and the Society of British Artists
- 1832** Moved to London, became founder member of Ipswich Society of Professional & Amateur Artists
- 1833** Returned home — The Beeches, Melton. Exhibited with the new Society of Watercolourists
- 1837** Death of John Constable
- 1843** Moved to Woodbridge
- 1850** Exhibited with Suffolk Fine Art Society, Ipswich
- 1851** Exhibited in Norwich
- 1855** Moved to Melton
- 1856** Moved to Woodbridge
- 1865** Died — family left with debts and little money
- 1866** Auction of his possessions to raise money
- 1927** All the Churchyard paintings sold in one big sale

Thomas Churchyard - Paintings

Ploughing	Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich
Pond with Trees	Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich
Landscape with Sheep and Trees	Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich
Wooded Landscape	Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich

All presumed to be dated between 1820 to 1865

Ploughing

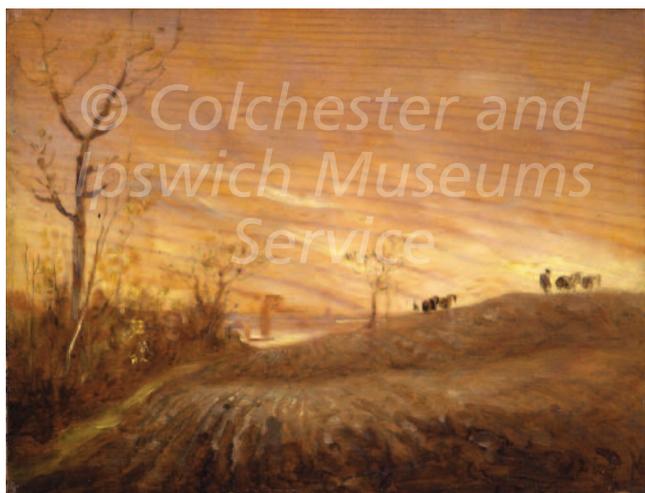
The natural colour and the grain of the wood on this pine panel have been cleverly incorporated into the design of this tiny scene of ploughing in Suffolk.

Thomas Churchyard regularly painted out-of-doors in oil and watercolour, chiefly scenes of the countryside near Melton and Woodbridge in Suffolk.

It is possible that Thomas Churchyard met Constable, who did visit the area at this time and they had mutual acquaintances. Much of Churchyard's work is inspired by Constable but they differed in that

Constable used his sketches as a base for a developed composition whereas Churchyard regarded his quick sketches as finished works, ready for display.

This quick sketch with its limited palette, using the natural colour of the wood, has produced a work of great harmony showing man in an autumnal scene under a glowing evening sky.



THOMAS CHURCHYARD

Ploughing

Oil on pine panel, 13.7 x 17.9 cm

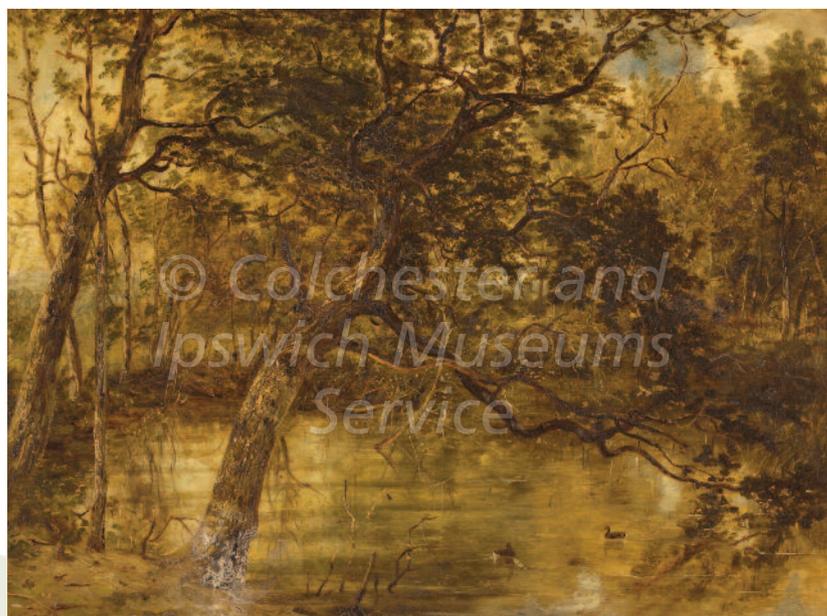
© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Pond with Trees

This painting shows us a hidden path in the woods with tangled neglected undergrowth, leaning trees and an unruffled pond with tiny ducklings, secret and undisturbed.

There are so many spots like this in the Suffolk countryside — the trees that bow down into the water from the left hand side and encircle the small birds as they learn to swim through the water. They are safe and enclosed, not many will come this way and Churchyard has recorded this special location for all to share.

Darker than many of his other works so this possibly was painted in his later period 1851 —65.



THOMAS CHURCHYARD

Pond with Trees, 38 x 52 cm

Oil on board

© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Landscape with Sheep and Trees

This appears to be a painting which emulates Constable's work. Churchyard, like him uses a "portrait" shaped board for landscape subject matter and the composition features the "L" shape that Constable favoured too in his paintings of Dedham Vale.

