

GAINSBOROUGH  
& *The Landscape of Refinement*

---

LOWELL LIBSON LTD

---

*The lonely haunts of the solitary shepherd, –  
the return of the rustic with his bill and bundle of wood, –  
the darksome lane or dell, – the sweet little cottage girl  
at the spring with her pitcher, – were the things he delighted to paint,  
and which he painted with exquisite refinement,  
yet not a refinement beyond nature*

JOHN CONSTABLE ON THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH, 1836

---



---

GAINSBOROUGH  
AND THE LANDSCAPE  
OF REFINEMENT

---

LOWELL LIBSON LTD

## LOWELL LIBSON LTD

3 Clifford Street · London W1S 2LF  
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7734 8686  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7734 9997  
Email: pictures@lowell-libson.com  
Website: www.lowell-libson.com

Lowell Libson  
*lowell@lowell-libson.com*

Deborah Greenhalgh  
*deborah@lowell-libson.com*

Jonny Yarker  
*jonny@lowell-libson.com*

### Exhibition dates

**JANUARY 25 – FEBRUARY 1, 2104**  
Lowell Libson Ltd at Mitchell-Innes & Nash  
1018 Madison Avenue · New York

**LONDON: FEBRUARY 17 – FEBRUARY 28, 2014**  
Lowell Libson Ltd  
3 Clifford Street · London

Published by Lowell Libson Ltd, 2014  
Text and publication © Lowell Libson Limited  
All rights reserved  
ISBN 978 0 9563930 8 1  
Principal photography by Rodney Todd White & Son Ltd  
Designed and typeset in Monotype Bulmer by Dalrymple  
Colour reproduction by Altagimage  
Printed in Belgium by Albe De Coker

## Foreword

January 2014 marks precisely 100 years since the pioneering exhibition of Gainsborough drawings held by Knoedler in their New York gallery. The Knoedler show comprised some thirty sheets, fourteen of which had come from Barton Grange and been formed by Gainsborough himself as a representative selection of his work as a draughtsman which he gave to his friend Goodenough Earl, with a further five drawings from the distinguished collection of John Postle Heseltine. This was the first major exhibition to show a group of Gainsborough drawings, not only in America, but anywhere in the world and contributed largely to the revival of interest in his work as a draughtsman. We believe that our exhibition is the largest commercial concentration of his drawings gathered since then.

Like the Knoedler show our selection includes drawings from the distinguished collections formed in the eighteenth century by Dr Thomas Monro and Dr John Hunter as well as Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. The nineteenth century roster of collections include those of Thomas Woolner RA, William Esdaile, John Postle Heseltine and in the twentieth century of Henry Pfungst, Victor Rienacker and Paul Mellon. But most importantly we hope that the present catalogue will stimulate renewed interest in Gainsborough's graphic work by a new generation of collectors.

The sophistication of Gainsborough's evocation of an ideal landscape, combined with his dazzling and intuitive ability to make beautiful marks on paper, has meant that his drawings have always been prized by connoisseurs. For five decades drawing was central to Gainsborough's creative life: whether in the magical execution of his mature painted portraits which appear to have been built up by layers of 'drawn' brushstrokes, to his works on paper in which he constantly explored a limited range of motifs. The apparent effortless beauty of Gainsborough's drawings calls to mind the music of Mozart. This is not entirely accidental for if one comprehends the emotional impetus of Gainsborough's drawings, as well as their intellectual qualities, one cannot but come closer to this most endearing of artistic personalities.

In spite of these qualities, Gainsborough's drawings have not received the attention they perhaps deserve. The first museum exhibition devoted exclusively to Gainsborough's landscapes was mounted in 2012 at the Holburne Museum, Bath (sponsored by Lowell Libson Ltd). Its title, *Themes and Variations*, was the same as an exhibition we held in New York in 2003 and reflects Gainsborough's constant reworking, over a forty-five year period, of a small number of elements. It is an aspect of Gainsborough's work which is explored in Jonny Yarker's essay 'Gainsborough and the landscape of refinement'.

I am very grateful to Hugh Belsey who has written or made contributions to the individual catalogue entries and to my colleagues, Jonny Yarker for his fascinating introductory essay and Deborah Greenhalgh for all her work in putting the catalogue together.

I am delighted that we have been able to assemble a group of Gainsborough's drawings in which every sheet not only tells its own part of the story but, in my opinion, delights the eye, the intellect and the imagination.

LOWELL LIBSON



## Gainsborough & The Landscape of Refinement

JONATHAN YARKER

In a lecture entitled *The Decline and Revival of Landscape* delivered at the Royal Institution in June 1836, the painter John Constable enthused on the appeal of Gainsborough's landscapes:

*The lonely haunts of the solitary shepherd, – the return of the rustic with his bill and bundle of wood, – the darksome lane or dell, – the sweet little cottage girl at the spring with her picher, – were the things he delighted to paint, and which he painted with exquisite refinement, yet not a refinement beyond nature.<sup>1</sup>*

The principal message of Constable's lecture was to advocate the observation of nature over the veneration of earlier masters, noting that nature: 'constantly presents us with compositions of her own, far more beautiful than the happiest arranged by human skill.' Constable enlisted Gainsborough as an early adherent to this idea, in contrast to the early eighteenth-century painter John Wotton, 'who painted country gentlemen in their wigs and jockey caps, and placed them in Italian landscapes resembling Gaspar Poussin, except in truth and force.' But Constable was aware that Gainsborough's work was more equivocal than being simply a faithful record of 'the lonely haunts of the solitary shepherd ... 'recognising that in Gainsborough's landscapes – particularly his landscape drawings – a tension existed between naturalism and invention. After all, the 'exquisite refinement' Constable refers to, suggests his appreciation of Gainsborough's ideal landscapes – refinement by definition being a process of selection – but that even in those studies anecdotally created from observing 'cork', 'coal', 'bushes of mosses' and 'woods of broccoli' Gainsborough never departed far from the truth of nature.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst Constable's comments were directed at Gainsborough's landscape paintings, they can be read as equally applicable to his landscape drawings. In fact it was to his drawings that Constable had far greater access – owning at least 12 examples himself – and it is in Gainsborough's drawings that his distinctive approach to landscape, both real and imaginary, is most apparent.<sup>3</sup> It is striking therefore that his drawings, as distinct from the exhibited oil landscapes, have received comparatively little scholarly attention.<sup>4</sup> One reason is the sheer number, the current published oeuvre with its various supplements stands at 1098 and the present catalogue publishes an additional three, but they also offer fundamental problems of categorisation. The scholar, in assessing their purpose and in what context they were made and viewed, is faced with insuperable difficulties. Few of the sheets are obviously preparatory to exhibited compositions and the 'finished' drawings rarely conform in subject-matter to the types of drawing identifiable in the works of Gainsborough's contemporaries. Indeed it is striking that this problem of categorisation is not shared by other major landscape draughtsman of the period. The work of Richard Wilson for example, who was only thirteen years Gainsborough's senior, is far easier to define. His 'finished' drawings were either topographical, semi-topographical (containing familiar, usually classical buildings in an imagined landscape) or designed to showcase specific literary or artistic quotations, the latter often from the works of Claude. Gainsborough's works by contrast are rarely actual places; they eschew narrative or historical readings and he rarely quotes directly from old masters.

The purpose of this short essay is not to offer a solution to the difficulty of classification or a comprehensive account of Gainsborough's work as a draughtsman, but to provide a context for reading the select group of landscape drawings contained in this exhibition. It will focus on Constable's observation that the mental act of refinement or selection was at the heart of Gainsborough's practice as a landscape painter, examining in turn his interest in the natural world, old master paintings and contemporary concepts of ideal landscape in his drawings.

### Refinement from Nature

The idea of refinement, or selection, was central to seventeenth-century French theories of painting. For a British audience the most important of these texts was Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy's 559-line Latin poem *De Arte Graphica*, which was translated into English by John Dryden in 1695 and which remained in print throughout the eighteenth century. In it, Dufresnoy stated, following antique precedents, that nature was imperfect and that as a result the artist had to select the best parts from the natural world and then combine them to produce a work that superseded nature. In relating a story about the Greek painter Zeuxis, who to create an ideal painting of Helen of Troy, made studies of the best elements from a number of maidens, Dryden concluded: 'thus nature on this account is so much inferior to art.'<sup>5</sup> This sentiment was commonplace in texts on painting and had the practical result that finished compositions were supposed to be composed of studies taken from a multitude of sources. For a landscape, this required the initial studies to be made from nature and then combined to produce an ideal composition. Making studies from nature was something Gainsborough did compulsively throughout the early part of his career.

Born in Suffolk in 1727, Gainsborough spent his early life in the town of Sudbury, where he studied at the local grammar school. There is little documentary evidence of Gainsborough's earliest training but in a letter he wrote to the Reverend Sir Henry Bate Dudley at the end of his life, Gainsborough made a striking assessment of his early masterpiece *Cornard Wood* (National Gallery, London) which had recently appeared at auction and been purchased for 75 guineas:

*It is in some respects a little in the schoolboy stile – but I do not reflect on this without a secret gratification; for – as an early instance how strong my inclination stood for Landskip ... it may be worth remark, that though there is very little idea of composition in the picture, the touch and closeness to nature in the study of the parts and minutiae, are equal to any of my later productions.*<sup>6</sup>

Gainsborough here acknowledges that the large, finished painting was a 'composition' made up of 'parts and minutiae' closely studied from nature; a formula which precisely parallels that suggested by writers such as Defresnoy.<sup>7</sup>

Bate Dudley tells us, in the obituary he published on his friend's death in 1788, that: 'Nature was his teacher and the woods of Suffolk his academy; here he would pass in solitude his moments in making a sketch of an antiquated tree, a marshy brook, a few cattle, a sheep herd and his flock, or any other accidental objects that were present.'<sup>8</sup> The obituary goes on to note that Gainsborough: 'made his first essays in the art by modelling figures of cows, horses, and dogs, in which he attained very great excellence.' The present catalogue contains the first recorded example of these exercises in the form of



[Fig.1] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Self-portrait; the artist seated in profile to left, beneath a tree, sketching*  
Pencil, the artist drawn on a separate piece of paper attached to sheet  
14½ × 10¾ inches · 359 × 258 mm  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



[Cat.1] Thomas Gainsborough RA 1727–1788  
*Sheep and lambs by a fence*  
Oil on canvas · 9 × 10½ inches · 228 × 267 mm  
Painted circa 1744–45

Gainsborough's earliest known oil study of *Sheep and lambs by a fence*, [cat.1] which Hayes dated to 1744–5, when Gainsborough was only 18.

The idea of the Suffolk countryside acting as Gainsborough's early 'academy' is a powerful one, and one supported by the visual evidence, which suggests that Gainsborough made multiple *plein air* studies of features from nature: individual trees, shrubs, animals and figures. A sale held by Gainsborough's daughter Margaret in 1799 contained ten sketchbooks belonging to her father, of which three at least can be partially reconstructed. The diarist Joseph Farington noted that one of the sketchbooks was acquired by the connoisseur Richard Payne Knight and several by 'Mr. Hibbert.'<sup>9</sup> This was George Hibbert, a West India merchant and collector, and the drawings remained with his descendants until 1913. The 'Hibbert' drawings – of which there are some 80 sheets altogether – tend to be fleeting studies of trees and foliage, or rough compositional sketches and are principally dated by Hugh Belsey to 1757.<sup>10</sup> These studies can be immensely beautiful and commanding sheets, but it is clear that they were never designed to be finished drawings [fig.2]. Another of these sketchbooks seems likely to have descended to the late nineteenth-century curator and collector Sir J. C. Robinson. A group of early drawings recorded in the dispersal of Robinson's collection in 1902 and others, including the *Study of Trees* [cat.2], which remained with his descendants, are all on identically sized paper and seem likely to relate to a sketchbook.<sup>11</sup> Although their provenance does not lead directly back to the sale of 1799, they show precisely the kind of focussed study of foliage which is found in other Hibbert sheets and are precisely the same size.

Following the logic of earlier theoreticians of painting, these preparatory studies should then be translated into finished compositions which reflect an ideal combination of parts. Certainly a number of Gainsborough's finished drawings and paintings seem to show this composite process. Gainsborough's large-scale painting of an *Open Landscape*, commissioned by Handel's librettist Charles Jennens, was clearly composed from a number of existing drawings, including a full study of the central section of the composition and two sketches of the cows, which were clearly made from life [fig.3].<sup>12</sup> Whilst a number of compositional studies survive for Gainsborough's later exhibition landscape paintings, it is rare to find his studies for nature directly quoted in finished works.



[Cat.2] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Study of Trees*  
Pencil · 5½ × 7¾ inches · 140 × 194 mm



[Fig.2] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Study of Trees, circa 1755–9*  
Pencil · 5½ × 7¾ inches · 140 × 190 mm  
Private collection, UK

[Fig.3] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Open landscape with peasant boy and cows*  
Oil on canvas · 28 × 53½ inches · 711 × 1360 mm  
Private Collection

This lack of a relationship between his life studies and finished works, is partly explained by Gainsborough himself in his correspondence. Writing to his friend, Constantine Phipps, whom he was advising about drawing in the 1770s, Gainsborough observed: *You know, Sir, I set you to this [sketch of foliage] merely to free your hand, but you are not to understand that for Drawing – therefore remember that there must be truth of hand, as well as freedom of hand in Drawing.*<sup>13</sup>

For Gainsborough the notations and studies which filled his early sketchbooks were not ‘Drawings’ but exercises, designed to ‘free his hand’ and presumably to inform obliquely his landscape drawings. His studies of foliage allowed him to understand the structure of different species of tree, the massing of light and shadow and the effects achieved at different times of the day and with this knowledge he could then create a refined vision in his finished sheets and paintings.

