

Joseph M.W. Turner

Custom House, London Bridge, 1825

watercolour on paper
13.8 cm x 24.0 cm

Vancouver Art Gallery, Founders' Fund
VAG 31.35



Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

Joseph M.W. Turner

Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Image source: www.wikipedia.org

Artist's Biography

Nationality: British

Born: 1775-04-23, London, England

Died: 1851-12-19

J.M.W. Turner was born on April 23, 1775 in London. His father, William Turner, was a wig-maker who later became a barber. His mother, Mary Marshall, a housewife, became increasingly mentally unstable during his early years, perhaps in part due to the early death of Turner's younger sister in 1786. She died in 1804, having been committed to a mental asylum.

Possibly due to the load placed on the family by these problems, the young Turner was sent in 1785 to stay with his uncle on his mother's side in Brentford, which was then a small town west of London on the banks of the Thames. It was here that he first expressed an interest in painting. A year later he went to school in Margate in Kent to the east of London in the area of the Thames estuary. At this time he had been creating many paintings, which his father exhibited in his shop window.

He was accepted into the Royal Academy of Art when he was only 15 years old. At first Turner showed a keen interest in architecture but was advised to keep to painting by the architect Thomas Hardwick (junior). Sir Joshua Reynolds, the president of the Royal Academy at that time, chaired the panel that admitted him. A watercolour of his was accepted for the Summer Exhibition of 1790 after only one year's study. He exhibited his first oil painting in 1796. Throughout the rest of his life, he regularly exhibited at the academy.

He is commonly known as 'the painter of light'. Although renowned for his oils, Turner is also regarded as one of the founders of English watercolour landscape painting. Turner travelled widely in Europe, starting with France and Switzerland in 1802 and studying in the Louvre in Paris in the same year. He also made many visits to Venice during his lifetime. He never married, although he had a mistress, Sarah Danby, by whom he had two daughters.

As he grew older, Turner became more eccentric. He had few close friends, except for his father, who lived with him for thirty years, eventually working as his studio assistant. His father died in 1829, which had a profound effect on him, and thereafter he was subject to bouts of depression.

He died in his house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea on 19 December 1851. At his request he was buried in St Paul's Cathedral, where he lies next to Sir Joshua Reynolds. His last exhibition at the Royal Academy was in 1850.

Source: "J.M.W. Turner," *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. December 21, 2005. <http://www.wikipedia.org>.

Joseph M.W. Turner

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Artistic Context

Nationality: British

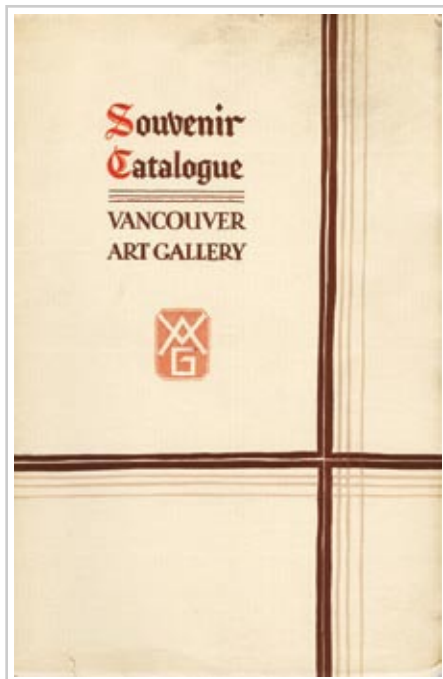
Training: Royal Academy, London

Peers: Thomas Girtin; John Constable

Group: British watercolour; Romanticism; Picturesque; 18th century; 19th century

Provenance: purchased from the Cotswold Gallery by Charles Scott and Henry Stone on behalf of the Founders in 1931; G. Hibbert, sale Christie 2 May 1860; John Farnworth, sale Christie 18 May 1847

Subject: landscape



Bibliography

Souvenir Catalogue: Vancouver Art Gallery

Publication
1931-10-5

[transcription]

Water Colours

J.M.W. Turner, R.A.
64 The Custom House, London Bridge. Circa. 1826

Notes on English Water Colours

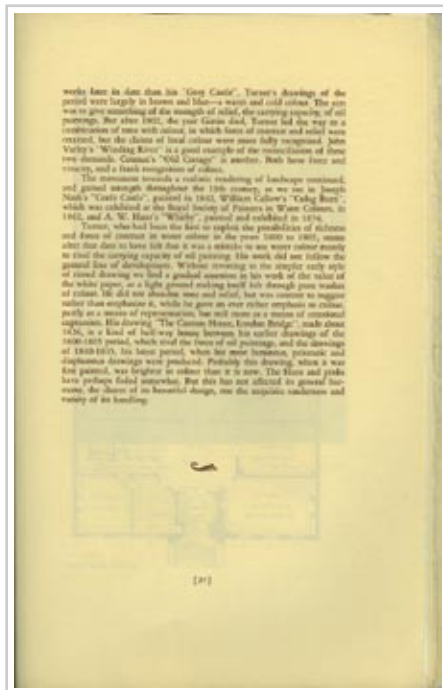
WHEN STUDYING the early English water colours it is important to bear in mind the date when the artist was born, as well as the date when any particular work was produced, for artists often continue to work all their lives in the manner acquired in their youth. For instance, the drawing of "Margam Abbey" was made in 1796, and Hearne's drawing of "Bowes Castle" was probably still later in date, yet they both belong to an earlier manner of working than that of "Croxden Abbey" by Edward Dayes and Girtin's "Grey Castle", although "Croxden Abbey" was painted in 1793 and the "Grey Castle" in 1795. The difference of manner is accounted for by the fact that Rooker and Hearne belonged to an earlier generation of water colourists than Dayes and Girtin; Hearne having been born in 1744, and Rooker in 1746, while Dayes was born in 1763 and Girtin in 1775.