Churchyard's painting gives us a glimpse of sheep grazing in a rich green pasture under the shelter of huge towering trees. The light on the trees, coming in from the right, gives them a magical brilliance. Beyond is a sunlit meadow of golden corn, another image that Constable often used. Above, a wild sky with whirling clouds invoking a windy day with bright sun. It is all part of the Suffolk countryside which Churchyard saw almost every day and in which he lived and worked.

This is a slight sketch, not re-touched or "finished" and may come from his middle period 1835—50.



THOMAS CHURCHYARD
Landscape with Sheep and Trees, 28 x 25 cm
Oil on board
© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Wooded Landscape

It is said of Churchyard that he painted impulsively, as if they were quick sketches to precede a more impressive work to follow. This was Constable's method and many of his sketches survive and can be related to his huge six foot paintings that came after them.

But Churchyard never followed his quick sketches up to achieve the masterpiece. This is a quick oil sketch painted with broad rich brush-strokes - unusual for such a modest size. He shows a comfortable farm scene, the stack is built and nestles in the corner of the field. The rutted lane leads down to a gate beyond. The sunlight picks out the yellow leaves of the hedgerow tree and bright white clouds scurry overhead, there are still some days of summer to enjoy. Autumn is a long way off.

This painting is probably from his early period, 1819 - 34 as it shows his simple natural manner, drawing with the brush and the oil very thinly painted.



THOMAS CHURCHYARD
Wooded Landscape, 22.8 x 31.7 cm
Oil on millboard
© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Harry Becker 1865-1928

Harry Becker was born in Colchester, one of four sons of the local doctor, a German immigrant. He was a painter, draughtsman and printmaker and one of the most distinct and creative artists to be closely associated with East Anglia. His subject matter was rooted in Suffolk country life and the ploughman, harvesters and gleaners who worked the land at that time. He was a prolific and passionate artist, adopting a wide range of materials and was innovative in his techniques and free handling of paint or line.

He spent the majority of his life in East Anglia recording the life of the countryside before mechanisation took hold. His vivid paintings give us an insight to the social history of the period. He worked in oil, pencil, watercolour, etching, pen and ink drawings, chalk pastels and lithographs.

When he was fourteen he was enrolled at the Royal Academy Schools in Antwerp, at the same college as Van Gogh, although not at the same time. Later, to finish his artistic training he worked in Paris in the studio of Carolus Duran, a fashionable portrait painter who had taught John Singer Sargent. Here he was influenced by the Impressionist painters and experimented with their techniques. He was particularly interested in the work of Degas whom he admired.

He returned to England, to the Minories in Colchester, and here he painted portraits and landscapes. Some of his work was hung "on the line" at the Royal Academy when he was eighteen and in 1906 he won a Bronze medal at the Milan International Exhibition. In 1908 he was chosen to paint huge murals of farm labourers for the new Selfridge's department store in London, but the commission was abandoned when the artist submitted the full scale cartoons for the work. By this time he had moved to London and had a studio there, but he was not very successful and was often unwilling to sell his work.

In 1902 he had married another artist, Georgina Waddington, he painted her portrait many times, they moved to Suffolk in 1912 and she supported him by teaching at St. Felix School in Southwold. At first they lived at Wenhaston, later moving to Hinton, near Darsham where he stayed for the rest of his life. He had not enjoyed the commercial thrust of the art world in London and preferred a quiet rural existence. However he travelled to Holland frequently where he painted and exhibited his work.

He planned his working day round that of the agricultural labourers, going out into the fields to sketch them while they worked. His notebooks show his rough sketches, together with notes on the time of day and the weather. He excelled at lithographs, among the most noteworthy is one entitled "The Scyther" produced for the London Underground, designed to attract more

women to work on the land during the First World War. His work of this time depicts a vanishing way of life, with lean figures worn by heavy farm work, and tired thin horses. He never changed or retouched his work, used wide washes of pure watercolour, or thick bright oil paint, and harsh black strokes of charcoal or pencil. Many of these characteristics stem from his knowledge of impressionist paintings, and he described Impressionism as:

- 1 – A spontaneous expression of emotional excitement
- 2 – A study done to acquire power through knowledge.
- 3 – A sketch, a calculated statement of intention.

It was said of him that he excelled at lithography "His power of suggesting the strength and vibration of sunlight by the omission of defining outline is quite extraordinary. Indeed his omissions are often more expressive than his actual statements".

His paintings were bought by Frank Brangwyn, John Sargent and Sickert and together with Lucien Pissarro, Stephen Bone and Sickert, his work was shown at the Redfern Gallery in London. In the international arena his work was displayed at the British Museum, The Victoria & Albert Museum, the Uffizi, together with galleries and museums in Brussels, Florence, Rome, Leningrad and Canada.

At his death his estate passed to his wife and then his daughter. When she died she left half his studio to the Loftus family of Southwold who had helped him in his early days, when he was still an unknown artist. The other half was left to the artist Kenneth Green.