This in part explains why so few of Gainsborough’s studies are strictly topographical. In a letter addressed to Philip, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, Gainsborough offers a characteristically insubordinate excuse to a patron making an unsolicited request for a topographical painting:

*with regard to real Views from Nature in this Country, he has never seen any Place that affords a Subject equal to the poorest imitations of Gaspar or Claude Paul Sandby is the only Man of Genius, he believes, who has employ’d his Pencil that Way – Mr G. hopes Lord Hardwicke will not mistake his meaning, but if His Lordship wishes to have anything tolerable of the name of G. the subject altogether, as well [as] figures &c must be of his own Brain.*<sup>14</sup>

Gainsborough’s more naturalistic landscape drawings have inevitably attracted titles identifying them with specific locations. Constable himself, asked for intelligence of Gainsborough’s activities in Suffolk by the keeper of prints and drawings at the British Museum, J.T. Smith, wrote a letter identifying a specific area near Ipswich as the subject of Gainsborough’s earliest works.<sup>15</sup> We do know, from a number of surviving references, that Gainsborough made drawing expeditions – those from Bath to the surrounding counties, to see friends in Derbyshire (James Unwin) and Devon (William Jackson) and a trip to the Lake District with Samuel Kilderbee in 1783 – but that very few drawings can be securely tied to these excursions and they are never strictly topographical.<sup>16</sup> An example of this ambiguity is a drawing in the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester which is inscribed ‘A study from nature, by Gainsborough when on a visit to Foxley.’<sup>17</sup> But even here Gainsborough departs from reality; as Susan Sloman has shown, the tower seen in the distance of the composition is Gainsborough’s invention.<sup>18</sup>

Gainsborough’s dissatisfaction with topography, as voiced to Philip Hardwicke, precisely reflects his appreciation of Continental theories of landscape painting as articulated by Dufresony and others. During his early training in London at the St Martin’s Lane Academy, Gainsborough would have been exposed to these ideas as many of the personnel who taught at the Academy were themselves of French extraction, including the engravers Hubert François Gravelot and Charles Grignion. This grounding in Continental art theory points to another important aspect of Gainsborough’s process, his interest in the works of earlier painters.

## *Refinement from Art*

In his 1688 *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, the French Académie’s unofficial theorist, André Félibien, observed: ‘there are two advantages to be had in studying from the beginning the work of the old masters. The first is that one finds there a nature unburdened of many things one is obliged to reject when one copies nature; the second is that one learns that way how to select from nature, only taking the beautiful and correcting what is defective.’<sup>19</sup> Félibien’s justification for advocating the imitation of the work of others was a seemingly paradoxical one; it was the surest way to represent nature faithfully, but to the seventeenth century academic mind, however, the paradox was more superficial than real. In the work of old masters the selection of the best parts of nature had already been done. This was a powerful doctrine transmitted to a British audience by Jonathan Richardson in his 1715 *Theory of Painting*, a text Gainsborough would certainly have known.

Gainsborough is always understood to have had an ambivalent relationship with earlier painters. In contrast to his contemporary, Joshua Reynolds, who copied poses, emulated styles and exhorted his students to do the same, Gainsborough eschewed direct quotation from other artists and avoided history painting with its associated visual traditions.<sup>20</sup> Yet many contemporaries viewed Gainsborough’s art – particularly his landscape painting – as one of pure imitation and that his refinement of nature owed a great deal to his interest in the art of the past. In June 1813 the diarist Joseph Farington recorded a discussion between the painters James Northcote and Robert Smirke:

*Northcote sd. He considered Gainsborough to be an original genius. Smirke differed from him, & sd. He thought Gainsborough was not an original genius, one who had attentively studied nature & derived from original thoughts, but that on the contrary His art was founded upon the works of others; made up from observations He had made upon the pictures of different masters, but that He had not looked beyond the source.*<sup>21</sup>

Smirke was a contrarian, but he was voicing an opinion – namely that Gainsborough’s works, and particularly his landscapes, owed a great deal to certain old masters – that was current amongst artists in the decades after 1788.<sup>22</sup> In 1809 the portrait painter John Hoppner, who was a great admirer of Gainsborough’s work, wrote of his finished drawings of the 1780s: ‘the studies he made at this period of his life, in chalks, from the works of the more learned painters of landscapes, but particularly from Gasper Poussin.’<sup>23</sup> Whilst Gainsborough was keen to erase all suggestion of narrative or allegory from his compositions he was conscious of his own debt to earlier masters, writing at the end of his life of his: ‘fondness for my first imitations of little Dutch Landskips.’<sup>24</sup>

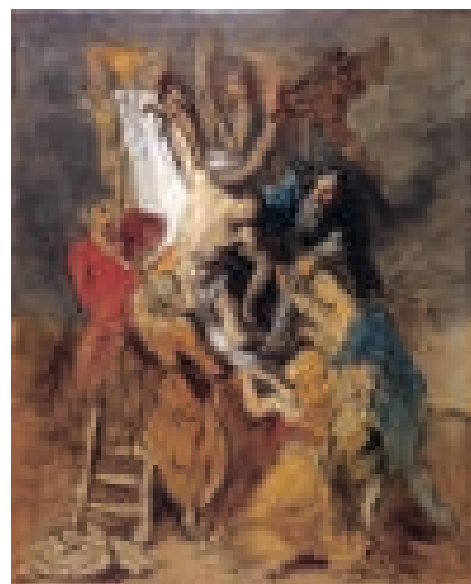
These ‘Dutch Landskips’ were made at the beginning of his independent career as a painter. Gainsborough moved to London from Suffolk in about 1741, where he initially trained in the orbit of a silversmith, likely to have been Panton Betew who also traded as an art dealer.<sup>25</sup> Training to be a painter in early eighteenth-century London involved working in all the ancillary trades of the London art market. Betew dealt principally in seventeenth-century Dutch landscape paintings and there is evidence that Gainsborough was employed cleaning, copying and ‘improving’ Betew’s stock of Dutch paintings. The 1762 sale of John Oldfield’s collection included a ‘Dutch Landscape, repaired by Mr Gainsborough’ and a painting by ‘Wijnants the figures by Mr Gainsborough.’<sup>26</sup> The access to genuine Dutch

landscapes offered a supplement to the young Gainsborough's formal training in the circle of the second St. Martin's Lane Academy.<sup>27</sup> One of Gainsborough's rare copy-drawings dates from this period: a fine sheet made after *La Forêt* by Jacob van Ruisdael (Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester).<sup>28</sup> On the whole though, rather than produce scrupulous replicas of existing landscapes, Gainsborough instead imitated the manner and style of earlier painters. Scholars have long discerned traces of the work of Anthonie Waterloo, Nicolas Berchem and Jan Wijnants in Gainsborough's drawings of this period, but most attempts to tie specific sheets, or canvases, to examples by these artists have been unsuccessful.<sup>29</sup>

This is once more because Gainsborough's process was rarely strictly linear. Whilst there are examples of elements of old master paintings being quoted directly in his finished landscapes, more often than not he simply absorbed a style or motif into his current way of working. This precisely followed contemporary theories of imitation. Gainsborough's contemporary, Joshua Reynolds, formulated in the *Discourses* he delivered to the students of the Royal Academy, a theory of imitation of earlier masters which is highly suggestive when viewing Gainsborough's own work. Reynolds observed:

*[A] great part of every man's life must be employed in collecting materials for the exercise of genius. Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory.*<sup>30</sup>

Reynolds was clear as to the source of these 'images', the 'great artists of the past', but he was more circumspect in the manner this was to be achieved. Reynolds was dismissive of the precise replication of old master paintings. He argued that 'of a very large composition, even those most admired, a great part may be truly said to be *common-place*' concluding that to replicate the whole picture was counter-productive: 'I consider general copying as a delusive kind of industry.'<sup>31</sup> He instead urged his students to make slight sketches of the machinery and general management of the picture.' Gainsborough's copies more often than not follow this pattern. His magnificent, fluid study of the *Descent from the Cross* [fig.4] made after a painting by Rubens is not a straight copy. Gainsborough concentrates on the figure of Christ, and Joseph of Arimathea, leaving the rest of the composition only lightly blocked-in.



[Fig.4] Thomas Gainsborough  
*The Descent from the Cross*  
Oil on canvas · 49½ × 40 inches · 1255 × 1015 mm  
Gainsborough's House, Sudbury



A number of Gainsborough's other copies from old masters are recorded as having been made 'from memory'; often small in scale and rapidly produced, they perfectly illustrate Reynolds's requirements of 'a slight sketch.'<sup>32</sup> For Reynolds invention was the product of imitation and the more paintings the artist had access to the better: 'there can be no doubt but that he who has the most materials has the greatest means of invention.'

In the 1770s Gainsborough looked increasingly at the work of French and Italian landscape painters of the seventeenth century, most particularly Gaspard Dughet [fig.5]. The posthumous auction of his collection included four paintings attributed to Dughet and as has frequently been noted, his works, particularly his drawings, demonstrate both a compositional and technical debt to Dughet.<sup>33</sup> Dughet, known throughout the eighteenth century as Gaspard Poussin, offered Gainsborough a vocabulary of forms and, most importantly, compositional devices for his own works. Dughet's pictures frequently contained serpentine tracks, often with a flock of sheep or herd of cows with a solitary herdsman or shepherd, framed by trees, with groups of rustic buildings in the middle-distance and hills on the horizon. Gainsborough's *A herdsman and cattle on a mountain track* of c.1778 [fig.6] now in the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, is a precise distillation of these Gaspardesque features. It is not a direct copy, nor does it directly quote from Dughet's works, but it approximates the 'machinery' of his works.

This process of refining the features learnt from Dughet can be further seen by comparing the Whitworth sheet to three other drawings by Gainsborough. The first [cat.8] is a slightly concentrated form of the same composition, Gainsborough has precisely replicated the Whitworth sheet simply removing the flock of sheep, dog and shepherd on the hill to the left. The second is a drawing of about the same date as the Whitworth drawing, Gainsborough has used the same elements – herd of cows, herdsman, serpentine track, trees in the middle-distance and mountainous horizon – slightly rearranging them to produce a variation on the same compositional theme [fig.6]. The third, a drawing Gainsborough gave to Richard French and now in Melbourne [fig.8], comprises the same serpentine track, but without the herd of cows or flock of sheep which is tellingly inscribed: 'original chalk drawing by Gainsboro ... after the style of Gaspar Poussin.'<sup>34</sup> In these three sheets it is possible to view



*Below, across spread, from left to right:*

[Fig.5] Jean Baptiste Chatelain  
after Gaspard Dughet  
*Landscape with figure on a track*, 1741  
Etching · 11¾ × 15¼ inches · 301 × 387 mm  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

[Fig.6] Thomas Gainsborough  
*A Mountainous landscape with a herdsman and his cattle*, circa 1778  
Black and white chalks and stump on buff paper  
10¾ × 15 inches · 276 × 381 mm  
Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester (D.50.1927)

[Cat.8] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded Landscape with Herdsman and cows*  
Black and white chalk and stump  
10½ × 14 inches · 270 × 360 mm

[Fig.7] Thomas Gainsborough  
*A Mountainous landscape with a herdsman and his cattle passing a cottage*  
Black and white chalks and stump on white wove paper  
11 × 14½ inches · 280 × 369 mm  
Inscribed verso: 1817 WE. Lamberts coll P45.N54/  
Gainsborough  
Drawn in the late 1770s  
Ex-collection Cavendish family, Holker Hall;  
Private collection, USA, formerly with Lowell Libson Ltd



Gainsborough's process of refinement, playing with Gaspardesque features to produce different iterations of the same composition. Varying the precise forms, fall of light and precise combination of the same group of features, Gainsborough produced four distinct drawings each 'after the style of Gaspar Poussin.'

### *Gainsborough and Ideal Landscape*

In light of his interest in the 'ideal' landscapes created by both Dutch seventeenth-century painters and Dughet, it is worth returning to Gainsborough's statement to Philip Hardwicke: 'if His Lordship wishes to have anything tolerable of the name of G. the subject altogether, as well [as] figures &c must be of his own Brain.' Gainsborough relied upon the 'materials for the exercise of genius', to quote Reynolds again, he had collected from the natural world – in the form of studies of trees, plants and animals – and from earlier painters, bringing them together in his finished landscape compositions. Again this mental process was similar to the method advocated by a number of earlier writers and, significantly, Gainsborough's contemporaries. It is instructive to consider just one, Alexander Cozens, who codified his approach to creating ideal landscapes in a number of publications. Cozens's advice to amateur painters in his 1785 publication, *A New Method of Assisting in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*, included the following instruction:

*The practice of observing and of drawing single parts or objects, such as trees, thickets, water, rocks, &c. from drawings or prints, and especially from nature, is very much to be recommended ... in order to acquire the knowledge of parts. While the sketch is making out, place good prints, drawings, or paintings, something similar to the same kind of subject as your sketch.*<sup>35</sup>

But this conventional accumulation of visual data from the natural world and old masters' was only part of Cozens's approach to landscape and it was in the process of his 'New Method' and its explanation that we find an important context for Gainsborough's own approach to drawing.<sup>36</sup>

Cozens had a considerable impact on the development of landscape painting amongst his contemporaries and younger artists of the following century, particularly John Constable.<sup>37</sup> As a drawing master Cozens won the patronage of a number of significant young collectors including Sir George Beaumont and William Beckford. During the 1750s he developed an innovative system for composing landscape based on ink 'blots'. Cozens encouraged the artist to apply Indian ink to prepared paper swiftly with a brush making 'all possible variety of shapes and strokes', these 'rude black Sketches' were to be developed until a landscape composition emerged in an almost accidental way. This 'blot' could then serve as the basis for a finished landscape drawn on a clean piece of paper using the spontaneously created masses as a general outline. This process was not as abstract as it sounds, the blots were created to a careful system. In the 1759 publication recording the method, *An Essay to Facilitate the Inventing of Landships*, Cozens provided eight pairs of blots with the outline landscapes drawn from them as examples of the eight styles of composition which he listed in the accompanying essay. According to Cozens, the ideal landscape drawing was made as instinctively as possible. The artist was to control his hand only in accordance with some 'general idea' which he should first have in his head. This done, the accidental shapes of the washes would suggest natural features to the artist. He could then elaborate or paint over them for the highly imaginative more finished drawing. Key to Cozens's method was the



[Fig.8] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Mountain landscape with classical buildings, shepherd and sheep*  
Mid 1780s  
Black chalk and stump and white chalk  
11 1/8 x 14 3/4 inches · 282 x 374 mm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1951

rejection of a drawn outline. As he explained in his *New Method*, 'for in nature, forms are not distinguished by lines, but by shade and colour.' The artist therefore produced a wholly 'invented' landscape, something firmly divorced from topography.