The earlier men generally worked upon a monochrome foundation--i.e. pencil outlines, with pale washes of Indian ink for the shadows. Sometimes, when the drawings were intended to be engraved, they were completed in monochrome, as in Hearne's "View of Bowes Castle". At other times, the monochrome foundation was tinted with washes of pure colour, as in Rooker's "Chapter House at Margam".

"Dumbarton Town and Castle", by Joseph Farington (born 1747), which is dated 1788, is worked on the same principle. Alexander Cozens (born about 1740, or earlier) seldom used colour, being generally content with a few washes of Indian ink or sepia.

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Edward Dayes, who was born in 1763, introduced a slight variation on the earlier methods, by using washes of Prussian blue for the sky and distances, while he retained Indian ink for the foreground and middle distance. His drawing of "Croxtton Abbey" evidently begun in this way and completed with simple washes of red and yellow.

Thomas Girtin (born 1775) was apprenticed to Dayes and he produced a number of drawings in blue and grey. This sort of foundation is traceable in his drawing of "The Grey Castle", but it was produced after his apprenticeship, when he was beginning to strike out for himself. Although the methods are similar to those of Dayes, the handling is bolder, the colour more vigorous and the general effect more masculine.

Paul Sandby Munn (born 1773) was a member of Girtin's sketch-club and was influenced by Girtin's work. His drawing of "Grasmere", though it was produced after Girtin's death, is worked largely in Indian ink, with a sparing use of colour.

The works of the earlier men, like Cozens, Hearne and Rooker, were generally described as "tinted drawings", not as water colours. But with Girtin, in the two or three years before he died (in 1802), and with Turner, in his works produced between 1797 and 1802, the earlier "tinted" manner was abandoned, and water-colour painting, in the modern use of the term, was introduced. A fuller tonality was used, but the earlier drawings tended towards monochrome, like Munn's "Grasmere", or Girtin's.

works later in date than his "Grey Castle". Turner's drawings of the period were largely in brown and blue—a warm and cold colour. The aim was to give something of the strength of relief, the carrying capacity, of oil paintings. But after 1802, the year Girtin died, Turner led the way to a combination of tone with colour, in which force of contrast and relief were retained, but the claims of local colour were more fully recognized. John Varley's "Winding River" is a good example of the reconciliation of these two demands. Cotman's "Old Cottage" is another. Both have force and vivacity, and a frank recognition of colour.

The movement towards a realistic rendering of landscape continued, and gained strength throughout the 19th century, as we see in Joseph Nash's "Corfe Castle", painted in 1842, William Callow's "Culag Burn", which was exhibited at the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, in 1862, and A. W. Hunt's "Whitby", painted and exhibited in 1874.

Turner, who had been the first to exploit the possibilities of richness and force of contrast in water colour in the years 1800 to 1805, seems after that date to have felt that it was a mistake to use water colour merely to rival the carrying capacity of oil painting. His work did not follow the general line of development. Without reverting to the simpler early style of tinted drawing we find a gradual, assertion in his work of the value of the white paper, as a light ground making itself felt through pure washes of colour. He did not abandon tone and relief, but was content to suggest rather than emphasize it, while he gave an ever richer emphasis to colour, partly as a means of representation, but still more as a means of emotional expression. His drawing "The Custom House, London Bridge", made about 1826, is a kind of halfway house between his earlier drawings of the 1800-1805 period, which rival the force of oil paintings, and the drawings of 1840-1845, his latest period, when his most luminous, prismatic and diaphanous drawings were produced. Probably this drawing, when it was first painted, was brighter in colour than it is now. The blues and pinks have perhaps faded somewhat. But this has not affected its general harmony, the charm of its beautiful design, nor the exquisite tenderness and variety of its handling.

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Souvenir Catalogue: Opening the New Vancouver Art Gallery, 1951.

Publication
1951-09-26

[transcription]

STUDIO "A"

WATERCOLOURS FROM OUR PERMANENT COLLECTION

During the eighteenth century in England a school of artists developed who recorded the beauties of famous houses and landscape views, mostly in monochrome drawings tinted in water-colour. Some of them became extremely skilful and their work surpassed the merely topographical aspect.