Chronology of Harry Becker's Life and Work

- 1865** Bom in Colchester, Essex (Henry Otto) youngest of seven
- 1879** Enrolled for a 3 year course at Antwerp's Royal Academy then in his final year he was accepted at the new art school in Bushey Herts. He also entered the studio of Carolus Duran, Boulevard Montpamasse, Paris. Here, painting in the open air was encouraged.
- 1886** Returned to England, based in Colchester.
- 1890** Elected a member of Ipswich Art Club, giving as his address Valley Farm, Flatford (made famous by Constable's "Hay Wain") 1894 Moved to London, frequently travelled to Holland where he worked and exhibited. He drew and painted the black and white Friesian cattle unusual in East Anglia at this time and portrayed the workers at potato picking and the bean harvesting.
- 1897/8** He made extended visits to Kent where he sketched sheep shearing on Romney Marsh and hop pickers in the Medway Valley. 1902 He married Georgina Waddington an artist whom he had met at the Bushey School of Art. She had her own studio in Chelsea.
- 1903** Their daughter, Janet was born in Kensington.
- 1905** He advertised his lithographs at 15 guineas for 3 proofs and held his first solo show at the Baillie Gallery in Bayswater exhibiting 30 lithographs.
- 1906** Bronze medal awarded at the Milan International Exhibition for a lithograph entitled "Summer Showers".
- 1907** Showed his work at the New English Art Club's winter exhibition together with Walter Sickert, Wilson Steer and John Singer Sargent
- 1908** After completing full-scale cartoons for large murals for the Selfridge's building in London, the scheme was abandoned.
- 1909** Although still based in London he began to bring his wife and daughter to the Old Hall Farm, Wenhaston for the summer, on an annual basis.
- 1912** A successful exhibition showing examples of his work was held at the Meryon Gallery, off Grosvenor Square, London. "Man Hedging" and "Two Men clearing a stream" date from this year.

- 1915** By this date the family had moved to "Sunny side", Wenhaston
- 1916** Georgina began teaching at St. Felix School in Southwold
- 1921** The family moved from "Sunnyside" to the Old Vicarage, Wenhaston.
- 1923** Georgina retired from teaching
- 1926** The family moved to Hinton Lodge, three miles away.
- 1928** Harry Becker died

Harry Becker - Paintings

Landscape with Horses Ploughing	Christchurch Mansions, Ipswich
Farm Scene with Horses	Christchurch Mansions, Ipswich
Cutting Chaff	Christchurch Mansions, Ipswich
Two Men Clearing a Stream	Christchurch Mansions, Ipswich

All presumed to be dated between 1913-28

Landscape with Horses Ploughing

Although not dated this painting probably stems from the time Becker lived at Old Hall Farm, Wenhaston. The area would be familiar to him from summer painting excursions, but now, living in the village he could share the working day of the farm labourer. There are stories of him rising early to accompany the men to the fields. Adrian Bell writes: "(they were) out to plough in the dawn; back to breakfast, out again at ten, and back at three".

Becker took into account the pattern of the seasons, the rhythm of farm work, the time of day and the weather. He shows us the calm acceptance of the work horses and his love of these huge animals.

This is a mid-day scene, the light shines directly on the backs of the horses, the sky is grey and cloudy. It is warm work, the ploughman is in his shirt sleeves and wears an old "Billycock" hat.



HARRY BECKER
Landscape with Horses Ploughing
 Oil on canvas board, 21 x 26 cm
 © Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Farm Scene with Horses

Becker painted the Suffolk countryside inland from Southwold and Walberswick, the area that followed the river Blyth consisting of heath, open farmland and including the villages of Blyth, Blackheath, Wenham and Darsham. This was probably painted in the early stages of the First World War. He used wide streaks of pure watercolour to depict the low horizon, wide sky and extreme clarity of light.

This serene landscape encapsulates the essence of a classically designed painting. This lies in the contrast of a low horizontal line to the long shadows of the huge trees that overhang the right hand side of the painting. This patterning of $\frac{1}{3} \times \frac{2}{3}$ design ensures that the central horse is almost exactly $\frac{1}{3}$ rd from the right and $\frac{1}{3}$ ^ up from the bottom of the painting. The perfect example of a planned composition which seems so harmonious and unsophisticated. These ideas, combined with the timeless quality and the universality of his images are what provide us with a sense of peace and well-being.



HARRY BECKER

Farm Scene with Horses

Watercolour, 38 x 56 cm

© Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service



HARRY BECKER
Cutting Chaff in the Open
 Oil on canvas board, 46 x 38 cm
 © Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Cutting Chaff in the Open

Becker recorded life on the land before major mechanisation had taken place. His dynamic style and robust brushwork was eminently suited to portraying this energetic life.

The two men are engaged in operating a hand chaff-cutting machine. This implement was used for chopping hay or straw in 1/2" lengths to be used for animal feed. This is not made to make the food more digestible but to supplement the more nutritious fodder provided. This has the effect of improving their condition