The same impulses governed Gainsborough's landscape making. We can perhaps go further, and see Cozens's blots as analogous to the artificial models Gainsborough developed for prompting the creation of his own ideal landscapes. A contemporary wrote that Gainsborough made:

*models – or rather thoughts – for landscape scenery on a little old-fashioned folding oak table ... This table, held sacred for the purpose, he would order to be brought to his parlour, and thereupon compose his designs. He would place cork or coal for his foregrounds; make middle grounds of sand or clay, bushes of mosses and lichens, and set up distant woods of broccoli.*<sup>38</sup>

It is striking that they are described as 'models' or 'thoughts', in precisely the way Cozens explained his 'blots'. Thus the semi-accidental arrangement of 'cork', 'coal', 'mosses' and 'broccoli', offered the stimulus for Gainsborough's finished drawings. This conceptual similarity between Cozens and Gainsborough is amplified by strikingly similar technical approaches and visual results. In a famous description of Gainsborough's working method, Edward Edwards explained the 'capricious' manner in which he produced his late drawings:

*Many of these were made in black and white, which colours were applied in the following manner: a small sponge tied to a bit of stick, served as the pencil for the shadows, and a small lump of whiting held by a pair of tea-tongs was the instrument by which the high lights were applied; beside these, there were others in black and white chalks, India ink, bistre and some in slight tint of oil colours; with these various material, he struck out so vast number of bold, free sketches of landscape and cattle, all of which have a most captivating effect to the eye of an artist, or connoisseur of real taste.*<sup>39</sup>

These fluid, late drawings were known by contemporaries as his 'moppings' – a term which in itself calls to mind the accidental quality of Cozens's 'blots' – and like Cozens's drawings a simple system and visual vocabulary yielded works, to quote Henry Angelo, which were 'emanations of genius and picturesque feeling.'<sup>40</sup> Turning to the drawings themselves, it is striking how visually similar they can be to Cozens's works. A remarkably fluid 'mopping', such as the *Wooded landscape with a cow beside a pool* now in Berlin [fig.9] can be compared in its fluid handling of forms and tonal atmosphere with Cozens's 'blot' drawing of *Goats on the Edge of a Lake* in the Art Institute of Chicago [fig.10]. Gainsborough developed a highly efficient short-hand for depicting his favourite motifs, thus cows and rural figures become little more than a few abbreviated lines or smudges of chalk. In the *Countrymen Harnessing a Horse* [cat.6] the dramatic scene has been described using such smudges, presumably made using the 'small sponge tied to a bit of stick', these suggestive marks have only been strengthened and defined late on in the drawings creation with lines of black ink and given greater contrast by the addition of ink wash.

The *Wooded Landscape with Stream and Building* [cat.7] is a characteristically rapid drawing made by Gainsborough in the mid-1770s, executed in black and brown chalk on blue paper with touches of grey wash, it demonstrates the range of materials he used to achieve such 'free sketches'. The drawing itself is a simple meditation on composition – the masses of the bank topped with imaginary buildings, the dense clump of trees, the



[Fig.9] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded landscape with a cow beside a pool*  
Black and brown chalks with grey and grey-black washes, heightened with white · 9 1/2 x 14 1/16 inches · 241 x 373 mm  
© Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (KdZ 4683)



[Fig.10] Alexander Cozens  
*Goats on the edge of a lake*  
Pencil, grey and brown wash · 6 1/2 x 8 1/4 inches · 165 x 210 mm  
The Art Institute of Chicago, Celia and David Hilliard Endowment and Thomas Baron Fund, 2010.49, formerly with Lowell Libson Ltd



[Cat.6] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Countrymen harnessing a horse to a cart*  
Pen and ink and wash with stumping  
10 1/4 x 13 1/2 inches · 260 x 340 mm



receding s-shape of the river and small waterfall – all features which appear time and time again in Cozens’s drawings as well as Gainsborough’s, indeed they are all apparent in a plate from Cozens’s publication *The Various Species of Composition* [fig.11]. Whilst there is little evidence that Gainsborough knew, or was interested in Cozens’s writing, Cozens was certainly aware of Gainsborough, producing a fascinating drawing which is essence an exercise in Gainsborough’s technique [fig.12].

As Cozens’s writing reveals, he believed his landscape drawings embodied abstract ideas and principles.<sup>41</sup> This was not a new concept. Throughout the eighteenth century popular discourses on aesthetics had specifically underlined the appeal of certain types of landscape

[Cat.7] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded Landscape with a building and stream*  
Black, brown and white chalk, with touches of grey wash, on blue laid paper · 10¼ × 12½ inches · 260 × 320 mm

[Fig.11] Alexander Cozens  
*The Various Species of Composition of Landscape in Nature, 1770–5*  
Etching · 8¾ × 5¾ inches · 212 × 149 mm  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



[Fig.12] Alexander Cozens  
*Landscape composition after Gainsborough*  
Watercolour · 10¾ × 15¾ inches · 273 × 399 mm  
© Tate, London 2013

and this had inevitably impacted upon theories of painting. Thus Edmund Burke’s 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime*, for example, contained sections specifically explaining the appeal of certain types of landscape painting:

*in painting a judicious obscurity in some things contributes to the effect of the picture; because the images in paintings are exactly similar to those in nature; and in nature dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form grander passions than those have which are more clear and determined.*<sup>42</sup>

It is hard not to read this passage and think of the heavily wooded areas of Gainsborough’s *Wooded Landscape with Stream and Building*, where a ‘judicious obscurity’ adds greatly to the appeal of the drawing. But whilst Cozens’s compositions were specifically designed to appeal to the ideas of the ‘sublime’, Gainsborough’s works have long been identified as appealing to the contemporary cult of sensibility.<sup>43</sup> In this context, the pleasure of viewing Gainsborough’s works came from contemplating innocent rural life uncorrupted by urban manners and morals. Sensibility exalted feelings over the intellect as the true expression of a person’s innate morality, and there is no doubt Gainsborough saw himself as a painter of sensibility, once arguing that he always sought ‘a Variety of lively touches and surprizing Effects to make the Heart dance.’<sup>44</sup> This was certainly the context of a sheet such as the remarkable *Cottage Door* [cat.5], a finished drawing dating from the late 1770s, which shows a mother standing outside a rural dwelling, with a brood of boisterous children, greeting the return of their father carrying a bundle of firewood. This was a composition Gainsborough revisited constantly throughout the last two decades of his career, introducing and then removing certain elements, such as the pig-pen seen to the right of the cottage. Gainsborough ultimately believed that a drawing such as this could be just as civilizing and cultivating as any history painting.

### *The reception of Gainsborough’s drawings*

Whilst Gainsborough may have been apathetic about viewing his landscape drawings as stimuli for specific emotions, there is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that this is the way they were considered by contemporaries. As we have already seen, Henry Angelo, praised his works for being: ‘emanations of genius and picturesque feeling.’ Angelo had been a pupil of Alexander Cozens at Eton and would have been familiar with his theories, it is therefore not surprising to find him reading Gainsborough’s ‘moppings and grubbings’ as works of sensibility. Comments such as this confirm that Gainsborough’s drawings were appreciated during his lifetime as more than simply private ‘thoughts’. This may seem self-evident, but it has been frequently implied that in contrast to his exhibited landscape paintings, Gainsborough’s drawings were made for purely personal reasons and consequently had little public life.

At least four of the drawings in this catalogue have provenances going back to Gainsborough’s lifetime and a fifth, the *Wooded Landscape with Stream and Building* [cat.7], is stamped with the artist’s name on the bottom left of the mount; a method of presentation Gainsborough developed presumably for their life beyond the studio.<sup>45</sup> It is striking that Gainsborough should have developed very particular forms of presentation such as this.<sup>46</sup> As has been pointed out in the past, such ‘presentation’ drawings were frequently the most abstract and apparently fragmentary of Gainsborough’s ‘moppings’ and the use of his stamped name, perhaps confirms that these drawings were not purely private exercises, but were intended for display.



[Cat..5] Thomas Gainsborough  
*A Family outside a Cottage Door*  
Pen and ink, grey and pink washes over pencil  
7¾ × 9¾ inches · 194 × 247 mm



[Fig.13] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Uvedale Tomkyns Price, c.1760*  
Oil on canvas · 48¾ × 39 inches · 1240 × 990 mm  
bpk | Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen

Although there seems to be no record of Gainsborough charging for his drawings, we know he gave a number of sheets to friends throughout his career. One of the drawings in the present catalogue, the fluid study of figures by a road in brown ink, is inscribed: ‘the gift of the ingenious artist to Miss Thicknesse’. This was possibly Anna Thicknesse, the daughter of Gainsborough’s friend Philip Thicknesse and his second wife, and was possibly made specifically for her to copy.<sup>47</sup> We know also that the *A herdsman and cattle on a mountain track* [cat.8] was acquired by the physician Dr John Hunter from Gainsborough – probably as a gift – it appeared in his posthumous sale in 1794 where it was purchased by the collector Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 5th Baronet, who also owned the *Countrymen harnessing a horse to a cart* [cat.6].<sup>48</sup> But there is enough circumstantial evidence surrounding the exchange of Gainsborough’s drawings in his lifetime, and immediately after his death, to suggest that they were valuable commodities and highly esteemed by artists and collectors. For example, the dealer Noel Desenfans’s sale in 1785 included four drawings by Gainsborough all described as ‘High Finished Drawings’: the two lots made one pound and seventeen shillings and one pound and three shillings, the former being acquired by an important collector, Francis Basset, 1st Lord de Dunstanville.<sup>49</sup> As John Hayes noted, newspaper articles started appearing shortly after Gainsborough’s death in 1788, stating that his drawings were: ‘in the highest request, and sought with the utmost avidity.’<sup>50</sup>

Their popularity is confirmed by a number of engravings made after Gainsborough’s drawings. Gainsborough had himself made a series of soft-ground etchings and aquatints specifically in emulation of his drawing style during the 1770s. At least three plates were acquired by the print seller John Boydell and published in the 1790s as part of a sequence of twelve prints after Gainsborough’s drawings. The soft-ground etching of a *Wooded Landscape with Two Country Carts and Figures* [cat.9] belongs to this sequence.<sup>51</sup> In 1788 Thomas Rowlandson, who evidently absorbed a great deal of his own technique from studying Gainsborough’s drawings, published a series etchings after a number of sheets in the collection of Carl Friedrich Abel. Five of these were included in a publication entitled *Imitations of Modern Drawings* which included prints after works by John Hamilton Mortimer, George Barret and Francis Wheatley.

It is evident from the later provenance of the drawings in this catalogue that their reputation increased throughout the nineteenth century. Dr Thomas Monro, who was the pioneering patron of Thomas Girtin, J.M.W. Turner, Thomas Hearne and other contemporary watercolourists, owned a large collection of Gainsborough’s drawings, numbering over 130 examples. According to Joseph Farington he purchased 80 of these en bloc from Gainsborough’s daughter Margaret, early in 1801. Monro’s granddaughter described the: ‘manner in which he would cover the walls of his room at Bushey with sketches by Gainsborough, Turner, Girtin, and others. These sketches he pasted on to the wall side by side, neither mounted nor framed, and he would nail up strips of gild beading to divide the one from the other, and give the appearance of frames.’<sup>52</sup> Monro himself copied Gainsborough’s drawings as well as approximating his style in his own work, and he would undoubtedly have passed on his interest to the artists who met to draw in his house. This is proved by the survival of a copy drawing of the *Outskirts of a Village* [cat.4], which was formerly in Monro’s collection, probably made by a member of the Monro Academy.<sup>53</sup> Further evidence exists in several drawings by members of the Academy, a study by Turner of *Cattle on the banks of a river* of about 1800, for example, demonstrates his own interest in both Gainsborough’s approach to landscape and techniques, although in the sheet Turner



[Cat.8] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded landscape with two country carts and figures*  
Softground etching in brown ink  
Sheet: 14½ × 17½ inches · 369 × 445 mm  
Published by J & J Boydell, 1 August 1797

has translated Gainsborough’s tonal drawing into a watercolour [fig.14]. Monro was not alone in collecting and copying Gainsborough’s drawings, a number of artists in the period are recorded as having collections of Gainsborough’s drawings, including: Joseph Farington, Thomas Lawrence, John Hoppner and of course John Constable, confirming that the ‘exquisite refinement’ of Gainsborough’s drawings continued to be understood and appreciated well into the nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion: ‘Refinement beyond Nature’

Sir George Beaumont, the great patron and collector, wrote at some point in the beginning of the nineteenth century of Gainsborough and Richard Wilson, the two great landscape painters he had known in his youth: *Both were poets; and to me, The Bard of Grey, and his Elegy in a Country Churchyard, are so descriptive of their different lines, that I should certainly have commissioned Wilson to paint a subject from the first, and Gainsborough one from the latter.*<sup>55</sup>

Beaumont was a pupil of Alexander Cozens so it therefore not surprising to find him reading literary associations into Gainsborough’s landscapes. But Gainsborough himself courted this particular association, illustrating the central theme of Gray’s poem in a dismembered painting – recorded in an engraving made by Maria Prestal – which showed two rustic figures meditating on a tombstone in a dilapidated churchyard. The painting, which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1780, the same year Gainsborough made a soft-ground etching based upon a drawing of the same subject-matter [fig.15]. The composition contains elements which are repeated in large numbers of Gainsborough’s drawings – donkeys, distant hills, ruins and seated rustic figures – but here the combination consciously recalls Gray’s poem and its earliest illustration, Richard Bentley’s plate made for the poem’s publication in 1753 [fig.16]. In this way the print suggests once more the process of refinement Gainsborough went through in executing his drawings: the same simple motifs repeated in varying contexts.