Of these the earliest was Paul Sandby (No. 2), who was also a good figure painter. Other outstanding members of this school represented in our collection are Michael Angelo Rooker (No. 6), a pupil of Sandby; Thomas Hearne (No. 3); Joseph Farington (No. 17), a pupil of Richard Wilson and Edward Dayes (No. 4), whose work is often difficult to distinguish from early Turners.

Carrying forward this style into the nineteenth century, we have examples by P. Sandby Munn (No. 13) and John Varley (No. 10) who was for a time influenced by Girtin to a broader and more sober style.

In addition to this native school, mostly concerned with making a pictorial record, were other artists whose visits to Italy had brought them in contact with a more classic conception of landscape composition. Among these were Francis Towne, Alexander Cozens (No. 1), and John Robert Cozens.

It was in the topographic school that Girtin (No. 5) and Turner (No. 15) had their foundation. They were both employed in their youth making copies of water-colours in the collection of Dr. Monro. Girtin died at the age of 27, but in that short time he achieved a breadth of style which has had a great influence on other artists, including Turner.

Slightly younger than Girtin was Cotman (Nos 18, 19, 21) who was not so much concerned with a naturalistic rendering as in achieving a rhythmic design. He had masterly grasp of structure, evident in his architectural drawings.

Turner meanwhile had passed beyond the topographical stage, beyond the Girtin influence, to a final mastery of light never before achieved. Our example probably belongs to his middle period when he was engaged on the numerous series of elaborate water-colours for reproduction by engraving.

David Cox (No. 12), had a few lessons from Varley, but was mostly self-taught. He also became a drawing master for a livelihood. W. J. Muller (No. 11), a painter of extraordinary skill, produced a mass of work before his early death at the age of 33. Joseph Nash (No. 14), is best known for his architectural interiors. Evans of Bristol (No. 16) lived for many years in North Wales and excelled in depicting its rough scenery.

The artists of the second half of the nineteenth century developed a greater complexity of technique as can be readily seen from our examples. But many of them, in a vain effort to imitate the solidity of oil paintings, sacrificed the freshness and luminosity which are the chief attraction of the water-colour medium.

J. A. MORRIS,
Curator.

Joseph M.W. Turner

Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



British and Canadian Watercolours

Publication
1992-07-11

[transcription of excerpt]

BRITISH AND CANADIAN WATERCOLOURS
July 11 -October 4

Introduction

This exhibition of watercolours from the permanent collection provides an opportunity for viewers to study the work of leading British artists from the height of the watercolour tradition, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, alongside early Canadian-colourists. This comparison reveals not only the debt of the Canadians to their British inheritance, but also the ways in which the Romantic tradition of picturesque representations of the landscape functioned historically at two different times. During the Industrial Revolution, artists such as John Varley, J M.W. Turner and John Sell Cotman developed a range of technical skills, now considered classic, to depict nostalgic, idealized views of rural life. In Canada, Lucius O'Brien, John Arthur Fraser, Frederic Marlett Bell-Smith and Charles John Collins, among others, applied the same techniques to idealize a colonized North American landscape. Today, while these paintings provide us with a compendium of technical excellence, their pictorial content is historically ironic.

The Development of Watercolour Materials in Britain

Watercolour painting came about as a way of tinting prints and drawings with washes of colour. It was not until the late eighteenth-century that it came to be used as a medium in its own right. This was aided by new inventions in paper-making and colour pigments. Watercolour paper was invented by James Whatman in the 1780s. He produced a paper with a smooth surface suitable for washes, by using a finely woven wire-cloth to mould the paper pulp. At the same time, William Reeves was producing water-colour in dry cakes, saving artists the chore of grinding their own pigments. Some years later, moist colours in porcelain pans were available, and by 1846 Windsor and Newton sold colours in metal tubes.

The new art products allowed a revolution in painting--for both the professional artist and the amateur. Fast-drying watercolour could be used easily outdoors, allowing artists to produce finished paintings on-the spot. This introduced freshness, spontaneity and accuracy to landscape painting. Furthermore, the ease and rapidity of watercolour painting, in comparison with oil painting, encouraged its development into a socially-approved past-time, providing travel souvenirs, and diversion on Sunday outings to the country.

British Watercolours, 1775-1875

The landscape tradition was highly developed in England around 1800. Watercolour was first used to make military records of topography, and archaeological records of monuments and ruins. Paul Sandby (1731-1809), considered the "father" of British watercolour painting, perfected

topographical and architectural views, and exerted wide influence as a drawing instructor at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. He taught several of the

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Custom House, London Bridge, 1825

The increasing number of amateur artists provided support for professional artists as collectors, art students, and also provided artists with travel and the chance to see the work of others. Professional success was, however, precarious for even the best watercolourists. Most relied upon teaching, and some on speculative publishing ventures, to obtain an income. The success of J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) was unusual, and was alternately a source of inspiration and envy to his contemporaries. Turner began his career making watercolour views of landscape and architecture for an architect, and tinting prints for an engraver. He was encouraged by Dr. Thomas Monro, the physician and patron of several young artists — including J.R. Cozens, Thomas Girtin, J.S. Cotman, and John Varley. A collector, Monro had the artists copy prints and drawings for him, providing a small fee and the opportunity to meet and learn from each other. The Custom House, London Bridge, shows Turner's ability in topographical views and may have been done for publication as an engraving.



