



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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62 | East Bergholt Common, View toward the Rectory 1813

Oil on canvas, mounted on panel, 22.5 x 29.3 cm

Lower right: 18 Aug [illegible]

Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton

2007.8.26

Constable's inscriptions of date, time, and place are often interpreted as part of the artist's project to perfect a "natural painture" of accurate depictions of the English landscape. Although most closely associated with his series of cloud studies executed on Hampstead Heath in 1821 and 1822, Constable's practice of recording the circumstances of his views dates from the early years of his career. From the annotation on the lower right of the canvas, we know that this sketch of *East Bergholt Common, View toward the Rectory* was painted on 18 August. The year is no longer visible; however, Constable's granddaughter, Ella (1865–1934), transcribed the date as 1813 on an old label on the back, most likely at the time of the 1891 auction.

At this auction, forty-one oils owned by Isabel (1822–1888), the artist's second daughter and fourth child, were offered for sale. The exact circumstances of the auction remain a puzzle, as it was Isabel's friend

Ernest Alfred Colquhoun who is registered as having consigned the work in Christie's records. Although it is unknown whether he had first purchased these works from Isabel's heirs or was representing them, this sketch was one of nineteen works Colquhoun bought at the sale.¹ It is important to note that the contents of the 1891 sale were, in fact, a small portion of the works in Isabel's collection. As the last surviving child of the artist, she was responsible for the gift of nearly four hundred works by her father to the then-South Kensington Museum in 1887.²

The date of the sketch places it within the period of 1812–15 during which Constable spent summers in Suffolk. The same view in another work (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven), painted on a canvas nearly half the size, is dated the following day.³ While the Clark sketch was in the collection of Isabel, the Yale version was in that of Constable's son Charles, reflecting the division of the contents of the studio on the artist's unexpected death. A third sketch of the view (private collection) bears no inscription and was in the collection of his youngest son, Lionel.⁴

We know from Maria Bicknell's letter of 25 Aug. 1813 that conditions for painting that summer were good: "What charming weather you have for sketching, I wonder which you have thought of most this summer, landscape or me."⁵ Further evidence of fair weather comes from other works painted during July

and August of that year. For example, *Dedham Vale from Gun Hill* (Staatsgalerie Stuttgart), painted on 12 July, and *Dedham from Langham* (Tate Britain, London), painted on 24 August, both show blue skies and verdant fields. These works, along with the sketchbook that Constable used in Suffolk and Essex that year (Victoria and Albert Museum, London), exemplify the attention Constable paid to the immediate vicinity of East Bergholt House, the home of the Constable family and the place of his birth.⁶

This house has an implied presence in the oil sketch, as it is from one of its window that Constable painted this view. The most famous views from the house's upper-story window are those of *Golding Constable's Flower Garden* and *Golding Constable's Vegetable Garden* (both Ipswich Museums and Galleries Collection). Both these and the Clark sketch, as well as earlier works, such as *East Bergholt Common from Golding Constable's House* (Downing College, Cambridge) and *The Rectory, from the Back of Golding Constable's House* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), show the expanse visible from the back of East Bergholt House.⁷ Constable depicted the house itself, whether from the back or front, less frequently. From *East Bergholt House* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) or the pencil drawing of the façade on Church Street (private collection), however, it is possible to see what a substantial presence the structure, and by extension, the Constable family, had in the village.⁸

The title of the Clark oil, as well as those of similar scenes, describes the geographic relationship of Constable's family home to that of the East Bergholt rectory, although the building itself is barely visible in the sketch, where it is almost entirely hidden by trees. This rectory was the residence of the Rev. Dr. Rhudde (1733–1819), the grandfather of Maria Bicknell, who upon his death was remembered as “a zealous and conscientious Divine.”⁹ While Constable made many sketches and drawings of the East Bergholt church, there are no close-up views of the rectory. In many ways, Constable's repeated views of fields that separated him from the residence of the influential relative of his great love represent the disapproval and distance with which the rector viewed the aspiring artist. These same fields were also the location of “some of the happiest hours of [Constable's] life,” as we know from a tender letter the artist wrote to Maria in which he reminisces about their walks together.¹⁰ Indeed, amid the brilliant sky, the serene fields, and the healthy trees of *East Bergholt Common*, *View toward*

the Rectory, there are few, if any, signs of a frustrated courtship or unappreciated aesthetic. EP

PROVENANCE Isabel Constable, the artist's daughter, by descent (d. 1888, her sale, Christie's, London, 28 May 1891, no. 124, as *A Sketch. "18th Aug. 1813,"* bought in or sold to Colquhoun);¹¹ Ernest Alfred Colquhoun (from 1891); Janet E. Colquhoun, by descent; sale, Sotheby's, London, 19 July 1978, no. 92; [Richard Green Gallery, London, by 1979]; private collection, London; [Deborah Gage (Works of Art) Ltd., sold to Manton, 10 Apr. 2002]; Sir Edwin A. G. Manton (2002–d. 2005); Manton Family Art Foundation (2005–7, given to the Clark, as *View toward the Rectory at East Bergholt*); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007.

EXHIBITIONS London 1889a, no. 246; London 1976, p. 86, no. 120, ill.; London 1979, pp. 12–13, no. 4, ill.