Given the artificiality of Gainsborough’s method it is perhaps difficult to uphold Constable’s assessment that his landscapes never represented a ‘refinement beyond nature.’ But Constable the landscape painter understood the importance of studying other painters to aid in the appreciation of the natural world. By observing Gainsborough’s landscapes represented ‘exquisite refinement’, Constable was making a profound insight into his working practice. Gainsborough internalised the natural forms he had studied in his youth, the lessons of composition learnt initially from Dutch painters and latterly Gaspard Dughet, using them as the stimulus for the numerous ideal landscapes he made in the latter part of his career. Susan Sloman’s pioneering exhibition at the Holburne Museum in 2012 of paintings and drawings by Gainsborough saw this as an exercise in ‘Themes and Variations’, a musical metaphor which neatly encapsulates the act of refinement which was at the heart of Gainsborough’s approach to drawing.

[Fig.16] Charles Grignion after Richard Bentley  
Plate from *Designs by Mr R. Bentley, for Six Poems by Mr T. Gray*, published London 1753  
Etching · 14¾ × 10¾ inches · 373 × 273 mm  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



[Fig.14] J.M.W. Turner  
*Cattle on the banks of a river*  
Pencil and watercolour · 10½ × 14¾ inches · 256 × 365 mm  
Private collection c/o Christies images



[Fig.15] Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded landscape with peasant reading a tombstone, rustic lovers and ruined church*, c.1779–80  
Soft-ground etching · 11¾ × 15½ inches · 297 × 395 mm  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



## Notes and References

- Ed. R. B. Beckett, 'John Constable's Discourses', *Suffolk Records Society*, xiv, 1970, Lecture iv, p.67.
- For a discussion of Gainsborough's creation of artistic models see: John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, 1, pp.32–33.
- John Constable's sale, Foster's 10 May, 1838, 2nd day, lots 289–93 and 3rd day, lots 523–4.
- John Hayes's remarkable catalogue and subsequent supplement – along with the work of Hugh Belsey – are the obvious exceptions. Susan Sloman also offered a very perceptive reading of the relationship between Gainsborough's drawings and paintings in the exhibition catalogue. See: John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970 (2 vols.); John Hayes, 'Gainsborough Drawings: A Supplement to the Catalogue Raisonné', *Master Drawings*, xxi, 1983, pp.367–391; Hugh Belsey, 'A Second Supplement to John Hayes's The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough', *Master Drawings*, 46, pp.427–541; Susan Sloman, *Gainsborough Landscapes: Themes and Variations*, exh. cat. Bath (Holburne Museum), 2012.
- Dryden's introduction contained the famous story of the Greek painter Zeuxis: 'who from the choice which he made of five Virgins, drew that wonderful picture of Helena, which Cicero in his Orator beforemention'd, sets before us, as the most perfect Example of Beauty, at the same time admonishes a painter, to contemplate the Idea's o the most natural forms; and to make a judicious Choice of several bodies, all of them the most elegant which he can find.' John Dryden, *The Art of Painting*, London, 1695, p.23.
- Thomas Gainsborough to the Revd. Henry Bate-Dudley, 11 March 1788. See ed. John Hayes, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 2001, pp.168–9.
- Roger de Piles, in his *Cours de Peinture par Principes* of 1708 contains a whole section on 'composing' landscape painting. De Piles's writing was translated into English (1743) and widely read throughout the eighteenth century.
- The Morning Herald*, 8 August, 1788.
- Ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, New Haven and London, 1979, iv, p.1222.
- For the dating see: Hugh Belsey, 'A Second Supplement to John Hayes's The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough', *Master Drawings*, 46, cats.1026–1034. There are in fact clearly two distinct periods represented by the drawings, the largest body of sheets date from the late 1750s, but a number of compositional studies with a Hibbert provenance date from the late 1770s. See John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, 1, cats., 545–559.
- For Sir J.C. Robinson's other sheets see: John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, 1, cats.83, 84 and 85.
- For the painting and the drawings which Gainsborough used see: John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1982, 1, p.108. Gainsborough's passion for Van Dyck is well documented and he is known to have produced a number of copies of his pictures. See: A. Mould, 'Gainsborough Dupont (1754–97) and Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88) copying Van Dyck', *The British Art Journal*, vol.vii, no.1, p.45–54.
- Ed. Kathryn Cave, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, New Haven and London, 1983, xii, p.4373.
- Smirke was responsible for a series of acerbic essays on the works of contemporary painters, the *Catalogue Raisonnée of the Pictures now Exhibiting at the British Institution*, which accused a number of contemporary artists of being little more than copyists of old master paintings.
- Quoted in: John Hayes, 'Gainsborough and the Gaspardesque', *The Burlington Magazine*, 112, May 1970, p.311.
- Ed. John Hayes, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 2001, p.174.
- Hayes cites two further possibilities for Gainsborough's early instruction, George Wickes and George Coyte, see: John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1982, 1 p.57 n.9. But Betew seems most likely. He was responsible for the sale of a number of Gainsborough's paintings in London while the artist was based in Suffolk, observing to Joseph Nollekens: 'I have had many and many a drawing of his [Gainsborough's] in my shop-window before he went to Bath; ay, and he has often been glad to receive seven or eight shillings from me for what I have sold: Paul Sandby knows it well.'
- John Thomas Smith, *Nollekens and His Times*, London 1828, 1, pp.189–90.
- Adrienne Corri, 'Gainsborough's Early Career: New Documents and Two Portraits', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol.125, 1983, p.210–216.
- For the impact of Dutch painting on English art at this date see: A. Bachrach, 'Shock of Recognition': *The Landscape of English Romanticism and the Dutch Seventeenth-Century School*, exh. cat. London (Tate Gallery), 1971.
- See Mary Woodall, 'A Note on Gainsborough and Ruisdael', *The Burlington Magazine*, 66, 1935, pp.40–41.
- Hayes devotes large sections to Gainsborough's artistic influences. See John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1982, 1, pp.43–55.
- ed. Robert Wark, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: Discourses on Art*, New Haven and London, 1975, p.27.
- ed. Robert Wark, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: Discourses on Art*, New Haven and London, 1975, p.29.
- For Gainsborough's copies see: Ellis Waterhouse, *Gainsborough*, London, 1966, pp.124–125.
- For Gainsborough and Dughet, see: John Hayes, 'Gainsborough and the Gaspardesque', *The Burlington Magazine*, 112, May 1970, pp.308–311.
- John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1982, 11, cat.634.
- Alexander Cozens, *An Essay to Facilitate the Inventing of Landships*, London, 1759, p.27.
- The link between Gainsborough and Cozens has been mentioned by a number of writers. See for example: Michael Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough: 'a little business for the eye'*, New Haven and London, 1999, pp.263–266 and Matthew Hargraves, *Great British Watercolours from the Paul Mellon Collection*, New Haven and London, 2007, pp.24–27.
- Constable copied Cozens's *Various Species of Composition in Nature* in the 1820s. See Andrew Wilton, *The Art of Alexander and John Cozens*, exh. cat. New Haven (Yale Center for British Art), 1980, cat no. 13.
- Notice attributed to 'An Amateur of Painting', *Somerset House Gazette*, 1, 1824, p.348. John Hayes identified the author as William Henry Pyne. Reynolds also recorded Gainsborough's table-top models. See ed. Robert Wark, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: Discourses on Art*, New Haven and London, 1975, p.250.
- Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painting*, London, 1808, p.139.
- Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo: With Memoirs of His Late Father and Friends, Including Numerous Original Anecdotes and Curious Traits of the Most Celebrated Characters that Have Flourished During the Past Eighty Years*, London, 1828, 1, p.219.
- See Kim Sloan, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens: The Poetry of Landscape*, New Haven and London, 1986, pp.36–61.
- Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London, 1757, p.62.
- There is some evidence that contemporaries understood Gainsborough's most unresolved landscape drawings as expressions of the sublime. Edward Edwards, for example, wrote of Gainsborough's latest drawings that: 'bold effect, great breadth of form, with little variety of parts, united by a judicious management of light and shade, combine to produce a certain degree of solemnity. This solemnity, though striking, is not easily accounted for, when the simplicity of materials is considered, which seldom represent more than a stony bank, with a few trees, a pond, and some distant hills.' Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painting*, London, 1808, p.139.
- Thomas Gainsborough to William Hoare, 1773, ed. John Hayes, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 2001, p.112–113.
- Edward Edwards: 'the author has seen one or two drawings which were distinguished by a mark in gold letter, which he applied by the same process that is used by the bookbinders, in the decorations of their book covers.' Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painting*, London, 1808, p.139.
- John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, 1, cat. nos 708 and 709.
- Thickesse related to W. H. Pyne: 'My departed daughter, who had some claim to genius with her pencil, and now then obtained a hint of importance from Mr. Gainsborough's, had prevailed upon him to give her a little feint tinted drawing of his to copy, from which she made so exact a resemblance, that at a slight view, it was not readily distinguished from the original.' See W. H. Pyne, 'The Greater and Lesser Stars of Pall Mall', *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1840, p.552.
- The drawing was included in Hunter's posthumous sale: Christie's, 29 January 1794, lot.18. It was possibly given to Hunter – along with another sheet – when he attended on Gainsborough during his final illness.
- Christie's, 14 May 1785, lots.48 and 60.
- John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, 1, p.95.
- John Hayes, *Gainsborough as Printmaker*, New Haven and London. 1972, cat. 9.
- W. Foxley Norris, 'Dr Monro', *The Old Watercolour Society's Club*, 2, 1925, p.3.
- The copy, like the drawing of the *Cottage Door* in the present exhibition, is from the collections of Victor Rienacker, Walter Hetherington and Alan Spencer. It appeared at Sotheby's on 26 January 1987, lot 92 repr. It was also listed in Mary Woodall, *Gainsborough's Landscape Drawings*, London 1939, no. 62.
- Farington acquired a collection of drawings directly from Margaret Gainsborough in 1799. See ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, New Haven and London, 1979, iv, p.1149. Lawrence was recorded as a purchaser at Gainsborough's posthumous sale and built up a substantial collection of Gainsborough's drawings, many of which were acquired by William Esdail, for Lawrence, Hoppner and Constable's collections see: John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, 1, pp.98–99.
- Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters and Sculptors*, London, 1834, 5, p.121.



## 1 Sheep and lambs by a fence

Oil on canvas  
9 × 10½ inches · 228 × 267 mm  
Painted c.1744–45

### COLLECTIONS

Probably, George Frost (1745–1821);  
With P. & D. Colnaghi Ltd, London  
Graham, 13th Lord Kinnaid (1912–97), acquired  
in 1955;  
Mr & Mrs Paul Mellon, acquired in 1961;  
Yale Center for British Art, gift of the above, to  
1983;  
Private collection, 1997;  
Private collection, USA, 2010;  
Private collection, 2013

### LITERATURE

Ellis Waterhouse, *Gainsborough*, 1966, p.112,  
no.885;  
John Hayes, *The landscape paintings of Thomas  
Gainsborough*, 1982, vol. II, pp.326–27, cat.1,  
reproduced fig.1

### EXHIBITED

Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,  
*Painting in England 1700–1850: The collection of  
Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon*, 1963, no.32

This charming small painting numbers amongst the earliest of Gainsborough's known works, indeed, it is no.1 in Hayes's catalogue raisonné of the landscape paintings. In spite of its early date, this picture demonstrates a fresh and sensitive handling of paint and is notable for marking the very beginnings of Gainsborough's life-long fascination with exploring a few simple bucolic motifs. Gainsborough's obituary recorded that he *made his first essays in the art by modelling figures of cows, horses, and dogs, in which he attained very great excellence.*<sup>1</sup> Although Gainsborough's handling of recession is naïf, one senses an inherent sophistication of approach to the treatment of both the group of sheep and the clump of trees and shrubs which already indicate the path which his interest in landscape was going to lead him.

Thomas Gainsborough RA  
*A study of farm animals*  
Pencil on laid paper, watermarked  
7½ × 9½ inches · 190 × 230 mm  
Drawn circa 1750  
Private collection, formerly  
with Lowell Libson Ltd



Gainsborough's early debt to Francis Hayman as well as his participation in the execution of the decorations at Vauxhall Gardens is generally acknowledged and whilst Hayes has underlined Hayman's influence in the younger artist's small full-length portraits he appears to have ignored the similarity of the paling fence seen in our painting and that found in Hayman's portrait of *Master John Wightwick* (Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery).<sup>2</sup> Indeed the composition of our small painting to some extent mirrors the details and construction of the Plymouth portrait. Making it likely that this portrait is actually a collaboration between Gainsborough and the older Hayman. The present landscape can be dated by comparison with the well-known painting of the dog 'Bumper' (Private collection) which is signed and dated 1745 and provides the rubric for dating and attributing paintings to the young artist. John Hayes pointed out that this picture 'is identical with Bumper in the fresh, liquid handling of the foliage, the loose touches of yellowish impasto in the foreground, the rather stiff delineation of the tree trunks.'<sup>3</sup> Our landscape may also be compared with the small unfinished '*Open landscape with a*

*cottage at the edge of a wood*' (Hove Museum of Art) and the slightly later unfinished '*Wooded landscape with winding path*' (Beit Collection).

Belsey has recently noted that: 'In this painting Gainsborough dapples the meadow and the sheep with sunlight, he uses brilliantly light clouds and highlights the edges of the paling fence and tree trunks on the left. The lamb on the right, concentrating on the new activity of standing, is posed just like Bumper and the nervously painted clump of miniature trees to the left, wrong in scale, anticipating the intertwined saplings that appear in many of drawing Gainsborough made later in the decade. This unassuming painting has a nervous energy that anticipates Gainsborough's extraordinary future creativity'.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, our small painting is remarkable inasmuch that it demonstrates that Gainsborough had from an early age a most distinctive artistic voice which was to be developed and sophisticated over the following four decades of his life; however, it is noteworthy that this, one of his earliest compositions, already contained most of the elements that he was expand on over the years.



