

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item(s)

William Hogarth (1697-1764)

The Christening (or 'Orator Henley Christening a Child')

Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 62.8 cm (19 ½ x 24 ¾")

The painting is in good condition, and has been displayed in exhibition and at Gainsborough's House within the last few years. The painting may have been slightly reduced on the right hand side at some earlier point in its history.

2. Context

Provenance

Hewer Edgeley Hewer, FRS (1692-1728); his sale, Cocks's, London, 6-19 May 1729 (11th day's sale, 17 May, lot 30, 'A Christening by Mr Hogarth') ... Smallbone's, London, 10-12 December 1823 (11 December, lot 118, 'The Christening') ... Sir Henry William Dashwood 5th Baronet (1816-1889); Christie's, London, 23 April 1887 (lot 123, 'The Baptism – Orator Henley', unsold); Christie's, London, 29 June 1889 (lot 52, 'The Baptism – Orator Henley', bought Agnew); Samuel Cunliffe Lister, 1st Baron Masham (1815-1906); by descent to his granddaughter, Lady Cunliffe-Lister; sold to The Right Hon Sir Felix Cassel, Bart (1869-1953); by descent to the present owner.

Exhibition history

City Art Gallery, Bradford, *"Coming of Age" Exhibition: Consisting of Works by British Painters from the Time of Hogarth to the Present Day*, February-April 1925 (33)

Tate Gallery, London, *Hogarth*, 2 December 1971-6 February 1972 (26)

Tate Britain, London, and La Caixa, Madrid, *Hogarth*, 7 February-26 August 2007 (36)

References

Frederick Antal, 'Hogarth and his Borrowings', *The Art Bulletin*, 29:1 (1947), pp.35-48 (p.41)

R.B. Beckett, *Hogarth*, London 1949, pp.9,64, repr. no.16

Frederick Antal, *Hogarth and his Place in European Art*, London 1962, pp.26, 94; repr. plate 25a

Gabriele Baldini, *L'Opera Completa di Hogarth Pittore*, Milan 1967, p.89 repr.

Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times*, New Haven and London 1971, vol.1, pp.214, 226-228, 471, 290, repr. fig 85

Lawrence Gowing, *Hogarth*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, London 1971, p.18 repr.

Ronald Paulson, *The Art of Hogarth*, London 1975, p.41

Derek Jarrett, *The Ingenious Mr Hogarth*, London 1976, p.95

Jack Lindsay, *Hogarth: His Art and His World*, London 1977, pp.51-2

Mary Webster, *Hogarth*, London 1979, p.21, repr. (detail repr pp.22-3)

David Bindman, *Hogarth*, London 1981 (repr. 1988), pp.36-37, repr. fig 25

Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, Volume I: The 'Modern Moral Subject' 1697-1732*, Cambridge 1991, pp.185, 215-6, 225-6, repr. fig 84

Fiona Haslam, *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Liverpool 1996, pp.219, 226

Jenny Uglow, *William Hogarth: A Life and a World*, London 1997, pp.174-6, repr. fig. 47

Mark Hallett and Christine Riding, *Hogarth*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Britain, London 2007, pp.66-7, repr.

Elizabeth Einberg, *William Hogarth: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, New Haven and London, due for publication 8 November 2016

3. Waverley criteria

The painting meets all three Waverley Criteria. This is a significant early work by the painter and printmaker William Hogarth (1697-1764), one of the most important figures in eighteenth century British art and culture, generally considered the founding father of the 'British School' and an artist whose satirical view of life both exemplifies and excoriates the national character (Waverley 1). *The Christening* is one of his very first painted comic scenes based on the observation of contemporary life, the genre which constitutes his great original contribution to British art and, indeed, to Western culture. It is a key document in the development of his art, marking his move from illustration and engraving into being a painter of stature, and anticipating his acclaimed 'modern moral series' in many individual details and motifs (Waverley 3). It is a work of originality, sophistication, and of great and distinctive quality (Waverley 2). In addition to its strictly art-historical value, it is of interest to cultural, literary and social historians, for whom Hogarth has long been a source of evidence about attitudes to domestic life, class and gender, the clergy and religion, and eighteenth-century manners and morals more generally (Waverley 3).

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

This small comic genre painting shows a christening taking place in the interior of a wealthy home. It was painted by William Hogarth in around 1728. It is one of his earliest paintings, and helped to establish his reputation as a painter of satirical scenes of contemporary life, the genre which established him as a major artist with a lasting legacy. The picture shows him developing his characteristic style, which combined considerable painterly elegance with biting satire conveyed through a mass of telling details – in costume, expression and décor – which demand close and sustained attention, and provide a rich commentary on the social conventions and tastes of early eighteenth century Britain.

The interior suggests a wealthy but badly-run household. To the left, the list fire of a grand fireplace set with Dutch tiles helps illuminate the scene, a Van Dyck-like ancestral portrait on the wall perhaps suggesting former greatness; on the right there is a grand canopied bed. The room is in darkness, befitting a birthing chamber, but we can perceive an expensive Turkey carpet on the floor and a mythological tapestry hanging on the rear wall, as well as indications of an ornate ceiling, though the details of the decoration are not now legible. The central scene is packed with comic details, suggesting, variously, greed, vanity, and the neglect of domestic and spiritual duties. The clergymen leers sideways at the bosom of the attractive young woman serving as sponsor, who holds a fan which is half-open rather than closed as propriety would demand. Neither she nor the other godmother, standing behind, pay attention to the child itself, while the godfather, a finely dressed fop, shoulders loaded with wig powder, pampers himself before a mirror. He wears striking red stockings and shoes with red heels, in the French style. The midwife, suspiciously well-dressed and wearing a massive gold fob watch, fusses with the child's bonnet. That child is neatly 'parcelled' in a richly glittering robe, but also appears to be on the point of being dropped. Behind the clergyman a curate or parish clerk turns his eyes upwards, suggesting despair or disapproval. Before them, an unattended little girl dips her fingers into the baptism water, and upsets the punch bowl which serves as a baptismal font. Meanwhile the exhausted-looking mother slumps in a red nursing chair to the left, attended by her husband. By the fireplace the nurse appears to be sleeping, while the hat being savaged by a small dog in the left foreground suggests the general themes of domestic disorder and neglect, which the house steward (carrying a steward's staff) and female servant to the far left seem also to be commenting upon.

