

JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

A View of Fulham from Putney with Old Fulham Bridge, All Saints' Church and the Bridge Toll House

SOLD

REF:- 122303

Artist: JOSEPH NICHOLLS

Height: 156.21 cm (61 1/2")

Width: 288.29 cm (113 1/2")

Framed Height: 192.024 cm (75 1/2")

Framed Width: 321.056 cm (126 1/2")



Short Description

Britain is fortunate in that it has an unrivalled record of topographical records compared to Europe. On the continent, major towns or cities were occasionally depicted as were important castles or palaces such as Versailles for example, but in Britain there is an abundance of engravings and paintings depicting country houses, churches, villages, towns, cities and parts of them.

The astonishing wealth of records, "There is simply nothing like this in the rest of Europe, not even after 1800, and no other country in the world has today such an efficient system of rate-supported County Record or Archive Offices which take into their care the paper history of the county" (John Harris in 'Prospects of Town and Park' – National Art-Collections Fund Exhibition, Colnaghi 1988) There were large numbers of antiquarians and there was enormous interest in recording the history and topographical views in written and painted records. One can only surmise why this is the case; perhaps it is a deep-rooted consequence of the Domesday Book, but whatever the reason, there is an abundance of painted views and aspects of houses and urban areas.

Therefore it is rather ironic that the genre of topographical painting had really been introduced to England from Northern Europe where artists in the Netherlands had an established tradition. There are few surviving illustrations from the Tudor period although some artists from the Low Countries such as Hoefnagel in 1568 and van der Wyngaerde in 1559 did work in England. It was following the Restoration and the coronation of Charles II in 1660, marking the end of the governance of Parliament, and then, particularly after the accession of William of Orange in 1689, that the influence of art and architecture from Holland became marked in England.

The Earl of Arundel had returned from a mission to Vienna in 1636 with the Prague born artist Wenceslaus Hollar who remained here until 1644. He returned again in 1652, remaining until his death in 1677 and although most of his work survives in engraved form, he was a significant influence on English landscape painting. He managed to impart an English sensibility to the Northern European style and this can be discerned in "A View of the Thames below Westminster Pier" now in the Barber Institute.

By the late part of the 17th century and into the 18th, artists such as Jacob Knyff, Jan Griffier, Thomas Wyck, Hendrik Danckerts and Johannes Vorsterman followed a little later by Pieter Tillemans, Jan Siberechts, Leonard Knyff and Pieter Andreas Rysbrack the Younger were in residence here and were being commissioned to paint panoramic views of country houses and estates as well as towns and views of London from the Thames. Printed guides started to appear in the early 1700s with engravings county by county and the number of architectural books published in Britain between 1715 and 1800 exceeded that of the whole of Europe in the same period. There was a seemingly almost insatiable desire to have a record of man's achievements in developing the built environment and bringing order to nature.

Joseph Nicholls, sometimes recorded as Nichols or Nickols, was one of the best of the English comparatively
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obscure painters of eighteenth century London views. In the 1740s topographical art in Britain received an invigorating influence from Italy, a consequence of the increasing popularity of the Grand Tour. The most famous of the Italian artists were Canaletto and Antonio Joli and the former's paintings had started to reach these shores in the late 1720s. Canaletto himself arrived in London in the summer of 1746. George Vertue, in his Notebooks in the Walpole Society writes: "...came to London from Venice the Famous Painter of Views Cannalotti ...the Multitude of his works done abroad for English noblemen and Gentlemen has procurd him great reputation and his great merit and excellence in that way, he is much esteemed..." His "Whitehall and the Privy Garden from Richmond House" and "The Thames and the City of London from Richmond House", both magnificent paintings and now at Goodwood, had a marked effect.

Canaletto's paintings of "A View of Westminster from the Terrace of Somerset House" and "The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards the City" were both engraved in 1751 and there can be no doubt that these engravings acted as a further stimulus to contemporary and later artists to depict similar compositions.

