

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



Julius Caesar Ibbetson (1759 - 1817)

Scenes of English rural life

both oil on panel

Sold, summer 2015

These richly colourful and lively panels appeared recently in separate auctions in Germany, and were hitherto unknown to us. More than fifteen years after the publication of James Mitchell's book, it is surprising – and gratifying – that new Ibbetson paintings continue to come to light.

In these oils, dating from the 1790s, one finds the artist at his best, and, even when working on a small scale, his style is assured, precise and the results most pleasing. Artisans like the knife-grinder seen here were of continual interest to Ibbetson's keen eye, and this character belongs to a rich tradition in the artist's work of depicting villagers at work, or gathered in town squares. In this vein, his numerous pictures of cottage industry in Wales come to mind – a notable example being Llangollen, peasants spinning (Cardiff, National Museum of Wales, inv. A504). Similarly, the figures grouped around a single, mounted traveller outside an inn are another regular feature in Ibbetson's oils and watercolours. Cleaning has revealed both the tavern sign, with its distinctive horseshoe motif, and the seated toper underneath. It is tempting to think that this is meant to be the painter himself, as he was no stranger to such places! The donkeys and pigs in each picture are drawn with the skill and affection with which Ibbetson invariably treats these beasts, and his distinctive 'Berchem' palette of prussian blue, naples yellow and crimson lake set off the figures agreeably. It would be difficult to find a better pair of small Ibbetson oils from this, his most fruitful period.