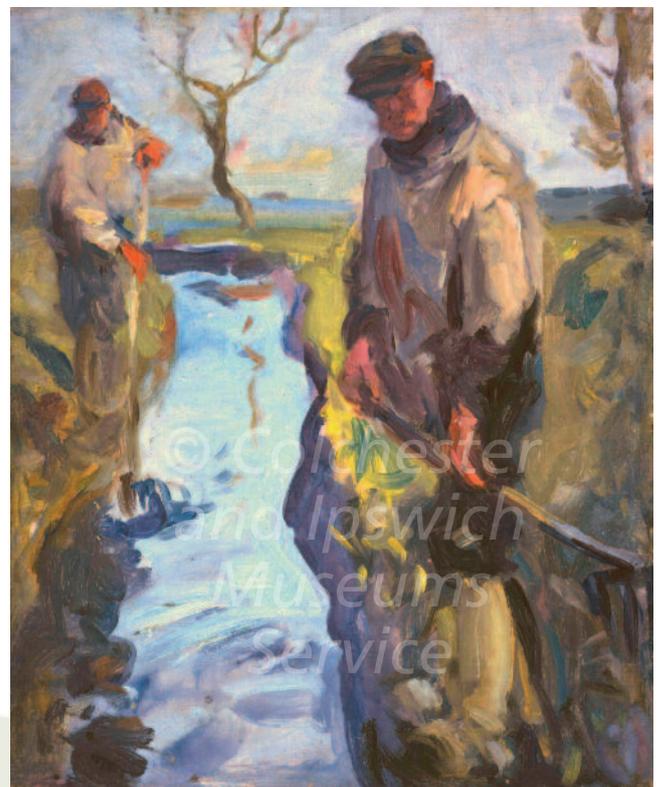
A chaff-cutter is a long box, seen on the left hand side of the painting, which holds the material to be cut. The chaff is conveyed along the bed of the box, and by turning the wheel chaff is cut into the correct length as it protrudes from the box.

Two Men Clearing Banks of a Stream

Following the disappointment of the collapse of the Selfridge's commission, in the next few years Becker began to focus on work in Suffolk. This painting was displayed in 1912 at a successful exhibition at the Meryon Gallery in London.

The strong light from the right hand side of the painting indicates a late winter afternoon, the trees on the horizon are bare, the sky grey and cold. Soon it will be time for the men to trudge home after a day of hard physical work.

He shows the men as tired and dejected. Their hands are raw and cold. The water is oily and thick with mud and weed. The banks where they have cut the reeds show bright yellow in contrast to the darker bank behind.



HARRY BECKER
Two Men Clearing the Banks of a Stream
 Oil on canvas board, 45.3 x 37.5 cm
 © Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service

Sir Alfred Munnings 1878 – 1959

Alfred Munnings was born on the 8th October 1878 at Mendham, Suffolk, where his father owned the mill. He went to school in Redenhall and at Framlingham College. He had drawing lessons at home from the daughter of the local parson and at 14 he started work at the Norwich lithography firm of Page Brothers. In the evening he studied at Norwich Art School with Gertrude Offord as his tutor. At Page Brothers, he designed posters and advertising material for Caley's, the chocolate manufacturers, and together with one of the directors, John Shaw Tomkins, he travelled to Europe where he had an opportunity to study European painters. He eventually spent time in Paris at the Academie Julian in 1902/3. In 1898 his painting entitled "Stranded" was accepted for exhibition at the Royal Academy. He set up a studio in Mendham but after an accident he lost the use of one eye which would eventually prevent him from active service in the First World War. In 1904 he moved from Mendham to Church Farm, Swainsthorpe in Norfolk and his painting at this time was centered on the area near Ringland Hills and Hoxne, on the River Waveney. By 1911 he had moved again to Cornwall where he painted with the Newlyn Group and then on to Hampshire where his work featured the hop-pickers. Not being eligible for war service, in 1917 he found himself caring for "remounts", the horses at Calcot Park, near Reading but by 1918 he worked as a civilian in Northern France as a War Artist, showing the wartime role of the Canadian Cavalry and Canadian Forestry Corps who supplied vital timber to the Front Line. In 1919 he was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy. He bought Castle House at Dedham and 45 of his wartime paintings were exhibited at the Canadian War Memorial Exhibition in London. In 1920 he married his 2nd wife, Violet McBride and for the next twenty years he travelled widely. In 1944 he was elected President of the Royal Academy and knighted the same year. His outspoken views on modern art made him unpopular at this time. It is for his masterful depiction of horses in the fairground, at the race-course and in the hunting field that he is remembered today.

Chronology of Sir Alfred Munnings Life and Work

- 1878** Born in Mendham, Suffolk
- 1888** Attended school at Redenhall and later Framlingham.
- 1893** Began a six year apprenticeship in commercial art with Page Bros. Lithographic firm in Norwich. Attended evening classes at Norwich School of Art.
- 1897** "Stranded" painted in this period, started using his own studio and travelled through Norfolk and Suffolk painting fairs, landscapes and riverscapes, began to exhibit.
- 1898** Two paintings were shown at the Summer Exhibition of the Royal Academy. Blinded in the right eye by a thorn bush.
- 1902** Attended painting classes at Atelier Julian in Paris.
- 1903** Set up a studio in Swainsthorpe but also lived in lodgings at Mendham and Norwich.