Francis Hayman  
*John Wightwick of Tettenhall, Staffordshire*  
Oil on canvas · 22¾ × 18¾ inches · 570 × 475 mm  
Plymouth City Council (Arts and Heritage)



#### NOTES

- 1 Philip Thicknesse, *A Sketch of the Life and Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough Esq.*, London, *Morning Chronicle*, 8 August 1788.
- 2 John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1982, II, p.34.
- 3 John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1982, II, pp.237-27, cat.1.
- 4 Hugh Belsey, private communication with Lowell Libson, 2013.

## 2 Study of Trees

Pencil  
 5½ × 7¾ inches · 140 × 194mm  
 Drawn c.1757

### COLLECTIONS

Sir John Charles Robinson (1824–1913);  
 Misses E.V. and E. M. M. Robinson, by descent;  
 Robinson sale, Christie's, 16 November 1982,  
 lot 30;  
 Anthony Reed, 1982;  
 Private collection, USA, acquired from the above,  
 to 2013

### LITERATURE

John Hayes, 'Gainsborough Drawings:  
 A Supplement to the Catalogue Raisonné',  
*Master Drawings*, vol. XXI, no.4, 1983, p.381,  
 cat.900, pl.5a

### EXHIBITED

London, Anthony Reed, *Spring Medley*, 1983,  
 no.3



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Study of Trees*, c.1755–9  
 Pencil · 5½ × 7¾ inches · 140 × 190 mm  
 Private collection, UK

This rapidly executed pencil study of a clump of trees was probably made by Gainsborough when he was settled in his native Suffolk at the end of the 1750s. It seems likely to have come from a sketchbook, being identical in size to a number of comparable sheets of the same period which are also focused *plein air* studies. Gainsborough's friend and obituarist, the Reverend Sir Henry Bate Dudley wrote in 1788 that: 'Nature was his teacher and the woods of Suffolk his academy; here he would pass in solitude his moments in making a sketch of an antiquated tree, a marshy brook, a few cattle, a sheep herd and his flock, or any other accidental objects that were present.'<sup>1</sup>

According to Joseph Farington a group of sketchbooks were sold by the artist's daughter, Margaret, in 1799 for £140.3s.6d.<sup>2</sup> Of the ten books offered for sale, three were acquired by the West India merchant and book collector George Hibbert, one by the collector and connoisseur Richard Payne Knight, one bought in half-shares by Hibbert and Sir George Beaumont, one was acquired by the dealers Colnaghi's and 'Mr Pugh', the artist Hugh Pugh, bought three.<sup>3</sup> It seems likely that one of these sketchbooks, possibly the Colnaghi volume, was later acquired by the late nineteenth-century Keeper of the Queen's Pictures, Sir John Charles Robinson. Robinson owned a number of studies of the same size – 5½ × 7¾ inches – the standard size of sketchbook Gainsborough preferred in this period.

The purpose of such studies was clearly to inform Gainsborough's own practice as a landscape painter. The close observation of clumps of trees allowed him to understand the construction of the plant, the massing of lights and shadows and the way the foliage behaved in different weather and seasons.

Stylistically Gainsborough was clearly working out a method of hatching which could suggest the characteristics of the tree without drawing every leaf, a method which was informed at this date by his interest in Dutch landscape painting of the seventeenth century. In another sheet, of precisely the same format, Gainsborough records a similar contrast in the form between two trees – the nearest shows strong light touching the left hand side of the tree and on the other side Gainsborough uses thick black chalk to show the foliage (see p.9, fig.2).<sup>4</sup> These sheets ultimately informed Gainsborough's practice as a landscape painter, but rather than providing templates from which he could quote in his paintings, they acted as exercises, allowing him to work out a method of drawing individual trees back in his studio. Gainsborough articulated the idea that these studies acted as exercises rather than formal drawings in a letter to his patron, Constantine Phipps, who he taught to draw: *You know, Sir, I set you to this [sketch of foliage] merely to free your hand, but you are not to understand that for Drawing – therefore remember that there must be truth of hand, as well as freedom of hand in Drawing.*<sup>5</sup>

### NOTES

- 1 *The Morning Herald*, 8 August, 1788.
- 2 Ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, New Haven and London, 1979, IV, p.1222.
- 3 John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, I, p.96.
- 4 John Hayes, *The Drawings to Thomas Gainsborough*, London 1970, I, pp.151, cats.168, 172, pls. 56 and 386.
- 5 Thomas Gainsborough to the Hon Constantine Phipps, later 2nd Baron Mulgrave, in ed. John Hayes, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 2001, p.92.



### 3 Figures by a track in a wooded landscape

Pencil  
7½ × 6 inches · 191 × 152 mm  
Verso: a slight study of trees  
Drawn c.1748–50

COLLECTIONS  
Private collection, UK, 1971;  
Private collection, USA, acquired in 1971, to 2012

This particularly finely drawn, early and previously unpublished drawing, depicting three figures seated by a track, is characteristic of Gainsborough's work from the period around 1748. The combination of a small group of rustic figures, winding track and wooded landscape, inspired by seventeenth century Dutch landscapes, became a constant theme in Gainsborough's work, realised in numerous drawn and paintings. The present drawing is a significant addition to Gainsborough's oeuvre and appears to have been made at the same moment as well as sharing a common inspiration as a drawing in the Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York and may have been made in preparation for a painting.

Writing at the end of his life, Gainsborough observed of his early painting *Cornard Wood*, now in the National Gallery, London:

*it is in some respects a little in the Schoolboy stile – but I do not reflect on this without a secret gratification; for – as an early*

*instance how strong my inclination stood for LANDSKIP, this picture was actually painted at SUDBURY in the year 1748; it was begun before I left school; – and was the means of my Father's sending me to London.<sup>1</sup>*

It has long be pointed out that there are inconsistencies in this statement – whilst *Cornard Wood* seems likely to have dated from 1746–8, Gainsborough left school in about 1740 – it underlines the importance of 'LANDSKIP' to the young artist, particularly the topography of his native town, Sudbury and its environs during the 1740s. Even whilst he worked in London, trying to establish a career as a metropolitan master, Gainsborough was thinking about the Suffolk landscape, producing drawings, paintings and designs for engravings which reflected this interest. The present sheet is therefore not necessarily drawn from life and may well have been executed in London. Instructively it is the same size and on the same paper as the sheet in the Pierpoint Morgan Library, showing that



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded landscape with a group of figures*  
Pencil · 7¾ × 5¾ inches · 187 × 146 mm  
The Pierpoint Morgan Library and Museum, New York, 111, 52



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded landscape with figures. c.1752*  
Pencil · 7¾ × 6¼ inches · 197 × 158 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa  
Gift of Archdeacon F.H.D. Smythe, 1957  
Registration: 1957-0009-292







from an early stage Gainsborough took pleasure in repeating the same motifs in multiple studies. Another drawing recently identified in the Museum of New Zealand in Wellington, shows a similar relationship between the figures and the landscape with a man leaning against a pile of logs with two women seated one on the logs and the other beside them. These drawings were incorporated into oil paintings at the same date, examples in the Yale Center of British Art, New Haven and the J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, both of which show the same seated figures by a track within more expansive landscapes.

The present drawing also shows evidence of Gainsborough's working method. In the bottom right-hand corner is a clump of burdock leaves, the distinctive profile of which appear in numerous drawings and paintings; a fine study of a burdock plant by Gainsborough from about 1750 is now in the British Museum. The group of figures are a variation on the rustic staffage Gainsborough introduces to many of his landscapes at this period; the man standing behind the seated woman, is shown wearing a distinctive, large flat-cap of which he was particularly fond. Whilst the trees are typically constructed, following Dutch precedents, Gainsborough used heavy pencil marks to indicate the trunks, with feathery hatching to build-up the foliage. It was a composition Gainsborough evidently felt would appeal to patrons, both as finished paintings and for a larger audience in the form of engravings.

The contention that the present drawing is not a finished work, but a sketched idea for a composition, is given strength by the existence of a fragmentary study of a tree



Thomas Gainsborough  
*A wooded river landscape with travelers resting near a tower*  
Oil on canvas · 9¼ × 12¼ inches · 235 × 311 mm  
Painted circa 1750  
J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville (formerly with Lowell Libson Ltd)

on the verso of the sheet. Gainsborough's 'strong inclination for LANDSKIP' throughout the 1740s means that a significant body of drawings survive, both taken from nature and imaginative evocations of nature, but few are as sensitively handled as the present sheet. In its confident, subtle line, bold combination of figures and landscape and rococo freedom, the present work is a hugely attractive addition to Gainsborough's oeuvre.

1 John Hayes ed., *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 2001, p.168.

## 4 The outskirts of a village

Black chalk and grey wash on paper  
 9 × 10½ inches · 229 × 267 mm  
 Inscribed *Gainsborough* (lower left) and initialed *WE* (lower right) in the hand of William Esdaile, also inscribed *verso* by Esdaile:  
 1833 *WE 12. Dr. Monro's sale. Gainsborough*  
 Drawn c.1778

### COLLECTIONS

Dr Thomas Monro (1759–1833), London;  
 Monro sale, Christie's, 26 June, 1833, lot 12;  
 William Esdaile (1758–1837), (Lugt 2617), acquired from the above;  
 Esdaile sale, Christie's, 16 March, 1838;  
 With Spink and Son;  
 Private collection, UK, 1971;  
 Private collection, USA, acquired in 1971, to 2012

### LITERATURE

John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London 1970, 1, p.215, no.461.

The present finely executed drawing belongs to a small series of village subjects of the very early 1770s which culminated in the closely related large varnished drawing which Gainsborough exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1772 (Art Institute of Chicago, The Harry B and Bessie K Braude Memorial Collection) and a small painting executed in oil on two joined sheets of paper now at the Yale Center for British Art. But the real importance of the present sheet lies in its provenance and use by artists of the succeeding generation.

The drawing was acquired by the great collector William Esdaile at the sale of the influential collector and physician Dr Thomas Monro. Monro was the physician to the Bridewell and Bethlem (Bedlam) hospitals a post which made him a specialist in psychiatric conditions and prompted him to be asked to attend on George III during his illness. But it is for his artistic activities that he is best

known, becoming one of the best-known connoisseurs of his day, as well as a patron, teacher and amateur artist. Monro also formed a considerable collection that included around one hundred and thirty Gainsborough drawings. Encouraging a host of young artists who were later to become household names; Monro was one of the first to recognize the talents of J. M. W. Turner, but he also patronised Girtin, John Varley, Joshua Cristall, Peter de Wint, William Henry Hunt, and John Linnell. Monro has thus been distinguished as a major influence on the British school of watercolourists through his role in assisting and training artists in the techniques of landscape watercolour. Monro opened his town house as an evening studio or 'Academy' where younger artists were encouraged to copy from his extensive collection whilst, in return, Monro provided a fee of a few shillings and supper.



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded Landscape with Village Scene*  
 Varnished gouache, over black and red chalks on cream laid paper  
 17½ × 22 inches · 435 × 559 mm  
 Art Institute of Chicago (Partial and promised gift of Dorothy Braude Edinburg to the Harry B. and Bessie K. Braude Memorial Collection, 2012.80)



Thomas Gainsborough  
*An Imaginary Wooded Village with Drovers and Cattle*  
 Oil and mixed media on paper on canvas  
 24½ × 29¾ inches · 622 × 746 mm  
 Drawn 1771–2  
 Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
 Accession Number B1981.25.297



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Village Scene with Horsemen and Figures*  
 Watercolour over black chalk and gum  
 8½ × 12¼ inches · 219 × 311 mm  
 Drawn between 1765–1770  
 Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
 Accession Number B1981.25.2589





Monro's collection of Gainsborough drawings was significantly shaped when he purchased some eighty sheets in 1801 from Margaret Gainsborough. We know he displayed these in his country house and his granddaughter described the 'manner in which he would cover the walls of his room at Bushey with sketches by Gainsborough, Turner, Girtin, and others. These sketches he pasted on to the wall side by side, neither mounted nor framed, and he would nail up strips of gild beading to divide the one from the other, and give the appearance of frames.'<sup>1</sup> It must be presumed that they were available for copying and there is evidence that our drawing was replicated by a member of the so-called 'Monro academy.'<sup>2</sup> Indeed there is growing evidence that Monro's promotion of Gainsborough's drawings amongst young artists had an enormous impact on the continuing interest in his styles and techniques.

The Monro 'School' copy of this drawing was described on the mount as 'Scene near Bath' although as it was completed after the artist had left the city this seems unlikely. The generalized composition and elegantly stylized line of trees suggest that it was in fact an idealized composition as Gainsborough eschewed topography. In technique, the combination of wash and pen and ink resemble similar details in other drawings of the period.<sup>3</sup>

After Monro's death and the dispersal at auction of his collection the present drawing passed to the next great collector of Gainsborough's drawings, the banker William Esdaile. Esdaile's enormous collection, which contained about 100 works by Gainsborough, was displayed in his villa at Clapham. There the antiquary John

Thomas Smith described visiting and seeing a number of drawings by both Richard Wilson and Gainsborough, offering: 'I should give the preference to the book containing those by Gainsborough, of rustic scenery.'<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 W. Foxley Norris, 'Dr Monro', *The Old Watercolour Society's Club*, vol.2, 1925, p.3.
- 2 The copy, like the drawing of the *Cottage Door* in the present exhibition, is from the collections of Victor Rienacker, Walter Hetherington and Alan Spencer. It appeared at Sotheby's on 26 January 1987, lot 92 repr. It was also listed in Mary Woodall, *Gainsborough's Landscape Drawings*, London 1939, no. 62.
- 3 See for example: H. Belsey, 'A Second Supplement to John Hayes's *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*', *Master Drawings*, XLVI (4), Winter 2008, p.500, cat.1058, fig.82.
- 4 J. T. Smith, *A Book for a Rainy Day*, London, 1845, pp.262-3.