The painting was freely adapted in a mezzotint published by Joseph Sympson in London in around 1729-1733. This included a text identifying the cast of characters, naming the godfather as 'gay Sr Fopling, an accomplish'd Ass' and the clergyman as "Orator" John Henley, a notorious dissenting cleric, known for attracting large fee-

paying audiences for his theatrical preaching. It is not known whether this identification was intended by Hogarth, but it would have given added topicality to the scene for his contemporary audiences, and has remained attached to the picture. Sympson's print also suggested a relationship between this painting and the *Denunciation* (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin), in which a pregnant unmarried woman makes a false accusation of paternity before a magistrate. This was also published by Smythson in an engraving around this date. Although neither paintings nor prints are an exact partners, this has sometimes be taken as indicating the pictures were created as a pair.

Reflecting his stature in the history of art and culture, Hogarth is well-represented in UK national and regional collections. Broadly comparable works from this early stage of his career as a painter would include the non-comic conversation pieces *The Gaols Committee of the House of Commons* (c.1729, NPG) and *Woodes Rogers and his Family* (1729, NMM) and the theatrical subject *The Beggar's Opera* (c.1726-9, Birmingham Museums Trust; c.1731, Tate). The later modern moral subjects are of course represented by the *Rake's Progress* (1733; Soane Museum), and *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1743, National Gallery, London), as well as the related *The Marriage Contract* (early 1730s, Ashmolean). There are no other comparable comic paintings of his early date in private hands. The most closely comparable works are in non-UK museums, notably *The Denunciation* (c.1729, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) and *The Sleeping Congregation* (c.1730, Minneapolis Institute of Arts).

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).

Hogarth's paintings of modern life, and the prints after them, were seminal. He was a 'modern' artist in his subject matter, in his critical attitude to society and the status quo, and in his search for commercial and professional independence. *The Christening* marks Hogarth's emergence as a painter of comic scenes and an artist of striking independence and originality. It is a key document in the development of his art, anticipating his acclaimed 'modern moral series' in many individual details and motifs, as well as in its painterly richness, and in its visual complexity and artistic debts. The characterisation of the interior space and of individual figures marks an advance even on the closely contemporary *Denunciation* (National Gallery of Ireland; see Lindsay 1976, pp.51-2), and points to the colouristic and painterly interest of his later work. The leading Hogarth scholar David Bindman commented of this painting: 'The caricaturist's view of the world as one of fools and knaves has now entered painting, but characterized by an elegance of touch which makes one see the figures, as Hogarth puts it, "as Actors dressed for the sublime genteel comedy"' (Bindman 1981, pp.36-7). The painterly elegance of the picture, drawn in part from contemporary French art, is combined with artistic references to prints by Bernard Picart, while 'The very Dutch motif of a picturesque fire was to become one of

Hogarth's favourites, and here the woman is an almost Pieter de Hooch type' (Antal 1962, pp.94). The picture's overall effect has been compared to Crespi and Longhi (Antal 1962, p.204).

Exceptionally, the contemporary evaluation of the picture's importance is well-documented. The painting was first owned by Hewer Edgeley Hewer, FRS (1692-1728), the son of the Rev Samuel Edgeley, vicar of Wandsworth, and heir to the significant property and fortune of his godfather, William Hewer, an assistant and friend of Samuel Pepys. He had died on 6 November 1728, at the age of 36, so although generally dated to 'c.1729' in the modern literature, the painting must be dated to 1728 or even before, making it one of the very earliest of Hogarth's oil paintings. Hewer's extensive collection, including the Hogarth painting, was sold in May 1729. The appearance of Hogarth's painting at sale was highlighted in a published notice which cast this still-emerging artist into the most celebrated company:

To be Sold by Auction ... a very curious Collection of Pictures, particularly several very Capital Sea Pieces by VANDERVELD, Battle Pieces by BORGOGNONE, and several other curious Pieces by PHILIPPO LAURO, SPAGNOLETTO, CARRACI, DEHEEM, GASPAT POUSSIN and RUBENS, with the Christening by Mr HOGARTH, and the large and Celebrated Picture of TINTORET (*Daily Journal*, 17 May 1729)

After the sale, in 1730, the art chronicler George Vertue noted:

Mr Hogarths paintings gain every day so many admirers that happy are they that can get a picture of his painting. a small peice of several figures representing a Christning being lately sold at a publick sale for a good price. got him much reputation. (*Walpole Society*, vol.22, 1933-34, p.41)

As the work which got Hogarth 'much reputation' at the very beginning of his career as a painter, this picture has a special importance. It has been included in the two major retrospectives of Hogarth's art (in 1971 and 2007), and drawn commentary from all of the artist's most important art historical commentators and biographers. It is therefore a work of national importance.

A lightly sketched oil study of the central group of figures from *The Christening* is in the British Museum. The mezzotint engraving by Joseph Sympson is also in the British Museum; this is only loosely based on Hogarth's painting and by no means serves as a real surrogate for the original oil.

26/9/2016