REFERENCES Hoozee 1979, p. 104, no. 178, ill.; Reynolds 1996, vol. 1, no. 13.13, vol. 2, pl. 1005.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fairly thick, coarse fabric, possibly a twill weave, with a thread count of about 19 threads per cm. The canvas is glue-mounted to a pine panel 0.8 cm thick, with the grain running vertically. The back edges are chamfered, but there is no sealant on the back of the pine board. The poor wood choice and the grain's improper orientation have caused a convex warp across the horizontal direction. There is a slight weave impression from the mounting pressure, and the tops of the higher impastos are flattened. The canvas was not centered on the board during the mounting, leaving the lower right canvas hanging over the edge of the wood and causing a long fill to be needed along the left side. Filled losses appear on the right edge, and part of the large fill on the left is chipping. The inscription in that corner has also been cut so that it now reads “Aug 18 [illegible]”, indicating that the mounting was done after the painting was completed. There are several old dents in the center upper edge and the center of the bright foreground passage. Slightly raised age cracks occur throughout the paint. The yellowed natural resin coating has a glassy fracture with some losses. It is dull and foggy, as well as pooled and wrinkled in some areas. The sky has considerable retouching below the varnish.

The lowest of two ground applications is a thick off-white layer, topped by a thinner pinkish color. This may indicate that the artist was responsible for at least the upper color. Black, green, and red layers can be seen in a chip in the upper left edge, between the pink ground and the present sky color. Areas of revealed dark underlayers may explain the reason for the overpaint in the sky. There was no evidence of underdrawing. The paint is quite vehicular throughout, with fairly thin fluid strokes punctuated by the thicker paint of the clouds. The paint layer appears to be executed entirely wet-into-wet, even at the horizon line, suggesting completion

in one sitting. The green bands in the landscape look like a thin glaze over a paler color. Under magnification, small blue particles are visible in the sky, suggestive of the pigment Prussian blue.

1. Leslie Parris first discussed the 1891 sale in Parris 1983, p. 223. A slightly more detailed account appears in Fleming-Williams and Parris 1984, p. 90.
2. See Reynolds 1973, pp. 3–5. In Fleming-Williams and Parris 1984, p. 85, the authors cite an article in the *Spectator* from 15 Sept. 1888 that the gift was made on the basis of a prior agreement between Isabel, Minna, and Lionel.
3. R 13.14.
4. R 13.27.
5. Maria Bicknell to John Constable, 25 Aug. 1813, in Beckett 1962–70, vol. 2, p. 111.
6. R 13.12, 13.15, 13.17.
7. R 15.22, 15.23, 00.16, 08.11.
8. R 10.28, 14.36.
9. *Gentleman's Magazine* 1819, p. 484.
10. John Constable to Maria Bicknell, 18 Sept. 1814, in Beckett 1962–70, vol. 2, p. 132.
11. Colquhoun had consigned the works from Isabel Constable's collection to Christie's; it is therefore unclear whether he owned them or was acting as an agent.

63 | Osmington Bay 1816

Oil on canvas, 23.3 x 30.6 cm

Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton

2007.8.31

Constable's relationship with Maria Bicknell, whom he married after a seven-year courtship, is central to his biography as the archetypal Romantic painter. Her grandfather's opposition to their relationship, their long-delayed marriage, her fragile health exacerbated by frequent pregnancies, her death in 1828, and his unrelieved grief not only contributed to Constable's emotional state, but often determined his physical location and choice of subject. *Osmington Bay*, painted while the couple was on their honeymoon on the Dorset coast in October and November 1816, stands at a pivotal moment in the artist's relationship with Maria, as well as in his career. Indeed, Graham Reynolds divides Constable's oeuvre between the



Fig. 63.1. John Constable, *Two Studies of a Shepherd* (verso of *Cottages*), 1816. Pen and ink on cream wove paper, 8.1 x 11.6 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton (2007.8.30)

early years before his marriage and the later years when he had settled in London after marrying. In addition, the painting, formerly in the collection of Dr. John Fisher, highlights the importance of this friend and patron in the artist's life.

The granddaughter of Dr. Rhudde, rector of East Bergholt, Maria Bicknell (1787–1828) met the aspiring artist while on one of her periodic visits to Suffolk, and, in 1809, their relationship began in earnest. Constable probably became friends with John Fisher (1788–1832), the nephew of the Bishop of Salisbury, in 1811 while the artist was visiting the bishop for three weeks in August and September. Both John Fisher and Maria Bicknell were assiduous correspondents with the artist, intersecting at the important moment of 1816 when Fisher offered to marry the couple and proposed they spend their honeymoon with him and his own new wife in Osmington, where Fisher had been given the position of vicar by his uncle earlier that year.

While the Bishop of Salisbury and his nephew were unwavering supporters of the artist, the rector of East Bergholt disapproved of his granddaughter's possible alliance with an unsuccessful painter. In the hopes of preventing a break with the wealthy clergyman, Maria's parents discouraged the romance, at times forbidding Constable from visiting them at their London home. The situation changed, however, with the death of his father on 14 May 1816 and his inheritance of a share of the estate; Constable then felt that his more secure financial position justified his proposal of marriage to Maria.¹