

RCEWA – *Going to Market, Early Morning*, Thomas Gainsborough

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the painting meets Waverley criteria one, two and three.

Further Information

The 'Applicant's statement' and the 'Note of Case History' are available on the Arts Council Website:

www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item(s)

Going to Market, Early Morning is an oil painting on canvas by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88), measuring 121.8 x 147.2 cm (48 x 58"). The painting is in good condition, and has been exhibited and displayed publicly many times. It was paid for by its original owner in July 1773, presumably shortly after it was completed.

2. Context

- Provenance

Purchased from the artist by Henry Hoare (1705-1785), of Stourhead, Wiltshire, in July 1773; by descent; Stourhead Heirlooms sale, Christie's, London, 2 June 1883, lot 16; bt. Martin on behalf of Thomas Holloway (1800-1883) for Royal Holloway College London; deaccessioned from the College Collection, 1992; purchased privately through Christie's, October 1993; sold from that collection, Sotheby's, London, 3 July 2019, lot 22.

- Key literary and exhibition references

Selected literary references:

John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, 2 vols, London 1982, cat. no 107 (repr.) (listing earlier literature)

Jeannie Chapel, *Victorian Taste: The Complete Catalogue of Paintings at the Royal Holloway College*, London 1982, p. 13 and 92-3 (repr.)

Michael Levey, *The Genius of Gainsborough*, *Christie's International Magazine*, October 1990, p. 5 (repr.)

John Hayes, *The Holloway Gainsborough*, Published by the Pym's Gallery to coincide with the New Displays at the Tate Gallery, London, 1995 (repr.)

Derrick Chong, 'The (Un)Making of Thomas Holloway's Picture Collection', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 14:2 (1995), pp. 149-168 (repr.)

Susan Legoux Sloman, 'The Holloway Gainsborough: Its Subject Re-examined', *Gainsborough's House Review 1997/1998*, 1998, pp. 47-54 (repr.)

John Hayes, *Thomas Gainsborough*, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara 1998, no. 39 (repr. and on cover)

Michael Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough: 'a little business for the Eye'*, New Haven and London 1999, pp. 186, 204-5 (repr)

Michael Rosenthal and Martin Myrone eds, *Gainsborough*, Tate Britain, London 2002, cat. no. 115 (repr.)

Susan Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, New Haven and London, 2002, pp. 181-186 (repr. and on back cover)

Mary Cowling et al, *Paintings from the Reign of Queen Victoria: The Royal Holloway Collection, London*, Art Services International: Alexandria, Virginia 2008, pp. 3, 33

Susan Sloman, *Gainsborough's Landscapes: Themes and Variations*, Holburne Museum 2011, pp. 54, 57

Exhibition history:

- 1814 *Pictures by the Late William Hogarth, Richard Wilson, Thomas Gainsborough and J. Zoffani*, British Institution, London, no. 36
- 1870 *Works of the Old Masters*, Royal Academy, London, no. 124
- 1949 *Thomas Gainsborough*, Arts Council, London, no. 12
- 1962 *Landscapes by Thomas Gainsborough*, University Art Gallery, Nottingham, no. 18
- 1968 *Bicentenary Exhibition*, Royal Academy, London, no. 143
- 1972 *La Peinture Romantique Anglaise et les Préraphaélites*, Petit Palais, Paris, no. 124
- 1975 *Pittura Inglese 1660/1840*, British Council, Palazzo Reale, no. 51
- 1979-80 *Zwei Jahrhunderte Englische Malerei*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, no. 35
- 1981 *Gainsborough*, Grand Palais, Paris, no. 45
- 1995-8 *New displays at the Tate*, Tate Gallery, London
- 1998 *Thomas Gainsborough*, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, no. 39
- 1998-9 *Gainsborough at Sudbury*, Gainsborough's House, Sudbury
- 2002-3 *Gainsborough*, Tate Britain, London; National Gallery of Art, Washington; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 115

3. Waverley criteria

Gainsborough's *Going to Market, Early Morning* meets Waverley Criteria one, two and three. It is an outstanding example of a landscape painting by one of the most important eighteenth-century British artists. It has been included in two collections of the greatest significance and quality, at Stourhead and at Royal Holloway College. It has been exhibited and published repeatedly as the epitome of English landscape art, representing this key aspect of British culture nationally and internationally (Waverley 1). It is widely acknowledged to be one of the most supremely accomplished of Gainsborough's paintings, marking a high-point of his achievements in the art of landscape (Waverley 2). The painting occupies a pivotal place in Gainsborough's professional and artistic development and has been interpreted as having great importance for our understanding of that artist and of eighteenth-century landscape painting more generally. It is of outstanding significance for art and cultural history both in its complex aesthetic engagement with past art and in its representation of the social life of the countryside. Furthermore, the painting's ownership history makes it an important case study in the history of collecting, having been in the past part of two collections of great historical significance (Waverley 3).

