A view over Donnington, West Berkshire

Samuel Palmer

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REF: 2941

Description

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881)
A view over Donnington, West Berkshire

Signed lower left: S. Palmer
Watercolour over pencil, heightened with bodycolour and white chalk
29.6 by 52.8 cm., 11 ½ by 20 ¾ in.

Provenance:
Given to the artist's father-in-law, John Linnell (1792-1882), 1846;
Thence by descent;
Given to A. H. Palmer, 1906;
Given by A. H. Palmer, as a gift, to Herbert Linnell;
By descent to Mrs Hugh Linnell (1938-2023)

Literature:
A. H. Palmer, The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, 1972, p. 74

Exhibited:
Probably, London, Old Watercolour Society, 1843, no. 131

Palmer here depicts Donnington Castle House and outbuildings in Berkshire, nestled below the ruins of Donnington castle. The castle was built in the late 14th Century and owned by several monarchs including Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth I. By the outbreak of the Civil War, the castle belonged to John Packer, a prominent courtier, who became a Parliamentary supporter. The King ordered Sir John Boys to take control of the castle, which given its strategic location, on the crossroads linking London, the West Country, Oxford and the South Coast, meant that the castle was almost continually besieged. When the Royalists eventually abandoned the castle in 1646, Parliament ordered that the castle be destroyed and only the gatehouse was left standing. When the Royalists abandoned the site, John Packer was allowed to reclaim his lands and in 1648, he began work building a new residence, Donnington Castle House. On his death in 1649, his son continued rebuilding, including the village. During World War II, the house was requisitioned as use for accommodation for the 101st Airborne Division, US Air Force and in 1950, Derek Parker-Bowles, the former father-in-law of Queen Camilla purchased the house. It remains in private hands.

Samuel Palmer's son, Alfred Herbert, recorded that his father spent the months from August to October 1843 in West Berkshire, based in nearby Thatcham, about four miles to the east of Donnington.'Here he painted two water-colours which were exhibited the following year at the Gallery of the Old Society and the visit led to the production of an admirable drawing which appeared at the same exhibition under a title whose accuracy no one appears to have challenged. At Donnington, Berkshire; the Birthplace of Chaucer'. (A. H. Palmer, The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, 1972, p. 74). Alfred Palmer continued that it was 'without exception one of the best examples of my father's subdued manner that I have seen. It seems astounding that a painter as accomplished as this drawing proves him to have been should ever have been concerned about "small monies' or the number of "dips" allowable for an evening's study' (op. cit.).

The present watercolour was apparently given to Palmer's father-in-law John Linnell in 1846, in payment for a loan and the work remained with the family. There is a note by A.H. Palmer on the old backboard, signed and dated Nov 18th 1922, which states that the white chalk in the sky of the present watercolour was added by John Linnell.

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