The English painters Samuel Scott, William James and William Marlow picked up on this style and there were several others of varying ability such as Samuel Wale, Francis Hardin, Thomas Priest and Herbert Pugh who were commissioned to paint views of a city rapidly expanding in size, influence and wealth. There is evidence though that Scott was already painting topographical views of London before the arrival of Canaletto with a drawing of Westminster Abbey and Hall from the River in the British Museum confidently dated to 1738 providing the evidence for this. There is also speculation that some of these painters utilised a camera lucida or other such optical devices which would explain some of the occasional distorted buildings, even apparent in an artist of Scott's ability.

Joseph Nicholls preceded these more illustrious first three named artists and his pictures show a good topographical ability and feeling of atmosphere for the Thames. Grant writes of him that "...there is a delicacy and finesse in his work, unusual in this type...he displayed a capacity also for foliage and scenery."

There is comparatively little known about Nicholls. He was from Bengeo in Hertfordshire, the son of a husbandman, and is believed to have been apprenticed to the Painter-Stainer Thomas Batten on 5th August 1713. He was certainly painting London views by 1738 as two of his paintings - "Stocks Market" and "Fountain in the Temple" - were engraved in that year. There are a pair of views of Twickenham in the Mellon Collection at Yale, one showing Pope's Villa and the other Orlean's House, one of which is dated 1726, but which was probably painted after 1755. Another painting, "View of the Thames", is dated 1748 but these signed and dated works are scarce. Other examples of his work include "The Thames at Lambeth Palace" and "Charing Cross with the Statue of King Charles I and Northumberland House".

Nicholls also worked as an illustrator and these engravings can be seen in Captain Johnson's "Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, etc" published in 1734. There is also an oil painting depicting a capriccio Italian scene which has his signature on it which was probably a commission work in England done from another painting(s) or engraving(s).

OLD PUTNEY BRIDGE

In the 17th century, there was no means of crossing the Thames between London Bridge and Kingston apart from by ferry. When William Laud (1573-1645) was Bishop of London before becoming Archbishop, he was crossing the water from Putney to his palace one dark night when the ferry capsized pitching the Bishop, his horses and his suite into the Thames and he was fortunate not to drown.

The building of a permanent bridge at this point of the Thames was first attempted in 1671 with the introduction of a Bill in Parliament which failed because of the vested interests of several parties, the most prominent being representatives for the City of London who claimed that the City would be irretrievably ruined if such a project were

undertaken. The ferry operators also saw a serious threat to their livelihood if a bridge

were to be constructed.

There had been a temporary bridge built during the Civil War. The Royalist Lord Essex, following his victory at the Battle of Brentford on 12th November 1645, had constructed a bridge of boats to cross his army. This had a fort at each end and was about 500 yards below where today's bridge stands. In 1813, in Faulkner's "History of Fulham" he wrote that the end of the bridge on the Putney side was "...still plainly discernible".

It was not until the first quarter of the 18th century that an Act was finally passed, mainly through the insistence of Robert Walpole. In 1720, when Britain's first Prime Minister was returning from a visit to George I in Kingston to attend a debate in the House of Commons, it is recorded that Walpole, ...rode on horse back with his servant to Putney only to find the ferry on the other side of the river. The ferrymen were drinking in the Swan Inn and took no notice of Walpole's shouts for them to take him across the river on vital national business".

The bridge was built after a design by Jacob Ackworth who also designed the bridges at Kingston, Chertsey, Staines, Datchet and Windsor and was completed in 1729. It was constructed of wood, 786 feet long and 24 feet wide and "...on the sides of the way over the bridge angular recesses for the safeguard and convenience of foot-passengers going over the same" and it was lit by oil lamps. The refuges for those on foot was necessary as apart from the number of carts that crossed, there were also many horses and cattle and other livestock being driven across. Being constructed of wood had its drawbacks due to flood damage and also collisions with boats which necessitated frequent repairs.