John Sell Cotman, *Cottage at Hobland*, watercolour, Collection of the V&A

Another protégé of Dr. Monro, John Sell Cotman (1782-1842) had several patrons to whom he was friend, teacher, adviser and collaborator. One such relationship was with the Reverend James Bulwer. Bulwer was a rector, amateur artist, and a student of Cotman. He collected Cotman's work and experimented with his techniques. Cotman's *Point Lorenzo, Madeira*, is based on a view which Cotman had never seen, but knew from a drawing made by Bulwer in Portugal. A number of our Cotman works come from Bulwer's collection. Cotman's *The Escort, Normandy*, comes from a series of works based on medieval Norman history for reproduction as folios of prints for sale by subscription. Cotman's *Cottage at Hob-*

artists in this exhibition, including Hearne, Dayes, and Rooker, and his own adoptive son, Munn, and these artists in turn were important to the next generation (Girtin and Turner). Sandby and members of his family taught the British officers who traveled abroad, many to Canada, and used drawing and watercolour not only to survey colonial territories, but also to record their impressions of new lands.

The artistic case for landscape in this period is known as the "picturesque." This was a codified view of nature as an idyllic setting of beauty and splendour unaffected by human events. The picturesque was based on Italian landscape paintings of seventeenth-century artist, Claude Lorrain, which were widely known in prints. In Lorrain's arcadian scenes, the composition is organized into a measured recession of spatial planes framed by trees or cliffs. Foreground, middle and far distance are linked by visual devices such as lakes and bridges and small figures or distant ruins provide a foil for the immensity of nature. This formula is evident in many of the paintings on display, such as John Varley's *The Winding River*, where the mountains of Wales are transformed into an Italian scene.


This ideal view of landscape masked the radical transformation of the English countryside that took place between 1750 and 1815. Increased city populations together with the French wars, created a demand for agricultural production and hence for arable land. A grid-like order was imposed on open land to enclose it into large holdings. The picturesque denied social and economic realities, screening out the signs of ownership and production in the real countryside and showing man in a harmonious and subordinate relationship to an unreal nature.

land represents another attempt to earn income. Its subject and the number in the lower right corner indicate that it belongs to the series of watercolours which Cotman advertised as a "lending library" for art students.

Canadian Watercolours, 1800-1925

British officers trained in drawing and painting at military college, together with their wives, were among the earliest Canadian artists. They typically combined topographical accuracy with the picturesque vision in landscape views made as souvenirs. The scenery of Niagara Falls and the Rocky Mountains, in particular, provided the untouched "wildness" and grandeur which appealed to the picturesque imagination. As Canada was developed, and expanded westward, forestry, mining, agriculture, and industrialization transformed the landscape. Many artists, however, continued to depict the land as an untouched, picturesque wilderness.

George Heriot (1759-1839) was one of the earliest artists in Canada, a Scotsman who studied with Paul Sandby at Woolwich. Deputy post-master general in British North America from 1792 to 1816, Heriot travelled frequently to inspect postal stations, making sketches along the way. The picturesque, arcadian image of the Canadian landscape evident in Colonel Nairne's *Settlement at Adir Bayreca*, John Varley. Many of his watercolour scenes appeared as prints in *Travels through Canada*, 1807.



Frederic, Marie-Belle Smith, *The Glacier of the 'Seser'*, watercolour, Collection of the V&A

Frederic Mariett Bell-Smith (1846-1923) created some of the first images of the Canadian West. Born in England, he applied his British training to work as a photographer and illustrator in Toronto and Montreal. He arrived in the West in 1887 as part of a Canadian Pacific Railway scheme to

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Custom House, London Bridge, 1825

Further Reading

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Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Inaugural Exhibition. October 5, 1931.

Opening the New Vancouver Art Gallery. September 26 - October 14, 1951.

British and Canadian Watercolours. July 11 - October 4, 1992.

75 Years of Collecting: British Masters, Group of Seven and Pop Icons. February 4, 2006 - May 14, 2006.

Selected Exhibitions Outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

Art Gallery of Toronto, Toronto. 1935.