## 5 A family outside a cottage door

Pen and ink, grey and pink washes over pencil  
 7 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 9 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches · 194 × 247 mm  
 Drawn c.1775–6

### COLLECTIONS

Victor Rienacker;  
 Walter Hetherington, 1978;  
 Alan Spencer

### LITERATURE

H. M. Cundell, 'The Victor Rienacker Collection',  
*The Studio*, LXXXIV, 1922, p.119 (illus p.123);  
 Mary Woodall, *Gainsborough's Drawings*, London  
 1939, cat.59;  
 John Hayes, 'Gainsborough Drawings: A supplement  
 to the Catalogue Raisonné', *Master Drawings*,  
 XXI, no.4, 1983, cat.932, pl.14;  
 Hugh Belsey, *Gainsborough's Cottage Doors*,  
*An Insight into the Artist's Last Decade*, 2013,  
 repr. fig.41, p.85.

### EXHIBITED

Ipswich, Ipswich Corporation Museum *Thomas  
 Gainsborough Memorial Exhibition*, 1927, cat.157.

Amongst Gainsborough's drawn *oeuvre* his treatments of rustic figures, particularly the so-called 'Fancy Pictures' and Cottage door subjects, rank amongst his rarest and most impressive. This notable and overlooked sheet – it was omitted from the comprehensive account of Gainsborough's Cottage door pictures published in 2005 – is amongst the most carefully conceived and executed drawings of the subject. Gainsborough first used the *leitmotiv* of the cottage door in the background of his *Landscape with travelers returning from market* of about 1770 in the Iveagh Bequest at Kenwood and over the next two decades it was a subject he repeated and refined in both large scale oil paintings and highly finished drawings. The present highly developed sheet is an important iteration of the theme – it was the first time Gainsborough introduced a pig-pen next to the cottage – demonstrating how artistically fertile the motif was for Gainsborough.



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded Landscape with Figures outside a Cottage Door*,  
 circa 1775–80  
 Gray wash with pen and gray ink, heightened with white  
 9 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 13 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches · 238 × 343 mm  
 Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, New Haven

In about 1773 the artist produced an upright landscape painting showing the return of a woodcutter laden with a bundle of sticks (an earlier load is already stacked up by the door of the cottage) where he is met by a woman sitting on the steps of the cottage suckling a child, surrounded by young women – perhaps her sisters – and toddlers who appear to take the woodcutter for granted and who are all immersed in their own thoughts and activities. Charles Manners, 4th Duke of Rutland purchased this landscape and it remains in the collection at Belvoir Castle. After such a successful sale, Gainsborough produced another version of the canvas for his friend the violinist Felice de' Giardini (collection Tokyo Fuji Art Museum). As Hugh Belsey has demonstrated the present drawing should be viewed as a development from the upright format of the Belvoir and Tokyo paintings, to the horizontal format of the version now in Cincinnati and therefore offers important evidence of the



Thomas Gainsborough  
*The Cottage Door*, circa 1777–8  
 Oil on canvas · 48 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 58 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches · 1226 × 1492 mm  
 Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio  
 Given in honour of Mr & Mrs Charles F. Williams by  
 their children / The Bridgeman Library



development of the composition and its meaning.<sup>1</sup>

In the drawing the cottage stands beside a gnarled tree with several broken branches. Those that remain, like the tree in the Rutland canvas, resemble the jagged lines of forked lightning. A single woman, babe in arms, is framed in the cottage door whilst two groups of children and dogs play at her feet. To the left, the father arrives home carrying a bundle of firewood and is greeted by one of his children, next to the cottage is a pen with pigs. The drawing is a formalization of a similar, slightly earlier sheet in the Yale Center for British Art, where the figures on the steps are less animated and another mother, with three children of differing ages, is shown walking away from the cottage. In this study the tree has been pollarded, indicating the long-term commitment of the woodcutter and his forebears to the landscape.

Gainsborough's constant repetition and refinement of this subject-matter in the last two decades of his life demands some explanation. In 2005 an exhibition and catalogue explored new interpretations of the cottage door, underlining the range of readings these pictures invite.<sup>2</sup> In all the compositions there seems to be a disparity between the hard labour of the male figure and the relaxed carefree attitude of the females with their children. John Barrell has suggested that this reflected the changing social conditions of the countryside during the eighteenth century forcing a previously independent peasantry, if they were not to work as hired laborers, to scrape a bare living by gathering wood or taking up some other hard and unrewarding occupation.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Marcia Pointon has suggested that

the composition should be read in context of the pastoral poetry of the period, which frequently celebrated the ideal of retirement from the city and from society in which man could reflect on how he could follow a virtuous existence in a fallen world by leading a life of rural solitude.<sup>4</sup> That some of the artist's contemporaries shared this interpretation of his paintings is suggested by the Reverend Richard Grave's poem: 'On Gainsborough's Landscips ...' in which Graves compares Milton's description of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden with Gainsborough's paintings: 'Each Landskip seems a 'Paradise regain'd.' Another cottage subject, exhibited in 1780, was described in a contemporary review as 'a scene of happiness that may truly be called Adam's Paradise.'<sup>5</sup> In his letters, Gainsborough expressed the desire to 'walk off to some sweet Village where I can paint Landscips and enjoy the fag End of Life in quietness and ease,' which suggests disenchantment with the pressures of urban life.<sup>6</sup> Indeed it has been suggested that the image of the husband burdened by the pressures of work and responsibility, whilst the women and children are at ease might mirror the artist's own situation: as his wife, the illegitimate daughter of a Duke, had certain expectations in life and his daughters, both disturbed and eccentric, followed the aspirations of their mother. However, his rustic subjects might also be seen as simply providing a vicarious expression of pastoral retirement for patrons who would have found the reality uncomfortable.

The present sheet is meticulously drawn, the broad grey wash used to indicate the lighting of the scene and the pen and ink applied to give focus to the details of the

figures, the tree and the background foliage. Our drawing represents an important step in Gainsborough's development of a horizontal format for the subject, which he eventually used in a painting that was shown at the Royal Academy in 1778. As a highly finished sheet of extraordinary beauty of one of Gainsborough's most enduring and important subjects, this study deserves to be better known.

#### NOTES

- 1 Hugh Belsey, *Gainsborough's Cottage Doors, An Insight into the Artist's Last Decade*, 2013, p.85.
- 2 Ed. Ann Bermingham, *Sensation & Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough's Cottage Door*, exh. cat., New Haven (Yale Center for British Art), 2005.
- 3 John Barrell, 'Spectacles for Republicans', in ed. Ann Bermingham, *Sensation & Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough's Cottage Door*, exh. cat., New Haven (Yale Center for British Art), 2005, pp.53-4.
- 4 Marcia Pointon, 'Gainsborough and the Landscape of Retirement', *Art History*, 1979, pp.441-55.
- 5 John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1982, 11, cat.123.
- 6 Ed. John Hayes, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 2001, p.68.



## 6 Countrymen harnessing a horse to a cart

Pen and ink and wash with stumping  
 10¼ × 13½ inches · 260 × 340 mm  
 Drawn c.1775

COLLECTIONS  
 Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 5th Bt, (1772–1840);  
 and by descent, 2003;  
 Private collection, UK, 2013

LITERATURE  
 John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas  
 Gainsborough*, 1970, p.216, no.467

Thomas Gainsborough RA  
*The Harvest Wagon*, 1767  
 Oil on canvas · 57 × 47 inches · 1448 × 1194 mm  
 © The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of  
 Birmingham

Thomas Gainsborough RA  
*A Market Cart with Horses by a Stream*,  
 early 1780s  
 Grey wash and traces of black chalk, heightened with  
 white, on buff paper · 10½ × 13½ inches · 267 × 347 mm  
 Harvard Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, Bequest of  
 Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.708



This exceptional sheet demonstrates Gainsborough's extraordinary virtuosity as a draughtsman. In a number of fluid marks Gainsborough suggests both the action of the reluctant horse and the efforts of his handlers. Whilst not made in preparation for a finished painting, the subject was one that Gainsborough had explored in an earlier canvas, *The Harvest Wagon*, exhibited in London in 1767, now in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham. This underscores Gainsborough's fascination with particular visual motifs and how his exploration was rarely linear, moving between painting and drawing, exploiting the different possibilities presented by the change in technique.

The present sheet depicts an event – a horse being harnessed to a cart – which must have been familiar to Gainsborough and one which offered great dramatic potential. The most remarkable aspect of the present study is its technique. Gainsborough constantly explored different combinations of techniques throughout his life, but particularly in the landscape drawings he produced in his last decades. The dramatic scene has been described using smudged lines of black chalk and

these suggestive marks have then been strengthened with lines of black ink and given greater contrast by the addition of ink wash. In a sense, this process is analogous to that explored by Gainsborough's contemporary, Alexander Cozens. Cozens developed his 'New Method' which required the artist to apply Indian ink to prepared paper with a brush making 'all possible variety of shapes and strokes', these 'rude black Sketches' were to be developed until a landscape composition emerged in an almost accidental way.<sup>1</sup> Gainsborough, like Cozens, saw the benefit in rapid, almost accidental, mark-making as a way of stimulating the creation of an ideal landscape composition. In the present sheet, Gainsborough has applied areas of wash in the background and foreground which only with the addition of pen and ink lines became identifiable as a mass of trees and the bank in foreground. It was technically diverse sheets such as this which Edward Edwards was referring to when he described: 'a process rather capricious, truly deserving the epithet bestowed upon them by a witty lady, who called them moppings.'<sup>2</sup>

The present drawing belonged in the eighteenth century to the Welsh landowner and collector Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 5th Baronet, who probably acquired it at the same time that he purchased the painting of *Hagar and Ishamel*, (now in the National Museum of Wales) at Gainsborough's posthumous sale in 1792.

### NOTES

- 1 Matthew Hargraves, *Great British Watercolours from the Paul Mellon Collection*, New Haven and London, 2007, pp.24–27.
- 2 Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painting*, London, 1808, p.139.



## 7 Wooded landscape with a building and stream

Black, brown and white chalk, with touches of grey wash, on blue laid paper  
 10¼ × 12½ inches · 260 × 320 mm  
 Inscribed on the mount with the artist's stamp,  
 lower left: T. Gainsborough  
 Drawn c.1778

COLLECTIONS  
 Private collection, UK, 1968;  
 Eileen Young

LITERATURE  
 John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, p.208, no.429.

It is a remarkable feature of Gainsborough's work that the drawings that appear to be the least formal or finished, are frequently the ones he prepared for presentation. In the case of the present highly spirited drawing, it shows densely rendered clumps of trees, a bank to the left and escarpment to the right with buildings perched perilously at the top. A serpentine stream leads the viewer's eye into the background despite being loosely handled, the sheet survives on Gainsborough's own mount, stamped with his name. But in contrast to Gainsborough's studies of herds of cows, pastoral figures or cottage scenes, the present sheet is pure landscape. We know the drawing was accompanied until 1968 by a second sheet, similarly executed in black and brown chalks on blue paper and identically mounted on buff paper with Gainsborough's studio stamp at the lower left, this second drawing is now in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.<sup>1</sup>

The idealised composition seen in both is partly inspired by the work of Gaspard Dughet, whose landscapes would have been

familiar to Gainsborough both in the original and through the medium of engraving. Such drawings may also reflect his practice of constructing models of artificial landscapes. W. H. Pyne wrote that he had 'more than once sat by him of an evening, and seen him make models, or rather thoughts, for landscapes scenery ... He would place cork or coal for his foregrounds, make middle grounds of sand and clay, bushes of mosses and lichens, and set up distant woods of broccoli.'<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the two drawings are necessarily not pendants, they show Gainsborough rearranging the same vocabulary of landscape features – stream, trees, building and sandy banks – to produce completely different 'thoughts, for landscape scenery' to quote Pyne. The choice of blue paper and chalks was possibly influenced by the old master drawings with which he seems to have identified more than is usually believed, particularly in his emphasis during the late 1770s on compositions from the mind rather than observations from nature. The mood of such drawings was



Detail showing stamped signature on the original mount.

Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded landscape with a building and pool*  
 Mid-late 1770s  
 Black, red, cream and white chalks on blue paper · 10½ × 12½ inches · 259 × 316 mm  
 Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
 Gift of William Bowmore AO OBE through  
 the Art Gallery of South Australia  
 Foundation 2004





well described by Edward Edwards in his *Anecdotes of Painters*: 'in his latter works, bold effect, great breadth of form, with little variety of parts, united by a judicious management of light and shade, combine to produce a certain degree of solemnity. This solemnity, though striking, is not easily accounted for, when the simplicity of materials is considered, which seldom represent more than a stony bank, with a few trees, a pond, and some distant hills.'<sup>3</sup> It was this imperceptible feeling of 'solemnity' which probably explained the success of a sheet such as this and why Gainsborough felt able to mount and sign it with his studio stamp.

There is growing evidence that Gainsborough in common with his contemporaries, such as Alexander Cozens, was conscious of the ability for his landscape drawings to suggest certain emotions. It is clear that in the highly considered and carefully constructed compositions he was producing in the late 1770s, Gainsborough was aware of the appeal of such ambiguous landscapes. It was the apparent simplicity of his formula, as described by Edwards, which prompted Joshua Reynolds to offer the audience of his fourteenth *Discourse* a word of caution about Gainsborough's technique, noting: 'Like every other technical practice, it seems to me wholly to depend on the general talent of him who uses it ... it shows the solicitude and extreme activity which he [Gainsborough] had about everything related to his art; that he wished to have his objects embodied as it were, and distinctly before him.'<sup>4</sup>

Therefore this presentation drawing and its companion now in Adelaide should be regarded as extremely important works, not only within Gainsborough's oeuvre,

but in our understanding of the development of landscape drawing in Britain in the eighteenth century. In the present sheet Gainsborough combines the conventional classicism learnt from Claude and Dughet with an emotional ambiguity which would become central to the art of Romanticism.