- 1904/10** Travelled in East Anglia painting horses, caravans and local scenes
- 1911** Moved to Newlyn where he met Florence Carter-Wood.
- 1912** Married Florence Carter-Wood.
- 1913** Moved to Lamorna Cove, near Penzance. Held first one-man Exhibition in London.
- 1914 -** Florence committed suicide, Munnings rejected for war service because of his defective eyesight
- 1918/19** Attached to the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, painted equestrian portraits. Bought Castle House, Dedham. Met Mrs. McBride
- 1920** Married Violet McBride, built house and studio in London.
- 1921/22** Solo exhibition and important portraits
- 1924** Visited America and Canada, accepting commissions for equestrian portraits.
- 1926** Elected to full membership of the Royal Academy.
- 1927** A retrospective exhibition of 300 works held at Norwich Castle Museum.
- 1928** Became a full member of the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours.
- 1944** Elected President of the Royal Academy. Knighthood conferred upon him by King George VI.
- 1947** Created Knight Commander of the Victorian Order and admitted to the honorary freedom of the City of Norwich.
- 1959** Died at his home in Dedham on 17th July, aged eighty.

Sir Alfred Munnings – Paintings

The path to the orchard	1908	Alfred Munnings Museum, Dedham
White Canoe on the Stour	c1924	Alfred Munnings Museum, Dedham
Barge on the Stour at Dedham	-	Alfred Munnings Museum, Dedham
Full River	1931	Alfred Munnings Museum, Dedham

The Path to the Orchard

Munnings writes about this painting in the first volume of his autobiography, "An Artist's Life". The pony is Augereau, who appears in several paintings of Norfolk & Suffolk. He writes "I looked into the sun doing this" in other words it resembles a "centre jour" photograph. He describes the girl in her white linen hat and apron leading the horse across the picture and along the river path at Mendham. Colour is provided by the garden with crimson and white phlox. Beyond lies the blue water and in the background, trees and the lawn fence on the far bank. This was the period when Munnings went on painting trips to Ringland Hills in Norfolk and Hoxne and the River Waveney in Suffolk. "The Ford" and "Travellers" belong to this period



SIR ALFRED MUNNINGS

The Path to the Orchard, 1908

Oil on Canvas, 76.2 x 106.7 cm

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White Canoe on the Stour at Flatford

This is one of a series of paintings of the River Stour painted over a number of years. It is a horizontal composition, the vertical lines being provided by the trees on the far bank. It was the sixth picture painted in 1924, the subject matter ranged from grey horses, to the river bounded by willows. In his autobiography "The Second Burst" Munnings confesses that he was bringing back memories of Flatford in the past when Mr. Bennyworth had a small business at one end of the mill buildings and let out a few boats for hire. It was painted on a still, grey afternoon. It shows Munnings' wife and her friend in light summer dresses, paddling the Canadian canoe. For the purposes of the painting it was fastened fore and aft from overhanging boughs, and then it was kept in place with a long willow pole propped against the bank. The following day Munnings painted a larger version under the same weather conditions. This second version went to the International Exhibition at Pittsburgh in 1924 and was eventually sold there.



SIR ALFRED MUNNINGS

White Canoe on the Stour

Exhibited in 1924

Oil on Canvas, 76.2 x 106.7 cm

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A Barge on the Stour at Dedham

In Munnings boyhood the barges were towed up to Dedham Mill on a "full river". The water is very high in this painting. He describes it as a lush green setting, unlike anything else in the world. Sadly now the mills are silent and the water not so full. He remembered when the floods were at their height and it was all a huge desolate sheet of water with inlets, rows of pollarded willows with their reflections inverted at the water's edge. The river was flanked by alders and poplars and as the stream drew near to the weir it grew faster and stronger, creating a moving cauldron of water. These fast flowing waters carved out portions of the bank and when they reached the eel nets the force of the water weighed them down.



SIR ALFRED MUNNINGS
A Barge on the Stour at Dedham
Oil on Canvas
© Estate of Sir Alfred Munnings.
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Full River



SIR ALFRED MUNNINGS
Full River
Oil on Canvas, 58 x 72 cm
© Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston,
Lancashire, UK / The Bridgeman Art
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In the second book of his autobiography, entitled "The Second Burst", Munnings writes about Dedham and the river in the period following the Second World War. He deplores many of the changes made in the countryside at this time, new council houses of red brick and slate, trees, which he had remembered which had now been felled and in contrast he recalls the quieter way of life on the river before the war. " Days when a few boats and canoes lay by the bridge and were let out by a baker in the village; days when the river was always full to the brim" and " on a Sunday afternoon one might see a stout broad- beamed family boat with women and children — two men in shirt sleeves at the oars — passing along on the slow moving current, the boat almost level with flat meadows on either side" and "groups of cattle against the sky reflected in the water

This painting is evocative of that period and in this placid canvas the artist employs a rich variety of brushstrokes to achieve his effect. The trees on the far bank are almost solid forms anchored into a landscape. But flowing past is turbulent water carrying loose leaves and grasses on its surface. On the right hand side a triangle of feathery reeds provides a veil over the water, the tangled leaves climbing up to the top right hand corner. The grey/blue sky forms a basis for a ragged collection of cloud forms -painted as if in haste with a broad brush of creamy white paint The overall effect appears to be a familiar river scene but I suspect the composition was carefully chosen and adapted to fit his ideas of earlier happier times. The painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1932.

John Nash 1893 – 1977

Although born in London in 1893, much of John Nash's childhood was spent in Buckinghamshire. His love of the countryside comes from the influence of this semi-rural upbringing and his artistic foundation stems from this time too.

