

The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells

Thomas Loggon

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Description

Attributed to Thomas Loggon (1706-1780)
The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells

Watercolour over pencil heightened with bodycolour with black in border
23 by 39.5 cm., 9 by 15 1/2 in.

Ideally situated, being only a day's carriage ride from London, Tunbridge Wells became a popular tourist destination for the Georgian gentry. The discovery of a mineral spring in 1606 led to the foundation of the spa town of Tunbridge Wells and within 24 years, its first Royal visitor, Queen Henrietta Maria, who stayed six weeks, secured its place as a tourist destination of note. The first permanent lodging houses were built in the latter 17th Century and the taking of water and promenading became a daily ritual. As the area's popularity grew, the area around the springs was levelled and raised and a double row of elm and lime trees planted to provide shade for those taking the air. The area was subsequently paved with the local pan-baked clay tiles, which gave the area its name. The artist has captured the elegant row of shops and coffee house, with elegant figures on the Upper Walk, parading beneath the soaring trees of the Lower Walk, with vivacity and a careful attention to detail.

Although unsigned, this seems likely to be by Thomas Loggon as other views of this subject by him are recorded. He was born in Great Grimsby, Lincolnshire in 1706 and started his career as dwarf for the Prince and Princess of Wales. In the 1730s he moved to Bath, where he established himself as a fan painter of topographical views of the city, as well as running a ladies' tearoom and china shop. An aquatint of this view after Thomas Loggon published by Sir Richard Phillips in 1804, but depicting a scene from 1748, is annotated with the names of the figures depicted. Whilst it is not possible to firmly tie up any of the figures in this watercolour with the identified figures in the aquatint, it is interesting to note that the three figures in the centre of our watercolour bear a strong similarity to a group identified as Mr Nash, Miss Chudleigh (Duchess of Kingston) and Mr Pitt (Earl of Chatham). Mr Nash is the celebrated dandy 'Beau' Nash (1674-1761), who appointed himself Master of Ceremonies for Tunbridge Wells in 1735 and retained control of the entertainment for visitors to the town until his death in 1761. Elizabeth Chudleigh (c.1720-1788), was a courtier and bigamous wife of the 3rd Earl of Bristol and the 2nd Duke of Kingston. The Mr Pitt, is William Pitt the elder, 1st Earl of Chatham (1708-1778) and later Prime Minister.

A further watercolour depicting the same view and intended as the central portion of a fan by Loggon, is in the British Museum.