DETAILED CASE

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

The painting depicts a group of rustic figures on horseback, traveling over the brow of a hill in an idyllic English landscape bathed in the silvery light of dawn. They pass, to the left, a destitute mother with a baby and young child, shown in the act of begging. The mounted group is headed by a young woman with striking red hair, and a young man who is turned attentively towards her. The picture was created by Thomas Gainsborough in 1773, towards the end of his stay in Bath, where he had since 1759 established himself as the most fashionable and accomplished portrait painter of the day and as a landscape painter of striking originality. The painting exemplifies the growing sense of ambition and significance attached to landscape painting at this juncture, and as a vision of the English countryside can be related to literary and social commentary on the changing nature of rural life in the era of enclosure and urbanisation. Painted in the wake of the foundation of the Royal Academy in London, which included Gainsborough as a founder member, and destined for a major country house collection that was otherwise dominated by Old Masters, the picture signals the ascendance of landscape painting as the most vigorous and innovative genre within British art.

Thomas Gainsborough is a major figure in eighteenth century European painting and is accordingly well-represented as a painter and draughtsman across the national collections and in many regional collections in the UK. There are over 300 portraits and landscapes in oils in national collections in the UK. *Going to Market* is comparable in quality only to the very finest of Gainsborough's landscapes, including *The Harvest Wagon* (1767; Barber Institute), *The Watering Place* (before 1777; National Gallery), and the thematically-linked '*Going to Market*' (or *Evening Landscape with Peasants Returning from Market*, c.1768-71; English Heritage, Kenwood).

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

This is one of a series of paintings and drawings showing figures traveling through the landscape, created by Thomas Gainsborough in around 1768-1773, during his last years based in Bath. These mark a new sense of ambition for landscape painting in the immediate wake of the foundation of the Royal Academy, with Gainsborough as a founder member. *Going to Market* is notable for its range of sophisticated references to art historical models, including the atmospheric effects of the landscapes of Claude and Rubens and more particularly in its use of motifs taken from Cuyp and 'a rather unprepossessing image by Philip Wouvermans' (Susan Sloman; see Appendix fig.1). Executed on a comparatively large size in oils, the picture invites direct comparison with the most esteemed landscape paintings of the past. The picture is also notable in its secularized treatment of religious motifs: Michael Rosenthal notes that the begging woman is 'strongly

reminiscent of Raphael's *Alba Madonna*, and the mounted figures at the head of the group effectively constitute a 'Flight into Egypt' with the figures of Joseph and Mary transposed into a native landscape setting (see Appendix, fig. 2). The relationship implied between the young man and woman on horseback has also drawn comment, for it suggests romantic interest between the pair, which either distracts them from the needs of the begging woman and her children or links to the theme of maternal love embodied by those latter figures. Through these devices, an ostensibly naturalistic scene of everyday life in the English countryside is endowed with a sense of aesthetic and emotional import which was quite new in British art and helped lay the foundations for the emergence of 'romantic' landscape painting.

Purchased by the banker Henry Hoare, the painting was originally displayed in the context of the collection of Old Masters at Stourhead, including works by Poussin, Rembrandt and Carlo Dolci. For Gainsborough, personally, it represented a culmination of his landscape practice to that point, drawing together themes and approaches he had been exploring in drawings and oil paintings over several years. It marked a high-point of professional achievement in the area of art – landscape – in which he was most emotionally invested. At a time of heightened rivalry within the British art world, this ambitious painting signalled Gainsborough's commitment to the genre of naturalistic landscape painting as the vehicle of sophisticated and ambitious artistic ideas, contrary to the more hierarchical and intellectually rigid ideals set forward by his rival Sir Joshua Reynolds in his capacity as President of the Royal Academy.

The collection at Stourhead was one of the great country house collections of the eighteenth century. The picture entered a second collection of great historical importance in the later nineteenth century. It was among the final purchases made by Thomas Holloway, manufacturer of patent medicines and philanthropist, for Royal Holloway College, at the very end of a bout of intensive collecting activity from 1881-1883. Holloway purchased *Going to Market* in June 1883. Together with Constable's *Sketch for 'A View on the river Stour, near Dedham'* (1821/2) and Turner's *Van Tromp Going about to Please his Masters* (1844), it was intended to encapsulate the development of earlier British landscape art in the context of a collection primarily comprising Victorian pictures. The departure for the painting from the collection in 1993, following approval from the Charity Commissioners in 1992, inspired widespread public discussion, including debate in the House of Lords.

