

# JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



**William Turner of Oxford (1789 - 1862)**

**View from Halnaker Down, Sussex, looking over Goodwood towards Chichester, and the Isle of Wight**

16½ x 28½ in. (42 x 72 cm.)

signed lower right 'W Turner / Oxford'; inscribed with title and 'No. 7' and signed on the reverse.

In its size, remarkable state of preservation and quality, this unpublished drawing is an important addition to the known oeuvre of the engaging English watercolourist, William Turner of Oxford. It comes to us five years after we were able to offer another, equally imposing and newly-discovered work by the artist, a sublime view of Loch Torridon at dawn [see illus.] Before his seminal tour of Scotland in 1838, Turner had also found inspiration right at the other, most southerly end of the British Isles, here in the South Downs, and his numerous scenes of this region are among his most popular with collectors. In the Royal Academy's landmark exhibition of English watercolours in 1993, two of the four pictures representing Turner of Oxford depicted Halnaker Mill, near Chichester (c.1837, National Galleries of Scotland) and Portsmouth Harbour from Portsdown Hill. Ours may be seen as a fusion of both compositions, with the Edinburgh drawing's arrangement of the distinctive windmill on the right and staffage at left, and the extensive vista looking west from the second. In the present example we see the spire of Chichester Cathedral and the inlets and creeks of Portsmouth harbour well to the right, with the Isle of Wight in the far distance stretching across almost all of the horizon. In Turner's characteristic way the sheep are arranged into several separate flocks, hinting perhaps at the downland vastness, while his shepherds, with their ruffs and white, 'scarecrow' faces, and ever-present dogs are so distinctive that they are as much a signature of his work as his written name. Most alluring of all is the glorious sky, which fills more than three-quarters of the panorama, and which the artist has suffused with a beautiful silvery light, punctuated by the carefully rendered rays of sunlight, all of which is in keeping with his interest in atmospheric and his finest work.

William Turner was sent to London at the age of fifteen to take up an apprenticeship under John Varley, and was elected a full member of the Old Watercolour Society in 1808. It was in this period that J.M.W. Turner rose to fame, and as a result the younger artist became known as 'Turner of Oxford'. His own reputation firmly established, he returned to his uncle's estate at Shipton-under-Cherwell in 1812 and began to build up his practice as a drawing master in Oxford. His range of subject matter was vast, and he travelled throughout the British Isles in search of subjects – from the Wye Valley to the Lake District, from Wales and the Hebrides to the Isle of Wight, and he was a loyal exhibitor at the Society of Painters in Watercolour, submitting a total of four hundred and fifty-five works. Turner of Oxford was

described as follows: 'Worthy and dignified, looking like a parson of the old school, dressed in black and wearing a white tie, he lived a hum-drum life at his house, 16 John Street, near Worcester College, where he resided from 1833 till his death on 7th August 1862' (quoted in Martin Hardie, 'William Turner of Oxford', Old Watercolour Society's Club, Vol. IX (1931-32)).

Our next printed Gallery Notes will be published at the end of the month, and will include this watercolour as well as many other recent acquisitions. Please let us know if you are interested in receiving a copy.

James Mitchell

May 2026