Joseph M.W. Turner
 Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Archival History

Cheque Stub
 Acquisition Record
 1931-06-25

[transcription of excerpt]

No. B5888

June 25th 1931

In favor of
 A.J. Finburg
 15 W.C.
 £285.50

[31.35 in pencil]



Accession Record
 Acquisition Record
 1931-08-06

[transcription of excerpt]

92 15 Watercolours. Finburg. 285.0.0

[31.35 in pencil]

Accession Record
 Acquisition Record
 1931-08-06

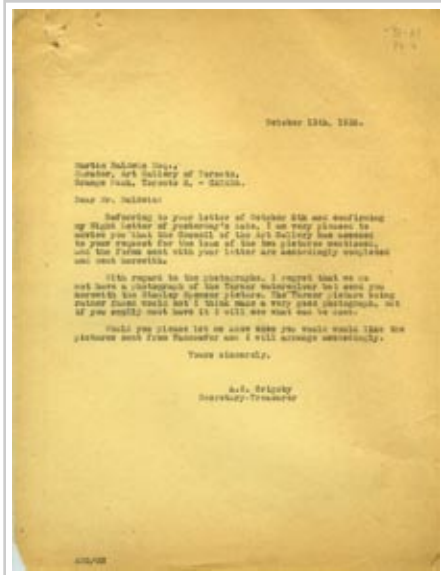
[transcription of excerpt]

Framed Water Colors

14 "The Pool London" J.M.W. Turner R.A., 1810 85.0.0

[31.35 in pencil]

Joseph M.W. Turner
Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Art Gallery of Toronto Loan
Correspondence
1935-10-13

[transcription]

October 13, 1935

Martin Baldwin Esq.,
Curator, Art Gallery of Toronto
Grange Park, Toronto 2 - Canada

Dear Mr. Baldwin:

Referring to your letter of October 5th and confirming my Night Letter of yesterday's date, I am very pleased to advise you that the Council of the Art Gallery has acceded to your request for the loan of the two pictures mentioned, and the forms sent with your letter are accordingly complete and sent herewith.

With regard to the photographs, I regret that we do not have a photograph of the Turner watercolour but send you herewith the Stanley Spencer picture. The Turner picture being rather faded would not I think make a very good photograph, but if you really must have it I will see what can be done.

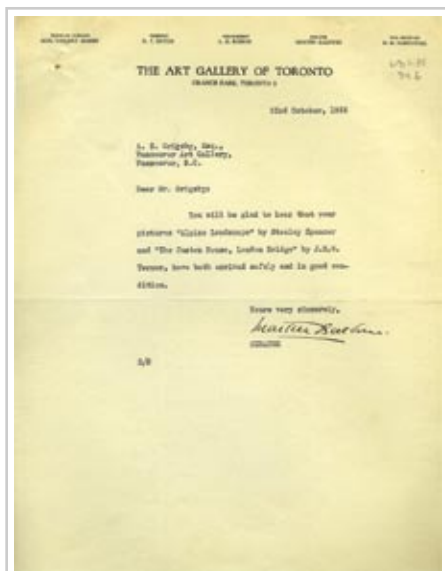
Would you please let me know when you would like the pictures sent from Vancouver and I will arrange accordingly.

Yours Sincerely,

A.S. Grigsby
Secretary-Treasurer

[31.35, 34.6 in pencil]

Joseph M.W. Turner
Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Art Gallery of Toronto Loan
Correspondence
1935-10-23

[transcription]

The Art Gallery of Toronto
Grange Park, Toronto 2

23rd October, 1935

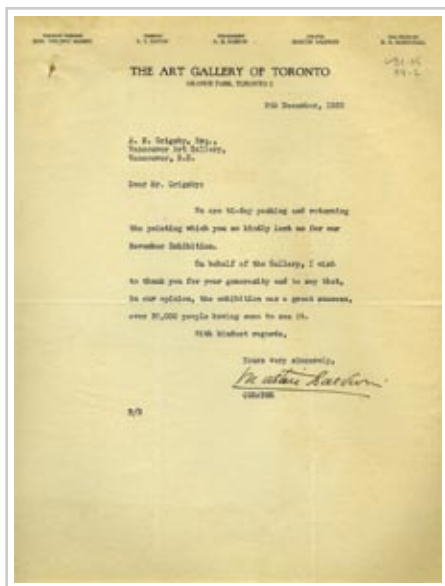
A.S. Grigsby, Esq.,
Vancouver Art Gallery,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Mr. Grigsby:

You will be glad to hear that your pictures "Alpine Landscape" by Stanley Spencer and "The Custom House, London Bridge" by J.M.W. Turner, have both arrived safely and in good condition.

Yours very sincerely,
[Martin Baldwin signed in ink]
Curator

[31.35, 34.6 in pencil]



Art Gallery of Toronto Loan
Correspondence
1935-12-09

[transcription]

The Art Gallery of Toronto
Grange Park, Toronto 2

9th December, 1935

A.S. Grigsby, Esq.,
Vancouver Art Gallery,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Mr. Grigsby:

We are to-day packing and returning the painting which you so kindly lent us for our November Exhibition.

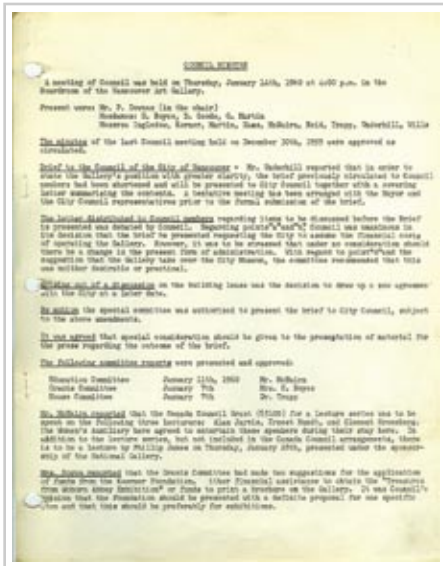
On behalf of the Gallery, I wish to thank you for your generosity and to say that, in our opinion, the exhibition was a great success, over 32,000 people having come to see it.

With kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,
[Martin Baldwin signed in ink]
Curator

Joseph M.W. Turner

Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Council Minutes

Miscellaneous History

1960-01-14

[transcription of excerpt]

COUNCIL MINUTES

A meeting of Council was held on Thursday, January 14, 1960 at 4:00 p.m. in the Boardroom of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Present were: Mr. P. Downes (in the chair)

Mesdames: H. Boyce, D. Goode, G. Martin

Messrs: Ingledew, Korner, Martin, Haas, McNair, Reid, Trapp, Underhill, Wills

Dr. Dale reported on the recent theft of art works from the Gallery. On Monday January 11th 1960 it was discovered that 8 Old Masters and 14 Byzantine Icons had been stolen. It was assumed that the thieves had hidden themselves in the Gallery on the Sunday afternoon (Jan. 10th) and evidence was found that they had broken out by the fire doors at the rear of the Gallery. Local police and the R.C.M.P. were investigating the case, and the Insurance company had posted a reward of \$1,500. Dr. Dale stressed that such a loss jeopardized our borrowing position, and that already a scheduled loan exhibition from the East had been canceled.

Security precautions are now in effect to ensure that the building is guarded at all times and involve the use of the Corps of Commissionaires, Pinkerton's guards, the Chief Handler and his dog, and the continued use of the two men on night maintenance. Council was informed that the method of insuring the collection was based on the current selling prices for contemporary painting, and that the more valuable section of the collection was based on world markets at the time the policy was drawn up. In view of the fact that the present insurance values would not begin to cover the actual worth of the paintings stolen, the Gallery will therefore suffer a loss.

After discussion it was agreed that the Fine Arts policy be reviewed as frequently as possible, to avoid such a loss. It was also agreed that the House Committee should enquire as to possible alternatives for the future security of the Gallery, and that Mr. Reid consult with the Director on the present insurance policies held at the Gallery. The Director was asked to formally notify the City Council of theft.

They were as follows:

- Oil GEORGE ROMNEY 'Portrait of Major Pierson'
- Oil W. HOGARTH 'Portrait of Mr. Bridgeman'
- Oil JOHN CROME 'Mill Scene with a Bridge'
- Oil T.S. COOPER 'Canterbury Meadows'
- Oil JOHANNES VAN RAVESTEIN 'Portrait of a Woman'
- Oil ADOLPHE MONTICELLI 'The Bathing Pool'
- Oil W. HOARE 'Portrait of Sir Watkin Wynn'

Watercolour J. TURNER 'The Custom House, London Bridge'

From the private collection of Ian Vorres, on loan to the Vancouver Art Gallery

14 Byzantine Icons

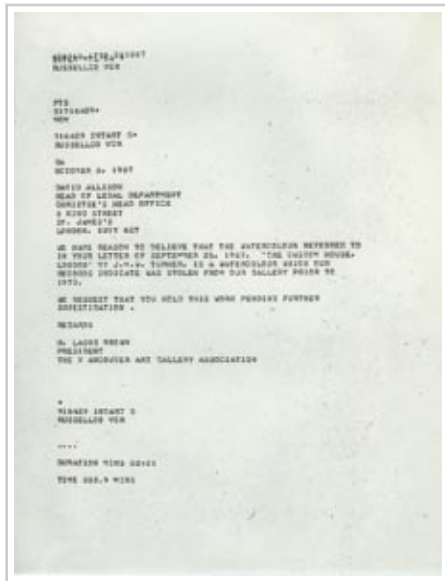
Joseph M.W. Turner
Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Catalogue Card
Miscellaneous History
1961

[transcription of excerpt]

Stolen Jan.10-1960 - Recovered Jan. 20th, 1960



Fax
Miscellaneous History
1987-10-08

[transcription]

PT5
51916429+
MOM

916429 INTART G+
RUSSELLCO VCR

GA
OCTOBER 8, 1987

DAVID ALLISON
HEAD OF LEGAL DEPARTMENT
CHRISTIE'S HEAD OFFICE
8 KING STREET
ST. JAMES'S
LONDON, SW1Y 6S1T

WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE WATERCOLOUR REFERRED TO IN YOUR LETTER OF SEPTEMBER 25, 1987 "THE CUSTOM HOUSE-LONDON" BY J.M.W. TURNER, IS A WATERCOLOUR WHICH OUR RECORDS INDICATE WAS STOLEN FROM OUR GALLERY PRIOR TO 1970.