#### NOTES

- 1 J. Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London 1970, 1, Cat. no.430, p.208.
- 2 Ephraim Hardcastle (W. H. Pyne), *Wine and Walnuts*, London, 1824, 11, p.197.
- 3 Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painting*, London, 1808, p.139.
- 4 Ed. Robert Wark, *Joshua Reynolds Discourses on Art*, New Haven and London, 1975, p.250.



## 8 A herdsman and cattle on a mountain track

Black and white chalk and stump  
 10½ × 14 inches · 270 × 360 mm  
 Drawn c.1778

### COLLECTIONS

Dr John Hunter (1728–93), presumably acquired by gift from the artist;  
 Hunter sale, 29 January 1794, lot 18 (with another),  
 Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 5th Bt. (1772–1840),  
 acquired at the Hunter sale;  
 and by descent, 2003;  
 Private collection, UK, 2013

### LITERATURE

John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, 1970, p.255, no.638

The importance of this subject to Gainsborough is evident as he made several variants of this design showing cattle being driven along a winding track in a hilly landscape. A slightly later drawing (Private collection, USA, formerly with Lowell Libson Ltd) has the same motif and it was one of the sheets that Thomas Rowlandson chose to reproduce as a soft-ground etching for his book *Imitations of Modern Drawings* published in the 1780s. Another closely related version of the subject is in the collection of the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester.

The technique used by Gainsborough in drawings like this was described by Edward Edwards in his *Anecdotes of Painters*, published in 1808:  
*a process rather capricious, truly deserving the epithet bestowed upon them by a witty*

*lady, who called them moppings. Many of these were in black and white, which colours were applied in the following manner: a small bit of sponge tied to a bit of stick, served as a pencil for the shadows, and a small lump of whiting, held by a pair of tea-tongs was the instrument by which the high lights were applied; beside these there were others in black and white chalks, India ink ... with these various materials he struck out a vast number of bold, free sketches of landscape and cattle, all of which have a most captivating effect to the eye of an artist, or connoisseur of real taste.*<sup>1</sup>

In our drawing Gainsborough seems to have used a combination of methods to achieve the densely worked effect, probably ‘mopping-in’ certain areas, and allowing the natural tone of the paper to provide highlights; the granular texture of the chalks



Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827) after Thomas Gainsborough  
*Landscape with a figure herding cattle along a road, circa 1784–9*  
 Soft-ground etching and aquatint  
 10¼ × 14½ inches · 260 × 362 mm  
 © The Trustees of the British Museum



Thomas Gainsborough RA  
*A Mountainous landscape with a herdsman and his cattle*  
 Black and white chalks and stump on buff paper  
 10¾ × 15 inches · 276 × 381 mm  
 Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester (D.50.1927)



resemble Gainsborough's soft-ground etchings perhaps recommending the present composition to Thomas Rowlandson who produced a print after the version mentioned above.

Unusually this drawing is on wove paper. This new method of paper manufacture was first used in Britain for book printing in the 1770s and it provided a much stronger paper than the traditional laid papers. The chain lines in laid paper show as ridges on the surface and demonstrate that the paper is of varying thickness and therefore inherently weaker. Gainsborough was amongst the first artists to realise the potential of wove 'unlined' paper and it enabled him to use stump as a basis for his design. Stump is black chalk that is then smudged with rolled up cardboard or leather. The effect, though similar to grey wash, provides more texture and more solid tones. In this drawing the basis is stump and then to add detail, Gainsborough then defined the forms with brief but precise dashes of black chalk. It is worth looking at two details to gauge the economy of drawing. The sky consists of just fifteen parallel lines of chalk, while the figure and cattle are finished with little more than five or six strokes of black chalk.

The drawing was originally in the collection of the eminent surgeon and anatomist, John Hunter, who presumably acquired it from Gainsborough himself. Hunter was the most eminent surgeon of his time and was appointed Surgeon Extraordinary to George III in 1776 and Surgeon General in 1790. He was first and foremost an experimental scientist: making important discoveries in geology and natural history as well as in surgery and comparative anatomy. His celebrated museum (acquired

after his death by the Royal College of Surgeons) was formed to illustrate life in its entirety, whether healthy or diseased and it contained several pictures of animals by George Stubbs which Hunter had commissioned. In April 1788 Gainsborough made the first mention of a growth in his neck, which was subsequently discovered to be a cancerous tumour. Hunter was consulted by Gainsborough and he treated him during his final weeks, being listed as a mourner at his funeral. Hunter never took payment from artists or writers and it maybe that the drawings listed in his posthumous sale, including the present sheet, were given by Gainsborough's widow in gratitude. This drawing was purchased in Hunter's 1794 sale by Sir William Watkins Wynn, 5th Bart and it remained with his descendents for more than two hundred years.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painting*, London, 1808, p.139.



## 9 Wooded landscape with two country carts and figures

Softground etching in brown ink  
 Printed with some ink tone, on cream wove paper  
 Sheet: 14½ × 17½ inches · 369 × 445 mm  
 Image plate: 11¾ × 15½ inches · 299 × 394 mm  
 Overall plate height including address plate:  
 12⅞ inches · 325 mm  
 Published by J & J Boydell, 1 August 1797

COLLECTION  
 Private collection, UK, 2011

LITERATURE  
 John Hayes, *Gainsborough as Printmaker*, 1972,  
 pp.62–65, no.9

This very rare print formed part of a series of twelve prints published by J & J Boydell. The present plate was no.3 in the series and is regarded as the second state of two. The first state which is of extreme rarity is only known in three ‘proof’ impressions dating from 1780 which were printed by Gainsborough himself (Huntington Art Gallery and Library, Yale Center for British Art and British Museum). The present print, as published by Boydell, utilised Gainsborough’s original plate in conjunction with a separate plate below giving the address line and name of the artist. This particular impression is carefully and evenly printed and is possibly an earlier version of the ‘second’ state before the numbering of the published plate ‘3’

which was added to the top left corner of the image.

Gainsborough is perhaps the most technically inquisitive artist working in Britain in the eighteenth century, possibly with the exception of Stubbs who additionally mastered the art of enamelling. In 1780 Gainsborough was considering his choices as an artist. Clearly bored with the treadmill of portrait painting and the competitive exhibitions at the Royal Academy, he wanted to free himself from demanding clients and reinvigorate his practice as a landscape painter. A significant part of Gainsborough’s practice and emotional energy was expended in drawing and the present image is closely related to a drawing to the mid to late 1770s formerly in the



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded Landscape with Two Country Carts and Figures*, circa 1779–1780  
 Soft-ground etching on blue laid paper, in gray ink, laid on eighteenth-century mount  
 First state · 11¾ × 15 inches · 302 × 381mm  
 Inscribed on original eighteenth-century mount in pen and brown ink, *Gainsborough [fecit?]*  
*with his own hand on soft copper*  
 Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Wooded Landscape with Two Country Carts and Figures*, circa 1779–1780  
 Soft-ground etching, printed in grey ink  
 First state  
 11¾ × 15¼ inches · 295 × 388 mm  
 © The Trustees of the British Museum





Spencer collection at Althrop (whereabouts unknown). Gainsborough, not surprisingly, appears to have been especially attracted by printmaking techniques which replicated drawings and in France new engraving techniques such as stippling and colour printing had produced impressive results in the 'crayon' and 'pastel' manner the hands of masters such as Bonnet. Amongst these new techniques were soft-ground etching and aquatint, both methods adopted by Gainsborough in his rare prints and which permitted a more 'painterly' approach to printmaking. As Michael Rosenthal has noted, Gainsborough was wary of the time consuming process of conventionally etching a plate and probably learned the technique of soft-ground etching from Paul Sandby who appears to have introduced this technique into England. In this process, the plate is covered in a soft wax and paper is laid onto the wax.<sup>1</sup> A drawing can be made directly onto the paper which when lifted removes wax from where pressure has been applied and the plate can then be 'bitten' in acid. The advantage as Sandby recorded and Gainsborough took advantage of was that 'it saves all the trouble of Etching with a Needle, and will produce an outline like fine Indian chalk'. Gainsborough was evidently fascinated enough to try both soft-ground and sugar-lift aquatint techniques in a very small series of experimental prints which, on the evidence shown in some of the very few surviving autograph proof impressions, he possibly intended to publish. That he never seems to have taken this further was perhaps predicated by his realisation that the process of making impressions to a standard that satisfied him was time consuming and ultimately could only be done by him. The time

saved in making the plate by the new etching technique would be somewhat outweighed by the labour involved in taking prints from them. In any case for Gainsborough, the creative process of making drawings was ultimately more fulfilling than printing a run of etchings.

Indeed, the extent of Gainsborough's activity as a printmaker is somewhat contentious and there is some doubt today that all of the twelve plates published by Boydell were in fact etched by Gainsborough. Three of the prints issued by Boydell were incontestably made from plates etched by Gainsborough himself on the evidence of Gainsborough's own proof impressions printed either in grey or brown ink on carefully selected papers. These are Hayes no.9 (the present image), Hayes no.10, *Wooded landscape with peasant reading a tombstone, rustic lovers and ruined church* and Hayes no. 11, *Wooded landscape with nherdsman driving cattle over a bridge*. From these three 1780 prints Boydell removed the lower margin containing Gainsborough's own inscription and replaced it with a second copper sheet containing an updated inscription. The use of this separate additional plate on which the lettering was included in Boydell's printing of this plate (second state), as is the case with the two other Boydell prints under discussion, is also indicative that this was Gainsborough's actual plate adapted for publication in 1797 rather than one which might have been produced especially for Boydell's posthumous edition in emulation of the master.

Given the great rarity even of impressions from the Boydell edition, it was evidently either printed as a very small run or met with little success and Mrs Gainsborough's

desire to capitalize on her husband's genius proved to be a disappointment. By the time the prints were produced she was ailing and died eighteen months later on 17 December 1798 and Boydell must have felt no need to promote them further. Certainly Margaret Gainsborough, the artist's daughter, appears to have again been in control of the plates by April 1802 when she wrote to Boydell's manager to secure possession of the unsold prints. The plates were eventually acquired by the printer McQueen and their successors Thomas Ross & Son until the eleven surviving plates were acquired by the Tate in 1971 which authorised a small edition of prints taken from them.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 1999, p.258.

## 10 An open landscape at dusk

Watercolour, heightened with white chalk,  
on laid paper  
8½ × 11¼ inches · 214 × 300 mm  
Drawn c.1770s

### COLLECTIONS

Fanny Marriott;  
R.M. Praed (Mrs Campbell Praed, 1851–1935),  
bequeathed by the above;  
Horace Bernard Milling (1898–1954);  
Mercie Winifred Sanderson Milling, wife of  
the above (later Mrs W.W. Spooner);  
William Wycliffe Spooner (1882–1967), 2nd  
husband of the above;  
and by descent to 2011

### LITERATURE

John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas  
Gainsborough*, 1970, pp. 52 & 225, no.504,  
pl.168

### EXHIBITED

Leeds, Leeds City Art Gallery, *Early English  
Water-colours*, 1958, no.37, repr. pl.1



Thomas Gainsborough  
*A wooded landscape with a horseman*  
Black chalk, watercolour and gouache  
9½ × 11¼ inches · 233 × 287 mm  
Stamped in gold with artist's monogram TG, lower left  
Painted early 1760s  
Private collection, USA, formerly with Lowell Libson Ltd

This remarkable and extremely rare drawing, executed in pure watercolour, shows Gainsborough drawing in colour with the brush rather than making marks on paper. In unusually fine preservation, the present sheet is a testament to the both the success with which he handled the medium as well his achievement of the desired effect. This must rank as one of the most beautiful British watercolours of the period and in it Gainsborough anticipates the full-flowering of Romanticism. The excessive rarity of such works in Gainsborough's oeuvre, in spite of their beauty, underlines what one must assume was his natural preference for making 'marks'. Ultimately, the primacy of drawing – making lines – was central to the physicality of the act of creation for Gainsborough.

After moving permanently to Bath in 1759 Gainsborough's time was increasingly taken up with painting portraits. At no other point in his career was he meeting the expectations of so many sitters and with such heavy demands on his time he had little opportunity to paint landscapes. Rather than ignore his work as a landscapist he paced himself carefully and painted a few imposing canvases that were reserved for public exhibitions in London. As some of the routine portraits from the 1760s show, his thoughts were more inclined towards resolving his landscape compositions. Chameleon-like he varied his approaches to landscape and sought inspiration from different seventeenth century artists such as Dughet, Rubens and Claude. Nonetheless for relaxation and amusement he snatched every opportunity to experiment with watercolour and bodycolour.

Coloured drawings from the early 1760s show Gainsborough using a restricted palette and dabbing little flecks of colour onto the

paper to form the foliage but ten years later Gainsborough was using watercolour in a very different way, a reaction to developments that had been taking place in artistic circles where the medium was being used more widely and innovatively. In our sheet the palette is relatively limited but instead of using touches of colour to enhance the drawn lines, Gainsborough 'draws' with the brush laden with colour, laying-in thin washes of colour and using the off-white colour of the paper to serve as a mid-tone in his atmospheric treatment of the sky and the pool in the foreground. The watercolour washes were the first stage of the drawing. Afterwards Gainsborough used the tip of his brush to add the figures, the cottage and the sedge grasses in the foreground. The sheet was then set aside until it was dry and a trail of white chalk was added to describe the setting sun highlighting the cloud, to give distance to the far hill and to define the track, the leafless branch in the foreground, the packhorse and the dog. All these elements, especially the contrasting angle of the dead tree in the foreground, show the traveller's steady progress and the soft light of dusk gives the drawing a mood of serenity and satisfaction after a tiring day.

Bath is on the south-west edge of the Cotswolds with a steep escarpment to the north of the city skirting the valleys of the River Severn and the River Avon. Gainsborough's choice of landscape generally favoured the surrounding wooded valleys but in the early 1770s he took to the hills and made a series of drawings showing open landscapes. This group of sheets often included block-like buildings that offered the travellers and their animals some sort of shelter though in this particular drawing the cottage is in the distance and the possibility of shelter is some way off.



