

# S P H I N X F I N E A R T



**Thomas Sidney Cooper (Canterbury 1803 - Vernon Holme 1902)**

## **Bingley Gate, Canterbury**

signed and dated 'T S Cooper/jan 1834' (lower centre)  
oil on canvas  
45.7 x 61 cm (18 x 24 in)

A tranquil scene epitomises the harmony of rural England. A little boy rides on a donkey as he herds his cattle unhurriedly through a ford. Thomas Sidney Cooper's brushstrokes and use of colour perfectly evoke a cloudless summer day.

*Bingley Gate, Canterbury* is one of four versions of a composition which depicts a bull and cattle being herded by a rustic on a donkey through water, and towards a lane in the direction of Canterbury. The major work, *Landscape and Cattle, View of Bingley Gate, Suburbs of Canterbury* (Private Collection) dated 1834, was exhibited at the Society of British Artists, Winter Exhibition, 1833-34, no.8. Another slightly smaller version, which omits the youth (herding the cattle) and dated 1833, is titled *The Watering Place* (formerly in the collection of the late Henry H. Walrond of Somerset). A third smaller oil on panel, entitled *Bingley Gate, Near Canterbury*, in Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery, Kent, has a notice from the Metropolitan Magazine pasted on the reverse suggesting that it is the picture exhibited at Suffolk Street in 1836. It is more likely, however, that it is an early compositional study for the 1834 exhibited work.

Bingley Gate is not identified on any maps or plans of the vicinity of Canterbury. However, the towers of the west gate seen in the distance provide a visual aid to the location. From the evidence provided by the landscape in the four very similar views, the 'gate' appears to have been a local designation for the fording place from Bingley's Island, south west of the city wall, and formed by tributaries of the River Stour.

The study for the bull in the centre foreground of *Bingley Gate, Canterbury* was also the model for the similarly placed bull in *Returning to the Farm* of 1832 and appears in a watercolour dated 1849.

A label on the reverse of the painting refers to an inscription on the back of the canvas, and states that

the painting was exhibited at the Society of British Artist's Winter Exhibition 1834. However, the Winter Exhibition of 1833-1834 at Suffolk Street was already in progress by the date of this painting. A picture titled *Bingley Gate* was exhibited at Suffolk Street in 1836 (no. 381), but it is very unlikely that Cooper would have sent a painting dated 1834 for exhibition two years later. The 1836 work has not been located and therefore the composition is not known. A review of the exhibition in *The Times*, 21 March 1836, noted, 'this picture contains some excellently painted cattle.'

Having shown great artistic promise as a child, Cooper enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy in 1824. In his early years he gave art lessons to private individuals, though his financial situation was made more secure on his appointment to a formal post as an art teacher in Brussels.

The prevailing Victorian taste for works by Dutch artists undoubtedly contributed to Cooper's contemporary popularity: he returned to England in 1831 and cemented his reputation as one of the most distinguished Victorian painters of sheep and cattle. The majority of Cooper's works were exhibited at the Royal Academy in London: from 1833 to 1902, he displayed 266 works without interruption and to this day he remains the longest continuous exhibitor in the Academy's history. Cooper was elected A.R.A. in 1845 and R.A. in 1867.

### **Literature:**

Kenneth J. Westwood, *Thomas Sidney Cooper C.V.O., R.A.: His Life and Work*, (David Leathers Publishing, Somerset, 2011), vol.1, p.181, no. O.1834.26.

### **Artist description:**

Thomas Sidney Cooper was encouraged in his ambition to become an artist by Sir Thomas Lawrence and the animal painter Abraham Cooper (no relation; 1787–1868). He entered the Royal Academy Schools, London, in 1823. He subsequently taught art in Brussels where he met Eugene Verboeckhoven, whose work had a profound influence on him. Through Verboeckhoven he came to appreciate the work of such 17th-century Dutch painters as Aelbert Cuyp and Paulus Potter. In 1831 he returned to London, exhibiting at the Royal Society of British Artists. He exhibited 48 pictures at the British Institution between 1833 and 1863. The majority of his work was, however, exhibited at the Royal Academy; from 1833 to 1902 he exhibited 266 works there without a break, and he remains the longest continuous exhibitor in the Academy's history. He was elected ARA in 1845 and RA in 1867.

Cooper's paintings were almost exclusively of cattle (he was nicknamed 'Cow' Cooper to distinguish him from Abraham 'Horse' Cooper) and sheep, for example *Landscape, with Cows and Sheep* (1850; Egham, University London, Royal Holloway & Bedford New College). He produced one history painting, *The Defeat of Kellerman's Cuirassiers at Waterloo* (1846; Birkenhead, Williamson Art Gallery & Museum). He also painted animals in landscapes by other artists, notably Frederick Richard Lee (1798–1879) (e.g. Lee's *The Chequered Shade*, 1854; London, Forbes private collection). Despite his preoccupation with animal painting and his prodigious output the quality of Cooper's work remained surprisingly high. The contents of his studio were sold at Christie's, 12–15 April 1902.

### **Collections**

Thomas Sidney Cooper is represented in the following collections: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Royal Academy of Arts Collection, London; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Tate Gallery, London; The Wallace Collection, London; Manchester City Art Gallery; Brighton Museum and Art Gallery; Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge; Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu, New Zealand; Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead, amongst others.