The Towers of Fribourg

John Ruskin

Sold



REF: 1930

1

Description

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John Ruskin (1819-1900)
The Towers of Fribourg

Signed with initials lower centre
Pen and black ink and watercolour over pencil heightened with white on blue paper
37.2 by 24.6 cm., 14 1/2 by 9 1/2 in.

Provenance:
Constance (Connie) Hilliard (1852-1915
Literature:
The Works of John Ruskin (The Library Edition), ed. E.T. Cook & A. Wedderburn, 1903-1912, Vol. XXXVIII (inc. Catalogue of Ruskin's Drawings), no. 737, p. 253

This drawing is likely to be the one of the same size listed in Cook and Wedderburn as `Tower of Fribourg.' In the Catalogue, the owner is given as Mrs. W.H. Churchill and the date of the drawing as 1856. This was Constance (Connie) Hilliard, who became Mrs Churchill. Her husband was the vicar of Reigate, and the present drawing came from a collection very close to Reigate. Connie Hilliard was the niece of Lady Trevelyan and Ruskin first met her at Wallington in 1863 (when she was 12 years old). She accompanied Ruskin on his continental tours (Italy and Switzerland) in 1866, 1870 and 1872. Connie is referred to by Ruskin in a letter of 1866 as "my little daisy", and in a letter of 1869 Ruskin signed himself to her as "your loving cuzzie". In addition to being amongst Ruskin's closest female friends, she was a lifelong friend of Joan Severn, being the same age as her. Either Ruskin or Joan could have given Connie the drawing at any time, but it is more likely to have been Ruskin in the 1870s.

Ruskin visited Fribourg in 1854 on his way to Chamonix and again in 1856 when he was planning a series of engravings of Swiss towns to illustrate Swiss history. He was there with his parents from 9th to 14th July 1856 and then returned alone from 23rd August to 2nd September. He wrote `Out of four months on the Continent, I have taken only ten days of whole work, and ten days half work: those were to make some drawings of old bits of Thun and Fribourg, likely to be destroyed before I get back to them again' (Letter to Pauline, Lady Trevelyan, 26th September 1856). He mainly drew the town's towers, walls and densely grouped houses. The present drawing shows the Tour des Chats, the Porte de Berne in the foreground, then the Tour des Chats with the Tour Rouge beyond. Fourteen of Fribourg's medieval towers still exist today mainly to the south and east of the town.

This drawing appears to be the basis for the watercolour of the same view in the British Museum which was engraved for Modern Painters in 1856, although the watercolour omits the Tour Rouge (see Robert Hewison, Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites, exhibition catalogue, 2000, no.146, p.164, ill.). Ruskin comments on this drawing: `The other day I sketched the towers of the Swiss Fribourg hastily from the Hôtel de Zähringen. It was a misty morning with broken sunshine, and the towers were seen by flickering light through broken clouds, - dark blue mist filling the hollow of the valley behind them.'

Other Fribourg drawings by Ruskin are in the British Museum (2), the Ashmolean, Fitzwilliam, Abbott Hall, the Fogg Art Gallery, Harvard, the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne and the Ruskin Library, Lancaster (2). Many of these drawings are illustrated in John H...

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