His landscape paintings can be roughly divided into two groups, those from Buckinghamshire or East Anglia. Before the First World War he was introduced to the North Norfolk coast by Claughton Pellew-Harvey on a walking holiday. Claughton was a fellow student with John's brother, Paul, and it was Claughton who encouraged John to develop his painting. By 1913 the two brothers had put on a joint exhibition of their work in Kensington, London. John sold seven pictures and was invited to join the avant-garde Friday Club. The following year he was elected as a founder member of the new London Group and exhibited at their first exhibition. Earlier in 1914 he had briefly visited Italy. War was declared in August and by the autumn he was working as an agricultural labourer in Dorset.

Having enlisted in the Artists' Rifles in 1916, by 1917 he was at the Western Front and his most famous painting of the time "Over the Top" commemorates the action on December 30th of that year. The following year he was made an Official War Artist and married Christine Kulenthal. After the war they lived in various locations in the south of England. He illustrated a number of books and became a member of Society of Wood Engravers and the New English Art Club. In 1921 he held a successful one-man show.

It was not until 1929 that he and Christine began to stay at Wormingford during the summer months. They were not able to buy a property there until 1943. During this period he undertook teaching commitments at Ruskin School of Art, Oxford and later at the Design School of the Royal College of Art, London.

In the Second World War he was again appointed as an Official War Artist and elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. By 1944 he was discharged from the Forces and having paid £750 for Bottengoms Farm, Wormingford in Essex, they finally moved in 1945. His book illustrations are often in the form of woodcuts or black and white lithographs. In Suffolk a number of his landscapes are snow scenes which embrace this use of "black and white" to full advantage and are among his most attractive works.

The following years see him carefully preparing six pictures a year for the Royal Academy, entertaining the contemporary avant-garde of the art world, traveling abroad and in Britain, teaching at the Colchester School of Art and Flatford Mill Field Studies Centre.

In 1951 he was elected a Royal Academician and in 1954 held a retrospective exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in London. He was awarded a C.B.E in 1963. In 1967 he held a major retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy and was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Essex.

He died in September 1977.

Chronology of John Nash's Life and Work

- 1893** Born in London on 11th April.
- 1901** Family moved to Buckinghamshire
- 1908-11** Educated at Wellington College
- 1912** First visit to East Anglia on a walking holiday with Cloughton Pellow-Harvey who persuaded him to become an artist.
- 1913** Joint exhibition with his brother Paul, at the Dorien Leigh Gallery, London. Both brothers joined the Friday Club.
- 1914** Founder member of the London Group, first exhibition at The Goupil Gallery.
In January visited Florence, Italy.
August — outbreak of the First World War
Autumn — worked as an agricultural labourer in Dorset.
- 1915** Exhibited with the Camden Town Group. "Trees in Flood" acquired for a public collection.
- 1916** Enlisted in the Artists' Rifles.
- 1917** Went to the Western Front "Over the Top" commemorates the action of December 30th.
- 1918** Became an Official War Artist. Married Christine Kulenthal.
Lived at Chalfont St. Peter and shared a studio with his brother.
- 1920** Founder member of the Society of Wood Engravers.
- 1921** Lived at various locations in the south of England. First one man exhibition was very successful.
- 1924-29** Taught at Ruskin School of Art, Oxford. Stayed at Wormingford in cottages and bungalows.
- 1930** Second one-man show at the Goupil Gallery, London.
- 1933** Exhibition at the French Gallery, London
- 1934-40** Taught at the Design School of the Royal College of Art, London and after the war until 1957.
- 1939** Outbreak of the Second World War.
- 1940** Appointed Official War Artist to the Admiralty. Elected Associate of the Royal Academy.
- 1941** Served as a War Artist at Plymouth
- 1943** Bought Bottengoms Farm, Wormingford, Essex for £750
- 1944** Discharged from the Forces
- 1945** Moved in to Bottengoms Farm, Essex. Re-joined the staff of the Royal College of Art, London.
- 1951** Elected a Royal Academician.
- 1953** Exhibited at the Aldeburgh Festival, Suffolk
- 1954** Retrospective exhibition at the Leicester Galleries, London

- 1957** Beginning of several visits to the Isle of Skye
- 1958** Began to teach at Flatford Mill Field Studies Centre
- 1963** Awarded the C.B.E.
- 1967** Major retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy and later at the Minories, Colchester. Awarded an honorary degree by the University of Essex.
- 1977** John Nash dies 23rd September
- 1980** Exhibition at Aldeburgh Festival, Suffolk.

John Nash - Paintings

Winter Afternoon	c1950	Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
The Barn, Wormingford	1954	Royal Academy
Garden in Winter	1964	Colchester Museum and Art Gallery
Disused Barn at Wormingford	1958	Towner
A Suffolk Landscape	c1936-37	Tate
The Cornfield	1918	Tate

Winter Afternoon

A scene near Bottengoms, their Suffolk home, painted in his favourite season, winter. The style of his landscape paintings did not alter much after the Second World War. It is a result of a direct observation from nature and shows his hallmarks which stem from a clear logical structure and use of line. In this painting it develops into three pictures which open up out of each other. The foreground with its curved surface and wattle fence on the left, then through a gap to an icy road with tracks in the snow, these in their turn lead up the hill beyond and so on to the horizon with tiny clumps of trees. Here we see a lowering sky full of storm filled clouds.

