

Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland

Thomas Girtin



Description

Thomas Girtin (1775-1802)
Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland

Signed lower left: T. Girtin 1797 and inscribed on reverse of backing: Bamborough Castle/Northumberland
Watercolour over traces of pencil heightened with bodycolour on laid paper
41.7 by 54.7 cm., 16 ¼ by 21 ½ in.

Provenance:

George Selby (1724-1804) of Twizell House, Adderstone near Bamburgh, Northumberland;
By descent to Sir Geoffrey Selby Church, 2nd Bt. (1887-1979) of Woodside Place, Hertfordshire, his
Executors' sale, Sotheby's, 13th March 1980, lot 137, where bought by the father of the present owners

Literature:

Randall Davis, 'Thomas Girtin's Watercolours', *The Studio*, 1924, p.21, ill. pl.76;
Thomas Girtin and David Loshak, *The Art of Thomas Girtin*, 1954, no. 192, ill. fig. 34;
David Hill, *Thomas Girtin - Genius in the North*, 1999, p.8;
Huon Mallalieu, *The Dictionary of Watercolour Artists up to 1920*, 2002, p.270, ill.

Exhibited:

London, Thos. Agnew & Sons, Loan Exhibition, 1931, no.132;
London, Thos. Agnew & Sons, Loan Exhibition of Water-colour Drawings by Thomas Girtin, 1953, no.15;
Beijing, China Art Gallery, British Watercolours and Drawings from Rowlandson to Riley, British Council
exhibition, 11th March to 7th April 1982, no.27;
Shenyang Art Gallery, China British Watercolours and Drawings from Rowlandson to Riley, British Council
exhibition 17th April to 16th May 1982, no.27;
Hong Kong Museum of Art, British Watercolours and Drawings from Rowlandson to Riley, British Council
exhibition 11th to 30th June 1982, no.27;
Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Academy, British Watercolours and Drawings from Rowlandson to Riley, British
Council exhibition, 20th August to 11th November 1982, no.27

This important watercolour, in excellent condition, is based on sketches drawn on Girtin's first major independent tour, to the north of England and southern Scotland, in the summer of 1796. Dated 1797, tradition in the Church family records that this watercolour was commission by George Selby (1724-1804) of Twizell House, Adderstone near Bamburgh, where Girtin is reported to have stayed on his 1796 tour. This watercolour was inherited by Sir Geoffrey Church (1887-1979) and remained in the Church family until 1980. It has been in a private collection since then.

By 1797, Girtin had reached full maturity as an artist. His early works were often architectural watercolours sometimes based on the amateur works of his patrons but he was now financially independent and able to travel and choose his own subjects. Many of his finished works from his 1796 tour are still of buildings however, particularly views of cathedrals and castles. Here he contrasts the vast imposing castle with the country folk in their simple cottage. He paints an idyllic view of their life, surrounded by their animals, which was far from the reality for most poor families at the period.

Bamburgh is one of a series of defensive castles on the remote Northumberland coast, between Lindisfarne to the north and Dunstanburgh to the south. A fort or castle has stood on the site since the fifth century. A fort was destroyed by Vikings in 993 and the core of the present castle was built by the ...