The Vaults Below Slingsby Castle, Yorkshire, 4th August 1803

John Sell Cotman

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

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Description

John Sell Cotman (1782-1842)
The Vaults Below Slingsby Castle, Yorkshire, 4th August 1803

Inscribed upper left: Slingsby Castle augst 4 1803 and numbered lower right 18
Brown wash over pencil on laid oatmeal paper
24 by 31.3 cm., 9 ½ by 12 ¼ in.

Provenance:
Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, 7th June 2006, lot 364;
Private Collection, UK

Literature:
Miklos Rajnai, John Sell Cotman 1782-1842, Arts Council Exhibition Catalogue, 1982, pp. 56-7;
David Hill, Cotman in the North - Watercolours of Durham and Yorkshire, 2005, pp. 48-61, ill. pl. 53

This drawing dates from the first of Cotman's three tours of Yorkshire in 1803, 1804 and 1805. These tours led to a transformation in his style which earlier had been heavily influenced by Thomas Girtin (1775-1802) and which culminated in his watercolours of the Greta, probably the greatest of his career. Cotman had met the antiquary Sir Henry Charles Englefield in London who provided an introduction to his sister Ann Cholmeley of Brandsby Hall, Yorkshire. With his fellow artist Paul Sandby Munn, Cotman arrived at Brandsby on 7th July using it as a base from which to explore Yorkshire. He stayed until 22nd September in exchange for drawing lessons for the four Cholmeley daughters. The present drawing is dated 4th August and was used as the basis for a finished watercolour `The Vault of Slingsby Castle', dated 1804 and now in a private collection. Slingsby Castle was in fact a Jacobean mansion a few miles north of Castle Howard built for Sir Charles Cavendish in 1630-40. Cavendish was a Royalist who fled to the continent in 1644 and the house may never have been inhabited. The ruins are now in the care of English Heritage but are not open to the public.

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