"There are no people to distract us, just the cold and snow."

Maurice Wiggin wrote in the Sunday Times about John Nash, that he had found:

"the serenity of the countryside with which he had identified not only his art, but his spirit, in perfect integration"

JOHN NASH

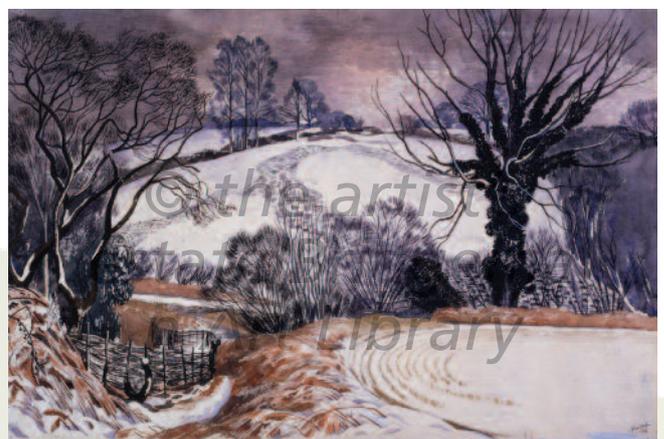
Winter Afternoon

c1950

Watercolour and ink, 40 x 59 cm

© the artist's estate/Bridgeman Art Library

photo credit Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery



The Barn, Wormingford

John and Christine Nash bought Bottengoms Farm in 1943 and moved in over the next two years. His subsequent landscapes were in the vicinity of his home, not only Wormingford but Stoke by Nayland, Nayland with Wissington, Boxted, Little Horkesley and later, scenes at Assington. The name of the house seems to stem from Bottingham, who was a Saxon farmer who once owned it. It was a small two-storied 16th and 17th century house built with wood and plaster with one brick gable. There were three main rooms downstairs, dining room, kitchen and sitting room, low ceilinged and with a staircase to the bedrooms and John's studio above. This viewpoint provided him with a varied landscape for him to develop into paintings.



JOHN NASH
The Barn, Wormingford
1954
Oil on canvas, 40 x 59 cm
© the artist's estate/Bridgeman Art Library
photo credit Royal Academy

This painting is his Diploma work presented to the Royal Academy after his election as an Academician. It was the peace of the Suffolk countryside that appealed to this quiet man after the tumult of the Second World War was over. It shows a view northwards towards the River Stour. The barn is built of local materials, the warm colour of the hand-made bricks shows them to have come from the Bulmer Tile & Brick Company which is still in production near Sudbury. It is a typical Essex barn with steep gable end and clapper board sides which have darkened with age and weathering. The extension to the barn has lost most of its terracotta tiles. The surrounding brick walls have fallen down in many places. In this time of post-war recession building materials and labour for repairs were expensive and hard to find. John Nash saw the local vernacular buildings as part of the landscape and delighted in showing rural crafts and materials. In this painting he depicts the rich summer light and the details of the barn and fences. He includes a length of woven wattle fencing on the right but the majority of the space is dominated by the huge derelict barn.

Ronald Biythe who now lives in the house described it as:

"hidden in a hollow and reached by a perilous rutted track, the building had a timeless air about it - during hot weather milk and butter were cooled in a little waterfall near the door"

he goes on to write of:

" a crammed luxuriant garden full of true cottage plants — the garden approached through an orchard of quinces, plums and greengagesa neatly ordered plot of fruit and vegetables - enamel sinks of alpines and succulents, herbaceous borders and old fashioned roses. "

Garden in Winter

This painting demonstrates John Nash's focus on patterning in pictures, the relationship of the curve of the horizon to the grey, threatening sky, is a unique statement in his work. The detail and interest in the painting swings from right to left as we "climb" to the topmost edge of the canvas. Before us, the shrubs, trees and hedges are laid out and the plants stand in deep snow.

It was said of him that, to him, snow was a "constant delight". But he could depict the weather in all its changes, wind, rain, fog, dazzling sunlight and the "fall of evening". He would concentrate on weather conditions and interpret his observations in a variety of ways. He also painted in different settings ranging from Cornwall to Skye, the Gower Peninsular, North Norfolk as well as Suffolk.

As a child John Nash had admired the work of John Sell Cotman and had later followed his natural instinct to be a landscape painter. The painter Harold Gilman, advised him never to dilute his paint with oil and to work from drawings rather than directly from nature.



JOHN NASH

Garden in Winter

1964

Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 60.5 cm

© the artist's estate/Bridgeman Art Library

photo credit Colchester and Ipswich Museums Services and

Disused Canal at Wormingford

It is interesting to compare this work, painted by Nash in 1958, with the paintings of Constable, produced over a century earlier.

Instead of a harmonious, peopled landscape, often with scenes of busy activity, Nash presents us with a very different vision of the area. Unlike his illustration work, people are entirely absent from this scene, something that was frequently the case with his landscape paintings. As one would expect in a managed landscape, the presence of humanity can still be felt. For example, in the winter-sown crop, willow plantation and cut tree stumps by the water's edge, but it feels remote, almost an intrusion into the countryside. Instead of a landscape that is lived in and worked daily, we are presented here with one where people visit intermittently to carry out a task, and then abandon it again, sometimes for long periods. This sense of abandonment is further emphasised in the disused canal that gives the work its title. The connection between the artist and subject is clearly just as strong, but there is now a much less intimate connection between the landscape and the people who manage it.

