The Burning of Bristol New Gaol with St Paul's Church, Bedminster

William James Müller



REF: 2826

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Description

Guy Peppiatt Fine Art Ltd.
Riverwide House, 6 Mason's Yard, Duke St. St. James's, London, SW1Y 6BU
T: 020 7930 3839 M: 07956 968 284 E: guy@peppiattfineart.co.uk www.peppiattfineart.co.uk

William James Müller (1812-1845)
The Burning of Bristol New Gaol with St Paul's Church, Bedminster

Oil on paper laid on panel
10.5 by 20.1 cm., 4 by 7 ¾ in.

Provenance:
Dr Robert Hemphill, Bristol;
Anonymous sale, Christie's, 25th May 1984, lot 75

Exhibited:
Cape Town, South African National Gallery, Old Masters from a Private Collection, December 1971, lent by Dr Hemphill

The Burning of Bristol Gaol took place during the Bristol Riots of October 1831. They were caused by the voting down of the second Reform Bill in the House of Lords which was intended to lead to electoral reform. The arrival of the anti-reform judge Charles Wetherell in Bristol on 29th October lead to three days of riots and protests during which much of the city centre was burnt down and up to 250 citizens were killed.

The New Gaol was commissioned in 1816 and opened in 1820. During the riots which started on Sunday 30th October, the mob used sledgehammers and crowbars taken from a local ironworks to smash their way into the gaol, 170 prisoners were released and the prison burned down. Müller and James Baker Pyne both witnessed the riots and drew small oil sketches and watercolours of what they saw. Many are in Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and include a watercolour version of this view by Müller, with added figures outside the gaol (see Francis Greenacre and Sheena Stoddard, W.J. Müller, 1991, p.74, no.26, ill.).

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