At the Fulham entrance to the bridge, there was a rather quaint double toll- house with its roof spanning the roadway. The toll at the Putney end was smaller. There were two toll collectors at each end clothed in "... hats and gowns of good substantial cloth of a deep blue colour, lined with blue shalloon, and carried staves with brass or copper heads". These staves were not just for show as there was considerable resentment about having to pay to cross, especially as there was no charge for crossing London Bridge. There was no

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alternative but to pay up however and the tolls remained in place until 1880.

In 1730, it was ordered that bells – cast in 1739 - were to be “...hung on the tops of the toll-houses, to give notice of any disorder that might happen, so that the collectors might go to the assistance of each other as there might be occasion”. They were used for various acts of unrest and were certainly needed on the Putney side where the Heath and its environs were known to be infested with footpads and highwaymen.

Provision had been made in the Act for a recompense of £62 per annum to be divided between the widows and children of the watermen of Putney and Fulham because with the completion of the bridge, the ferryman were not allowed to ply their trade on Sundays. The foundation stone for the replacement stone bridge was laid by the Prince of Wales in July 1884

It is believed that Fulham gets its name from the Saxon word “foulenham” meaning a place where birds live or a place of fowls. In the opinion of some, since the time of the Romans, all the land from Westminster to beyond Fulham was flat fen and until the 19th century it was still heavily wooded or else market gardens which extended up to Hammersmith. The Bishop of London had his residence since the late 13th century on the Fulham side of the Bridge and the bridge is unique in Britain in having a church at each end with All Saints on the north bank and St Mary’s on the south side.

The Swan Inn, which was built around 1698, was on the river immediately to the left as one crossed on to the Fulham side. Other notable buildings nearby were Stourton House, Ranelagh House, Mulgrave House and Hurlingham House.

We are grateful for the following information that has been supplied by somebody doing research into the antislavery campaigner, Granville Sharp (d. 1813).

“Over several years of research I have obtained images of Sharp and the houses in which he lived. One image that has eluded me for years is that of his brother Williams Fulham House (sometimes Stourton House). A surgeon, William is wearing the Kings livery in Zoffanys famous painting of the family on their barge at Fulham. Granville lived in Williams London home for two decades, and was also given living quarters in Fulham House, when William retired there in 1787. Three years after Williams death, Granville died at Fulham House in 1813. Your painting of Fulham attributed to Joseph Nicholls shows - what I believe to be - William Sharps Fulham House, albeit a few decades before it was occupied by the Sharps.

Im guessing that your painting is the one alluded to on page 248 in History of the Noble House of Stourton... (London, 1899): Old Fulham House is shewn in a coloured picture, (believed to be the only one in existence shewing that house,) which presents the river, the bridge, &c., besides Fulham House. Fulham House is <https://johnbennettfinepaintings.com/a-view-of-fulham-from-putney-with-old-fulham-bridge>

discussed on pages: 181-188, 218-219, 248-249, 277 -
<https://archive.org/stream/historyofnobleho01mowb#page/186/mode/2up>

From various sources, including the attached image of a map from the sale of Fulham House in 1841 (red lines representing the current Putney Bridge), I think that your painting depicts (left to right) the Tollhouse, the Swan Inn (obscuring the church), Fulham House (taken down in 1842) and, what I believe to be, the old vicarage. Both Granville and his brother William are buried in All Saints churchyard. There is more information from me on Granvilles life in his brothers Fulham home.

Bibliography:

Dictionary of British Landscape Painters - M H Grant

Dictionary of British 18th Century Painters - Ellis Waterhouse

British Landscape Painters of the 18th Century – Luke Hermann

Prospects of Town and Park – National Art-Collections Fund Exhibition, Colnaghi 1988

Book Illustration in 18th Century England - Hanns Hammelmann

Old and New London Vol. VI – Edward Walford

More Information

Year	1726 - 1755
Medium	Oil on canvas
Country	England
Provenance	U.S. private collection purchased from Oscar and Peter Johnson as by Joseph Nicholls Collection of Sir Walter Benton Jones Apollo Magazine May 1967
Condition	Original frame