That Nash liked winter best of all is not surprising, given his tonal palette. The quiet lyricism of this scene – a frequent feature of his work - with its bare trees and shafts of pale watery sunshine suited his temperament, which was prone to introspection and, in later life, periods of melancholy.

As an artist John Nash could be described as an upholder of traditional landscape painting in a century that was characterised by the astonishing changes wrought by Modernism. Far less influenced by Surrealism than his brother Paul, his work also less obviously inhabits the neo-Romantic genre of other English landscape painters who were his contemporaries, such as Eric Ravilious and Graham Sutherland. Instead, and particularly after he settled in Wormingford, Nash worked to capture a rural backwater using a painting technique that effectively mirrors his choice of subject.



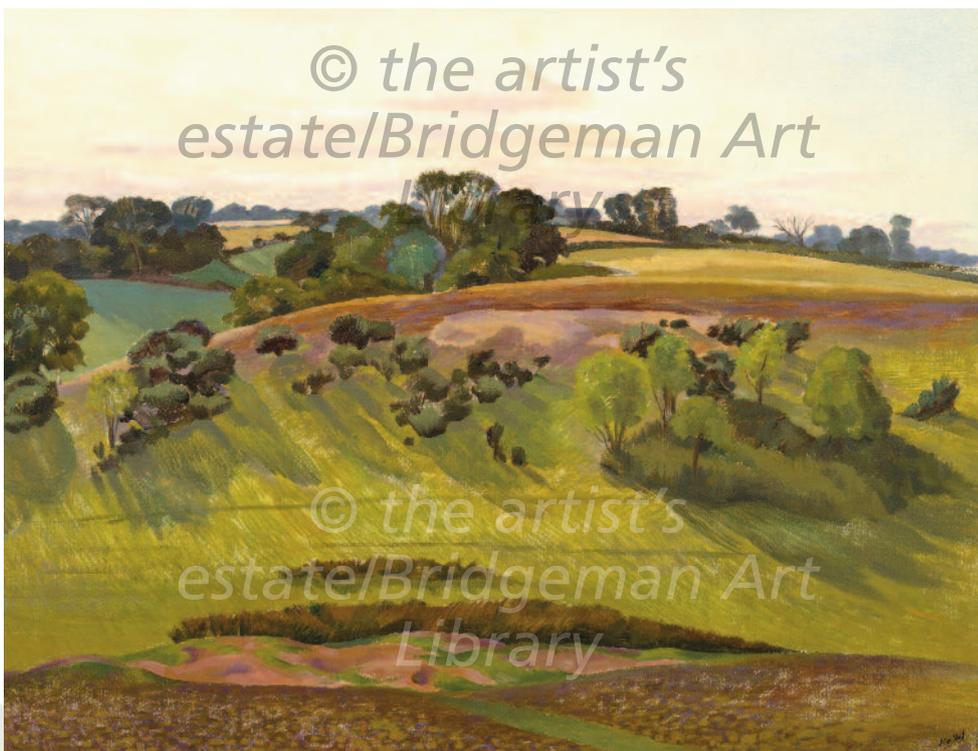
JOHN NASH
*Disused Canal at
Wormingford*
1958
Oil on canvas, 58.7 x 73cm
© the artist's
estate/Bridgeman Art
Library
photo credit Tate, London
2013

A Suffolk landscape

This picture reveals Nash's considerable skill at creating memorable paintings with an economy of means. The subject is a simple one, a valley side near Assington, dotted with small trees and bushes and lit by low, angled sunshine, while beyond the rolling East Anglian clay plateau reaches towards a distant horizon. The sky is un-dramatic and on the face of it there is relatively little to hold one's attention.

However, it's apparent simplicity belies a carefully considered design, while Nash's clever use of paint provides interest while never drawing attention to itself. In places the painting is improvisatory and has the appearance of a sketch, but this was clearly done deliberately as Nash's normal procedure was to work in the studio from drawings. The picture is divided up into a series of roughly horizontal plains. The largest contains the most important area of interest, the gently sloping valley side with its slanting areas of dappled sunlight and shade. Here Nash employs the subtle use of hatching, somewhat in the manner of his watercolours, to give the painting a rhythmic vitality. On the valley floor the painter has used an almost abstract network of warmer-toned brush strokes over a lighter under painting, anchoring the picture and providing a suggestion of different foliage on the valley floor.

This painting was finished in the late 1930s before Nash settled permanently in the Stour Valley. He jokingly referred to his Stour valley paintings as depicting 'the Suffolk and Essex highlands' and clearly relished the artistic opportunities provided by the sloping valley sides and gently undulating scenery.



JOHN NASH

A Suffolk Landscape

c1937-37

Oil on canvas, 61 x 81.3cm

© the artist's estate/Bridgeman Art Library

photo credit Tate, London 2013

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*Managing a
Masterpiece:*

The Stour Valley
Landscape Partnership