The subject matter of this picture has elicited sustained commentary from several different perspectives. John Hayes noted of this picture that 'It was such figures as the beautiful redhead that Hazlitt had in mind when he wrote that Gainsborough gave "the air of an Adonis to the driver of a hay-cart, and models the features of a milk-maid on the principles of the antique"'. The same authority ranked the picture as 'One of the most ravishing of all Gainsborough's landscape paintings' which 'expressed to perfection the artist's arcadian vision and ... brings together most of the strands which make up Gainsborough's mature work as a landscape painter'. For writers on the politics of English landscape art, including John Barrell and Michael

Rosenthal, the picture demonstrates the complex and sometimes fraught dynamics of the representation of rural work and commerce, idealistically presenting the English landscape as a place of idyllic peace while it was in reality undergoing fractious change. The presence of the woman begging for charity at the bottom left in juxtaposition with the working and trading people on horseback has for Rosenthal suggested that Gainsborough's painting offers a view into the stratified and potentially conflicted character of rural society. The scale of the figures in relation to the landscape setting provides for a sense of monumentality that had not appeared in Gainsborough's art before, even with closely comparable subject matter, and has been taken as indicating the painter's intense sympathy for the plight of the rural poor. More recently, Susan Sloman has detailed how *Going to Market* can be related precisely to the commercial life of Bath in the late eighteenth century: referring to the picture's title in nineteenth-century inventories, Sloman argues that the three male figures at the rear of the group are colliers, bringing to market the cheap coal which was among the distinctive attractions of Bath at this point, and which was typically carried on pack ponies over the hills surrounding the city (rather than in carts). The obviously enticing appearance of the female rider to the front of the group may similarly have a reference point in social reality, for eighteenth century commentators noted that young countrywomen would adopt fashionable costume to go to market, at least partly in order to attract customers for their goods.

In terms of its iconography and aesthetic value, its biographical, art historical and social-historical context, and its reception and collecting history, the painting is of regional, national and international importance. It has been an object of fascination for commentators of different interests and outlooks over generations, and its fate has inspired national debate. In the last fifty years it has been repeatedly published and exhibited nationally and internationally, in France, Germany, Italy and the US, serving as the representative of British landscape painting at its most original and accomplished.

As noted, the painting draws together motifs and ideas that Gainsborough explored over many paintings and drawings, and there are a range of broadly-related works in public and private collections in the UK. More specifically, the painting is the culminating work in a sequence of oil paintings on the theme of peasants travelling on horseback through the landscape, the others being *The Road from Market* (c.1767-8; Toledo Museum of Art) and *Evening Landscape with Peasants Returning from Market*, (c.1768-71; English Heritage, Kenwood) (see Appendix, figs.3-4). The motifs of the cottage door and the travellers, combined in the picture at Kenwood, were subsequently developed separately as more monumentally figurative canvases, the former motif with *'The Woodcutters's Return'* (c. 1772-3; Belvoir Castle), the latter with *Going to Market* (Appendix, fig. 5). The same themes appear in several drawings from around the same date, including most strikingly the large drawing of *A Peasant Family Travelling to Market* (c.1770; Gainsborough's House, Sudbury) (Appendix, fig. 6).

APPENDIX



1. Robert Strange after Philips Wouvermans, *Le Retour du Marché*, c. 1750. Etching and engraving, 38 x 27.1 cm. The British Museum, London



2. Raphael, *The Alba Madonna*, c. 1510. Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 94.5 cm diameter. National Gallery of Art, Washington.



3. Thomas Gainsborough, *The Road from Market*, c.1767-8. Oil on canvas, 121.3 x 170.2 cm. Toledo Museum of Art



4. Thomas Gainsborough, *Evening Landscape with Peasants Returning from Market* ('Going to Market'), c. 1768-71. Oil on canvas, 119.4 x 146.1 cm. English Heritage, Kenwood



5. Thomas Gainsborough, *Wooded Landscape with Family Grouped outside a Cottage Door (The Woodcutter's Return)* c. 1772-3. Oil on canvas, 147.3 x 123.2 cm. Duke of Rutland, Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire



6. Thomas Gainsborough, *A Peasant Family Going to Market*, c. 1770 – 1774. Black and white chalk, with grey and brown washes, extensively heightened with white chalk and bodycolour on prepared brown paper, 41.4x53.8 cm. Gainsborough's House, Sudbury