WE REQUEST THAT YOU HOLD THIS WORK PENDING FURTHER INVESTIGATION

REGARDS

H. LAING BROWN
PRESIDENT
THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY ASSOCIATION

916425 INTART G
RUSSELLCO VCR

DURATION MINS 02:01

TIME 002.9 MINS

Joseph M.W. Turner
 Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Board Minutes
 Miscellaneous History
 1987-10-21

[transcription of excerpt]

The Vancouver Art Gallery Association
 Minutes of the Board Meeting

Held Wednesday, October 21, 1987 at 4:30 p.m.

Willard summarized the situation regarding a painting which had been

left at Christie's in London for appraisal, which had turned out to be a painting originally stolen from the VAG prior to 1970. Whilst in Europe, Willard will visit Christie's and the London lawyers dealing with this to see if the VAG can retrieve the painting, alleged to be a watercolour by J.W. Turner.



Board Minutes
 Miscellaneous History
 1989-02-22

[transcription of excerpt]

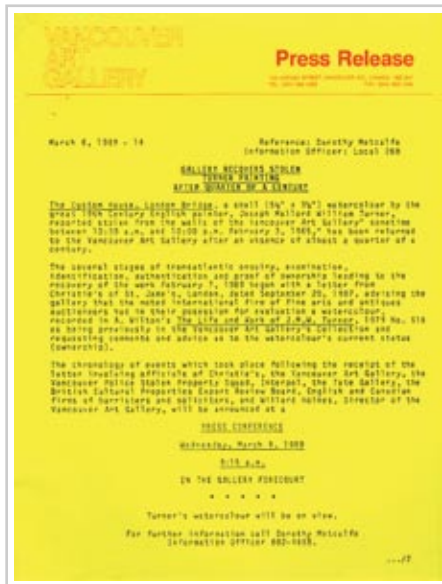
The Vancouver Art Gallery Association
 Minutes of the Board Meeting

Held Wednesday October 21, 1987 at 4:30 p.m.

Turner Watercolour

Mr. Holmes showed the Board the Turner which had come back in good condition. Its value was increasing daily. The latest appraisal received from the Tate Gallery was thirty thousand pounds. A press release was being planned. A new conservator with excellent credentials would begin work at the Gallery in April. Her first task would be a slight restoration on the Turner.

Joseph M.W. Turner
Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Press Release
Miscellaneous History
1989-03-06

[transcription]

Press Release

750 HORNBY STREET VANCOUVER, B.C., CANADA V6Z 2H7
TEL: (604) 682-4668 FAX: (604) 682-1086

March 6, 1989 - 14
Reference: Dorothy Metcalfe
Information Officer: Local 268

**GALLERY RECOVERS STOLEN
TURNER PAINTING
AFTER QUARTER OF A CENTURY**

The Custom House, London Bridge, a small (5 1/2" x 9 1/4") watercolour by the great 19th Century English painter, Joseph Mallord William Turner, reported stolen from the walls of the Vancouver Art Gallery" sometime between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. February 3, 1965, has been returned to the Vancouver Art Gallery after an absence of almost a quarter of a century.

The several stages of transatlantic enquiry, examination, identification, authentication and proof of ownership leading to the recovery of the work February 7, 1989 began with a letter from Christie's of St. James's, London, dated September 20, 1987, advising the gallery that the noted international firm of fine arts and antiques auctioneers had in their possession for evaluation a watercolour, recorded in A. Wilton's *The Life and Work of J.M.W. Turner, 1974* No. 516 as being previously in the Vancouver Art Gallery's Collection and requesting comments and advice as to the watercolour's current status (ownership).

The chronology of events which took place following the receipt of the letter involving officials of Christie's, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Vancouver Police Stolen Property Squad, Interpol, the Tate Gallery, the British Cultural Properties Export Review Board, English and Canadian firms of barristers and solicitors, and Willard Holmes, Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, will be announced at a

PRESS CONFERENCE

Wednesday, March 8, 1989

9:15 am

IN THE GALLERY FORECOURT
Turner's watercolour will be on view.
For further information call Dorothy Metcalfe
Information Officer 682-4668.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Custom House, London Bridge was acquired by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1931, from a \$100,000 Founders Fund, established by the Gallery's first president H.A. Stone. Mr. Stone, and Charles N. Scott, director of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts and first chairman of the Gallery's Purchase and Acceptance Committee, were commissioned by the Founders to go to Britain and the Continent to purchase works for the Gallery's fledgling collection.

Joseph M.W. Turner

Custom House, London Bridge, 1825

Their initial purchases were seen in the inaugural exhibition at the new Gallery, 1145 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, which included 55 paintings, 33 water colours, 25 prints and drawings and four sculpture. Most were late 19th and early 20th Century works, reflecting Vancouver's conservative, British Influenced taste.

The painting was also listed in an exhibition of watercolours from the Vancouver Art Gallery's Collection on the occasion of the opening of the extension to the Vancouver Art Gallery September 26, 1951.

The Custom House, London Bridge was also figured in a major art theft from the Vancouver Art Gallery involving a collection of icons and paintings which were on exhibition January 11, 1960. The works including the Turner watercolour, were recovered by Vancouver police at the CNR depot, January 20, 1960.