## 11 Figures resting in a woodland landscape

Pen and brown ink and brown wash on wove paper  
9 1/8 x 11 1/2 inches · 232 x 291 mm  
Signed lower right: *T. Gainsborough pinx: 1784*,  
also inscribed: *The Gift of the ingenious artist to  
Miss Thicknesse*

### COLLECTIONS

Ann Thicknesse, a gift from the artist, 1784;  
with Allen's Map and Print Warehouse, Dublin;  
Lady Emily Fitzwalter (d. 1951);  
And by descent

The discovery of this carefully executed drawing is an important addition to Gainsborough's oeuvre. It demonstrates the further refinement of Gainsborough's approach to landscape in his final years. Its gift to the daughter of the sitter in one of Gainsborough's most celebrated portraits demonstrates the close bonds that existed in the artist's circle and further underlines the dissemination of his drawings amongst a knowledgeable and discriminating group.

This sheet is one of the very few drawings that Gainsborough inscribed with a date and consequently it is of great importance in establishing a chronology for the artist's drawings. A few sheets that date from twenty years earlier in the artist's career bear similar inscriptions and have been compared with print production.<sup>1</sup>

Since making the drawing of the *Cottage Door* six or seven years earlier using the

same media of washes and pen and ink, Gainsborough economised his technique, dispensing with all unnecessary detail and creating form by every turn of the brush or pen. The composition too is simplified with a perfect balance of washes that undulate across the sheet and provide a sense of perspectival depth in the landscape that combines with a perfect balance of masses across the composition. Sometimes he uses flat tone and at others he uses the wash to show trees or dappled light falling on the rocks. The whole composition is drawn together by a knot of figures that extend the line of the hillock on which they are grouped. The figures are formed from the darkest washes with areas of the paper left bare and consist of a standing figure, another sitting with a nurse, toddler and dog on the left. It is difficult to provide a rational explanation for their presence,



Thomas Rowlandson after Thomas Gainsborough  
*Landscape with a figure herding cattle*, circa 1784–9  
Soft-ground etching  
10 1/8 x 12 3/8 inches · 256 x 323 mm  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



contentedly grouped by a pathway in a deserted landscape, but by this stage in his picture making Gainsborough has abandoned any desire to provide a narrative element in his work and he was concerned with picture making and forming a balanced and pleasing composition.

A significant aspect of the present sheet is the amusing and informative inscription: *The Gift of the ingenious artist to Miss Thicknesse*, confirming that it was presented to the daughter of Gainsborough's patron and early biographer Philip Thicknesse. Thicknesse himself noted: *My departed daughter, who had some claim to genius with her pencil, and now then obtained a hint of importance from Mr. Gainsborough's, had prevailed upon him to give her a little feint tinted drawing of his to copy, from which she made so exact a resemblance, that at a slight view, it was not readily distinguished from the original.*<sup>1</sup> This led to Gainsborough destroying the offending drawing as he thought it was his own work.<sup>2</sup>

Hayes identified this as Anna Thicknesse, a daughter from his second marriage to Maria Lanove, although given the date of the present sheet, the anecdote may relate to one of the daughter's Thicknesse had with his third wife, Ann Ford who was the subject of one of Gainsborough's greatest female portraits. Gainsborough was known to have encouraged drawing amongst the amateur patrons of his acquaintance, and he seems likely to have instructed his own daughters – Margaret and Mary – in drawing. An inscription on the reverse of several sheets by Charlotte Warren, daughter of the physician, Richard Warren confirms his interest in the teaching of young women.<sup>3</sup>

A charming, previously unpublished sheet, this drawing confirms that one of Philip Thicknesse's daughters received encouragement, if not instruction, from Gainsborough himself and it may well be that the simplified forms and bold composition was designed specifically for her to copy.

#### NOTES

- 1 John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London 1970, cats.238 and 243, pp.164–165.
- 2 Philip Thicknesse, *A Sketch of the Life and Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough, Esq.*, London, 1788, pp.45–5.
- 3 For Gainsborough's possible pupils see John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1970, 1, pp.68–70.



*The Gift of the ingenious artist to Miss Thicknesse.*

## 12 A study for *A Boy with Cat – Morning* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Pencil  
8 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 6 $\frac{1}{16}$  inches · 225 × 154 mm  
Drawn c.1786–7

### COLLECTIONS

Thomas Woolner RA, (1825–92);  
Woolner sale, Christie's, May 21, 1895, lot 35,  
(purchased Shepherd);  
Henry Joseph Pfunst, FSA (1844–1917);  
Pfunst sale, Christie's, 15 June, 1917, lot 46;  
Jacques Seligman & Co, New York, acquired at the  
above sale;  
Alfred Ramage, acquired from the above in the  
mid-1920s;  
Isabel Ramage Maddox, (1890–1936), daughter of  
the above;  
Evelyn Maddox McConnell Pope, daughter of the  
above, to 2013.

### LITERATURE

John Hayes, 'Gainsborough Drawings:  
A Supplement to the Catalogue Raisonné', *Master  
Drawings*, vol. XXI, no.4, Winter 1983, p.982,  
cat.982.

This enchanting figure study is an important sketch made by Gainsborough early in preparation for his painting of *A Boy with a Cat – Morning* of 1786–7 which is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. One of his so-called 'Fancy Pictures', the painting dates from the end of Gainsborough's career making the present drawing unusual and important evidence of his working practice. Fluidly handled and rapidly executed, this sheet is testament to Gainsborough's supreme ability to capture form.

Shortly after the Royal Academy exhibition of 1781 Gainsborough withdrew from the exhibiting society. He painted fewer portraits, more landscapes and began to develop new subject matter, particularly the paintings of rural figures in landscapes which have become known as 'Fancy Pictures'. It was a genre that he had already employed a couple of years earlier when he exhibited a *Shepherd Boy* that showed a peasant lad with his collie dog cowering in the shelter of tree during a storm and according to one press report it 'seems to have met with Approbation of the Publick above all other' paintings in the exhibition.<sup>1</sup> The aim to show the boy's vulnerability was clearly successful and it encouraged an empathic response from the beholder as the artist had intended. Based on the work of the Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, whom Gainsborough much admired, the painting was rehearsed in two chalk drawings now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne.<sup>2</sup>

In 1787 Gainsborough produced two more 'Fancy Pictures'. One of a *Boy and*



Thomas Gainsborough  
*A Boy with a Cat – Morning*, 1787  
Oil on canvas · 59 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 47 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches; 1505 × 1207 mm  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Marquand Collection, Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889  
(acc.no.89.15.8)  
© Photo SCALA, Florence, 2013





*Girl at a Cottage Fire* (private collection), no doubt the interior was intended to represent evening, and the other of a *Boy with a Cat—Morning*.<sup>3</sup> Both were engraved by Charles Turner and published together in 1809 and the two paintings remained in the same collection until they were sold at auction in 1885. The present drawing depicts: ‘the Richmond child, Jack Hill, whom Gainsborough painted several times, and whom his daughter is said to have wished to adopt.’<sup>4</sup> The young model is shown standing with his left hand brought to his mouth, looking down quizzically. The figure is drawn with fluid pencil lines and the background suggested with light hatching. Next to the standing

figure of Hill Gainsborough has rapidly suggested a cat, in a few energetic lines essentially consisting of two spheres, he has perfectly described the seated animal. These rapidly suggested animals appear in other of Gainsborough’s drawings, including a study of children, now in the British Museum.

Whilst the present study is preparatory for the painting, Gainsborough made a number of changes in translating the drawing to canvas. First the child is shown with his left hand scratching his head, rather than at his mouth, Gainsborough has shifted the whole orientation of the figure from looking down and to the left, to up and to the right. The cat has also been further developed, shown standing and alert. At some stage

in the development of the composition, Gainsborough strengthened certain aspects of the current drawing, including the hem of the child’s smock and line of the right arm, these precisely correspond with the painting, suggesting they were made as Gainsborough was translating the life drawing to a finished painting. As a late figure study made in preparation for a celebrated subject painting, the present drawing offers important evidence of Gainsborough’s workshop practice. It is also the initial idea for a painting that one contemporary critic observed was: ‘a natural representation, and a picture that will live for ever as a chaste and beautiful effort of the art.’<sup>5</sup>



Thomas Gainsborough  
*Study of a woman with three children and a cat*,  
1785–9  
Black chalk and stump touched with brown chalk on buff  
paper heightened with white  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

#### NOTES

- 1 *St James’s Chronicle*, Thursday, 10–Saturday, 12 May 1781, no.3151, p.4.
- 2 John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, London 1970, I, cats.832 and 827, pp.301–302.
- 3 E. K. Waterhouse, *Gainsborough*, London 1958, p. 104, cats.808, 809, pl.282; Katharine Baetjer, *British Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1575–1875*. New York 2009, pp.112–14, cat.50.
- 4 William Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1915, p.292.
- 5 Quoted in: William Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1915, p.292.

## Select Bibliography

Philip Thicknesse, *A Sketch of the Life and Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough Esq.*, London, 1788

George Williams Fulcher, *Life of Thomas Gainsborough, R.A.*, London, 1856

Sir Walter Armstrong, *Gainsborough and his place in British Art*, London and New York, 1898

William Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough*, London, 1915

Percy Moore Turner, and Ellis Waterhouse, *Gainsborough Loan Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, 45 Park Lane, London, 1936

Mary Woodall, *Gainsborough’s Landscape Drawings*, London, 1939

Mary Woodall, *Thomas Gainsborough*, exhibition catalogue, Arts Council, 1949

John Hayes, *Gainsborough Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, Arts Council, 1960–61

Ellis Waterhouse, ‘A Checklist of Portraits by Thomas Gainsborough’, *Walpole Society*, xxxiii, 1953

Ellis Waterhouse, *Thomas Gainsborough*, exhibition catalogue, Arts Council and Tate Gallery, 1953

Ellis Waterhouse, *Gainsborough*, London, 1958

John Hayes, *The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough*, 2 vols., London, 1970

John Hayes, *Gainsborough as a Printmaker*, London, 1972

John Hayes, *Thomas Gainsborough*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, 1971

Anthony Griffith and Timothy Clifford, *Gainsborough and Reynolds in the British Museum*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1978

John Hayes, *Gainsborough 1727–1788*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 1981

John Hayes, *The Landscape Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, 2 vols., London, 1982

Lindsay Stainton and John Hayes, *Gainsborough Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, International Exhibitions Foundation, Washington DC, 1983

John Hayes, ‘Gainsborough Drawings: A Supplement to the Catalogue Raisonné’, *Master Drawings*, xxi, no. 4, Winter 1983, pp. 367–91

Hugh Belsey, *Gainsborough the Printmaker*, exhibition catalogue, Aldeburgh, 1988

Malcolm Cormack, *The Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough*, Cambridge, 1991

Susan Foister, *Young Gainsborough*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1997

Michael Rosenthal, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 1999

John Hayes, *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, New Haven and London, 2001

Hugh Belsey, *Thomas Gainsborough: A country life*, London and New York, 2002

Hugh Belsey, *Gainsborough at Gainsborough’s House*, London, 2002

Michael Rosenthal, and Martin Myrone, *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough*, exhibition catalogue [London, Washington & Boston], London, 2002

Susan Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, New Haven and London, 2002

Lowell Libson, Hugh Belsey & Peter Bower, *Thomas Gainsborough: Themes and Variations, The Art of Landscape*, exhibition catalogue, 2003

Ann Bermingham, *Sensation and Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough’s Cottage Door*, New Haven and London, 2005

Hugh Belsey, ‘A Second Supplement to John Hayes’s The Drawings of Thomas Gainsborough’, *Master Drawings*, xlvi, Winter 2008, pp.427–541

Susan Sloman, *Gainsborough’s Landscapes: Themes and Variations*, exhibition catalogue, Bath, 2012

Hugh Belsey, *Gainsborough’s Cottage Doors, An Insight into the Artist’s Last Decade*, London, 2013

# Thomas Gainsborough: a brief chronology

1727

Born in Sudbury, Suffolk

c. 1740

Sent to London and apprenticed to Hubert-François Gravelot, the French draughtsman and engraver who taught at the St Martin's Lane Academy

1741–42

Works with Francis Hayman and possibly assists with painted decorations at Vauxhall Gardens

1743–44

Establishes his own studio in Hatton Garden, London

1746

Marries Margaret Burr, illegitimate daughter of Henry, Duke of Beaufort, who had settled an annuity of £200 a year on her

1748

Joins with Hogarth, Gravelot and Hayman on the decorations for the Foundling Hospital, London and presents a view of Charterhouse to the Hospital

1749

Returns to Sudbury

1750

Paints *Mr & Mrs Andrews* (National Gallery, London).

Birth of elder daughter, Mary

1751

Birth of younger daughter, Margaret

1752

The Gainsborough family move to Ipswich

1758

Makes a six month visit to Bath

1759

Moves to Bath

1760

Accession of King George III

1761

First exhibits at the Society of Artists

1763

Seriously ill as a result of overwork

1768

Foundation of the Royal Academy of Arts. Gainsborough becomes a Foundation Member

1772

Exhibits drawings in imitation of paintings at the Royal Academy

1773

Withdraws from the Royal Academy exhibition after a dispute over the hanging of his pictures.

Does not exhibit there again until 1777

1774

Rents part of Schomberg House, Pall Mall and settles in London

1779

Visits the Devon coast

c. 1781–82

Constructed his peep-box to display his painted transparencies of landscapes

1782

Tours the West country with Gainsborough Dupont, his nephew and studio assistant

1783

Gainsborough's final exhibit at the Royal Academy.

Visits the Lake District

1784

Holds exhibition of his pictures at Schomberg House

Draws *Figures resting in a woodland landscape* for Miss Thicknesse [cat.no.11]

1785

Paints *Diana and Actaeon*

1788

Gainsborough dies 2nd August.

Reynolds writes of his final meeting with Gainsborough in his fourteenth *Discourse*, delivered at the Royal Academy in December

1789

Private sale of Gainsborough's drawings and paintings at Schomberg House

