

THOMAS SIDNEY COOPER, R.A.

(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)

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.

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*, dated 1834, was exhibited at the Society of British Artists, Winter Exhibition, 1833-34, no.8 (fig. 1). 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



Thomas Sydney Cooper, *Landscape and Cattle, View of Bingley Gate, Suburbs of Canterbury*, 1833, Private Collection (Figure 1)

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.

