

The North Front of Chalfont Lodge, Buckinghamshire

Thomas Girtin



Description

Thomas Girtin (1775-1802)
The North Front of Chalfont Lodge, Buckinghamshire

Signed lower right: Thos. Girtin
Watercolour over traces of pencil heightened with bodycolour
42 by 54.9 cm., 16 ½ by 21 ½ in.

Provenance:

Commissioned by Thomas Hibbert (1744-1819);
By descent to Leicester Hibbert (1826-1909);
Possibly C. Wyndham Tryon;
Harry Littlewood, M.R.C.S., C.M.G. (1861-1921), circa 1910;
By descent until 2018

Literature:

Probably T.Girtin and D. Loshak, *The Art of Thomas Girtin*, 1954, p.167, no.244

The present watercolour formed one of a group of four works depicting the Chalfont estate, commissioned by its owner Thomas Hibbert (1744-1819). The other views depict The South Front of Chalfont Lodge (Birmingham Art Gallery), Chalfont House, from the North West and Chalfont House, from the North East, with Fishermen Netting the Broadwater (both Private Collection, Herefordshire). They are amongst the largest of Girtin's compositions and were obviously intended to be hung together. There is a smaller view of the South Front of Chalfont Lodge, from the Lawn, in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, which was commissioned by Thomas' brother Robert (1750-1843), who lived in the lodge, until he inherited the estate in 1819 on the death of his elder brother.

The wealthy Jamaican merchant, Thomas Hibbert bought the estate in 1791. Chalfont House had been designed by John Chute (1701-76) for Colonel Charles Churchill (c.1720-1812) in 1755, in the Gothic style that he had employed for Churchill's brother-in-law, Horace Walpole (1717-97), at Strawberry Hill. In 1799, Hibbert commissioned John Nash (1752-1835) to remodel the house in a gentler, more picturesque gothic manner. He also had the grounds, originally designed by 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783), remodelled by Humphrey Repton (1752-1818). It seems that Girtin was commissioned to depict the estate following the extensive remodelling. It is interesting to note that Girtin had also collaborated with Repton at Harewood House, Yorkshire, the seat of Girtin's notable patron, Edward Lascelles (1764-1814), although whether this is coincidental, or whether Repton had a hand in Girtin's employment is unknown.

The Lodge, depicted here, was designed by John Nash, for Thomas' younger brother, Robert. Situated about 700 metres, to the north-east of the main house, the lodge was a substantial building with its own grounds, lake and kitchen garden. Intended both to provide a suitable and pleasing home for Thomas's brother and to provide interest and beauty for the owner of the estate, the lodge was cleverly situated to take advantage of the existing established trees and planting, to help bed the new schemes into the wider landscape.

The watercolours remained together in the Hibbert family, until 1909, when this and the other view of the south front of the Lodge were sold at Christie's. In about 1910, the distinguished surgeon Harry Littlewood (1861-1921), who formed a notable collection of watercolours, purchased the present view and it remained in his family until 2018.

The present watercolour demonstrates Girtin's extraordinary mastery of both watercolour and bodycolour highlight...