St Mary's Church and the Radcliffe Camera from Oriel Lane, Oxford

Joseph Mallord William Turner, R.A.

Sold



REF: 2589

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Description

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Joseph Mallord William Turner, R.A. (1775-1851)
St Mary's Church and the Radcliffe Camera from Oriel Lane, Oxford

Signed lower right: W Turner Delin.t
Watercolour over pencil heightened with touches of bodycolour on laid paper watermarked with a w, with original washline border
Image 27 by 21.5 cm., 10 ½ by 8 ½ in.

Provenance:
Possibly Dr Thomas Monro (1759-1833), his sale, Christie's, 28th June 1833

As Dr Christopher Brown notes, 'Turner, had a profound and long-lasting love of Oxford. The city and its architecture provided subjects to which he returned again and again throughout his career. Turner travelled extensively… and yet he made more finished watercolours of Oxford than of any other place, even Venice' (Dr Christopher Brown, Turner's Oxford, 2000, p.7).

Turner first visited Oxford when he was a teenager, with his uncle to stay with distant relatives who lived in the small village of Sunningwell, about 4 miles downstream from Oxford. It seems that the artist returned several times to stay with his relations over subsequent years. It also seems that Turner had other acquaintances in Oxford, although there is surprisingly little information as to who these may have been. The range of architectural styles would have appealed to the artist and this combined with the relative closeness of Oxford to London, must have added to its appeal. However, these factors alone cannot account for the frequency with which Turner visited Oxford during the last years of the 18th and first of the 19th centuries.

By the late 1790s Turner was in demand for producing topographical and architectural watercolours, made specifically for reproduction as prints. Indeed, by this time the young artist was regarded as one of the leading architectural draughtsmen of the period. In 1797, Turner received his most important commission to date, being commissioned by the trustees of the Oxford University Press to make the first two, of what was eventually ten watercolours, to be reproduced in the Oxford Almanack. The Almanack was the annual calendar published by the University Press and widely collected. It was first published in its illustrated form in 1674 and by 1716 had settled on the scheme of using depictions of Oxford buildings for its illustrations.

This previously unrecorded early work by Turner is one of a number of Oxford views dating from 1793. Another version with differing figures is in the Tate Gallery (T.B. XIV-C). A further, slightly later, looser version, with the buildings being depicted in a less detailed manner and with scaffolding up one of the houses in the middle distance, is also in the Tate Gallery (T.B. XXVII-X).

Turner drew more than one version of his early Oxford views on more than one occasion. It could be that they were painted for different patrons. Two of Turner's earliest important patrons, Dr Thomas Monro and John Henderson, did on occasion commission second versions of works. For example, there are two views of Magdalen Tower and Bridge, painted in 1794, one of which belonged to Dr Monro and now in the Whitworth Art Gallery and the other which belonged to John Henderson, which is now in the British Museum. 'From the crisper penwork...

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