In 1953 the painting had been examined in the Gallery's vaults by a Turner connoisseur who claimed it was "not by Turner's hand and of little consequence". Contemporary Turner scholars, including Andrew Wilton, who assessed *The Custom House, London Bridge* for the Vancouver Art Gallery, have now identified the work as a true Turner, painted circa 1825.

Joseph M.W. Turner

Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



News Clipping

Miscellaneous History
1989-03-08

[transcription]

A Turner Turns up Again

Stolen Painting: returned to the Vancouver Art Gallery after 24 years is displayed today by gallery director Willard Holmes. The Joseph Mallord Turner watercolour is worth at least \$300,000.

"Gallery Gets Back Stolen Painting" The Vancouver Sun. Wednesday March 8, 1989 A16

The Vancouver Art Gallery has recovered a small 19th-century watercolor by British painter Joseph Mallord Turner that was stolen in 1965 and is now said to be worth at least \$300,000.



VAG director Willard Holmes displayed the badly damaged five-by-nine-inch landscape today and said its recovery came after months of investigation and transatlantic negotiations.

Holmes said the watercolor, titled *The Custom House, London Bridge* and purchased by the VAG in 1931, was stolen in 1965. Officials decided not to report the theft, in part because they assumed, on the basis of an appraisal by a now-discredited expert, that the painting was a fake, he said.

(The expert, Briton Paul Oppe, was discredited when it was discovered at his death in 1957 that his own collection contained a large number of fakes. But the gallery failed to re-evaluate his advice.)

The story of the VAG's missing Turner resumed in 1987 when an anonymous man appeared at Christie's in London, requesting an evaluation of the painting.

Christie's identified it as a work by Turner, learned that it had been held by the VAG at one time, and contacted the gallery, which then began making arrangements for its recovery.

"It has cost us legal fees, a couple of trips to London and thousands of hours of time," Holmes said.

Holmes said he retained two British art experts, Andrew Wilton and Evelyn Joll, who confirmed that the watercolor is an original. But in order to get the painting back into Canada, "we had to prove that this was a drawing that had been stolen from here," Holmes said.

He also had to prove that it had entered Britain only in the last 50 years, because the British Export Licensing Department claims as "cultural property" any works of art that have been in the country more than half a century.

Holmes said that he has little information about the Christie's client who held the watercolor.

"The man is not a British national, he may live in Greece and he claimed he was given the painting by an American friend who found it in a library," he said, adding that the man disappeared after he was told of the VAG connection.

Holmes said the painting is in poor shape, scratched on the left side, and badly

Joseph M.W. Turner
Custom House, London Bridge, 1825

faded from too much exposure to ultraviolet light. He believes it was left unframed for most of the 24 years it was missing.

Although Holmes wouldn't put a value on the painting, Vancouver art dealer Tony Westbridge said a small watercolor by Turner—"if everything was right"—could be worth "three or four hundred thousand" dollars on the open market.

The painting will be put on public view for a brief display in about "four or five days" Holmes said. Conservation and restoration work is expected to begin in April.



Condition Report

Conservation
1989-09-23

[transcription]

FINE ART CONSERVATION
ART ON PAPER - TEXTILES - CONSULTATION & TREATMENT

CONDITION REPORT/TREATMENT PROPOSAL

Object: watercolor

Artist: Turner, Joseph

Title: Customs House, London Bridge

Support: white, light-weight, wove watercolor paper

Media: watercolor

Dimensions: H 13.8 x W 24 cm

Owner: Vancouver Art Gallery

CONDITION

The support is glued to a light-medium weight paper board, which appears to be rag and/or chemical wood pulp. This secondary support is hinged to acid corrugated cardboard. There are two light scratches in the upper half of the watercolor. The watercolor appears to be faded overall.

TREATMENT PROPOSAL

1. Remove primary/secondary supports from cardboard backing.
2. Remove secondary backing from primary support.
3. If desired by curator, tone the two scratches in the upper half of the watercolor.

ESTIMATED COST

Removal of secondary support \$100.00 - \$125.00
Toning of scratches \$50.00 - \$75.00

CONSERVATOR Rebecca Pavitt

DATE August 23, 1989

1469 East 10th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C., Canada, V5N 1X4

Joseph M.W. Turner
Custom House, London Bridge, 1825



Treatment Report

Conservation
1989-10-02

[transcription]

FINE ART CONSERVATION
ART ON PAPER - TEXTILES - CONSULTATION & TREATMENT

Condition Report/Treatment Proposal

Object: watercolor

Artist: Turner, Joseph

Title: Customs House, London Bridge

Support: white, light-weight, wove, rag, watercolor paper with little texture

Media: watercolor

Dimensions: H 13.8 x W 24 cm

Owner: Vancouver Art Gallery

TREATMENT

1. The secondary supports were removed from the corrugated cardboard, by removing hinges.
2. The secondary support was thinned, using a scalpel. Residue was removed using water and a blunt scalpel, followed by damp cotton swabs.
3. Scratches in the image - top left and lower right - were toned with watercolor.
4. Humidified and pressed.

CONSERVATOR Rebecca Pavitt

DATE: October 2, 1989

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