

JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER

DRAWINGS, PASTELS, AND  
WATERCOLOURS

A CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

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see No. 333) :: bequeathed to the Freer Gallery in 1919.

Acq. No.: 05.116

Lit: Stubbs 1948, p. 19 as 'St Ives: Sunset'; exh. cat., Washington 1984, pp. 187, repr. pl. 111.

On 30 January 1884 Whistler wrote to E. W. Godwin, 'The country you know never lasts me long and if it had not been for the Sea I should have been back before now—However I shall bring a few "little things" . . .' (GUL G120).

Whistler experimented with methods of achieving atmospheric effects with transparent washes. Freer, when he annotated a list of Way's collection in 1905, noted 'amazing sky' (FGA). It was achieved by laying a pale grey wash over a warm glow of lemon and orange and pink, and the same colours with additional drops of blue and grey on the beach. On a calm blue-grey sea several boats were added, their grey sails merging into the land on the horizon.

In the centre land and sky unite. The sky, having been painted immediately after the sea and land, drips down into them at right, while the land runs into the sky just to left of the centre. There is a harder line at the horizon on the right, where on the left it is softened by a thin wash over and around the headland.

It was painted on a paper with very little tooth, the brush making almost no use of the slight, wavy, horizontal grain. The sheet is slightly browned at the edges.

### 919. The Ocean Wave

FREER GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, DC

Watercolour on beige paper, laid down on card  
126 × 176 (4 $\frac{15}{16}$  × 6 $\frac{13}{16}$ )

Signed with butterfly

History: Probably painted in St Ives, 1883/4 :: . . . :: bought from Obach, London dealers, by C. L. Freer, Detroit, in Feb. 1906 for £613.9.4 (voucher, FGA) :: bequeathed to the Freer Gallery in 1919.

Acq. No.: 06.54



Lit: Stubbs 1948, p. 19 as 'The Ocean Wave'; exh. cat., Washington 1984, pp. 188, 298, repr. pl. 112; Walker 1987, repr. p. 88.

Although close in technique to watercolours of St Ives (Nos 915–18), this might be later, or it could have been signed later, since the butterfly is of a type used in 1885. It is likely that it was exhibited at Dowdeswell's in 1884, and it might have been No. 920.

Heavy clouds, washes of purplish-grey tinged with pink, with patches of pale blue, drop or drip down over the uneven skyline of misty distant headlands and into the rich grey-green sea, suggesting the blurring of a passing squall. The very slightly diagonal tilt of the composition is restful.

It is on a thin smooth paper, with a fine horizontal grain, possibly taken from a sketchbook, like No. 921, which is similar in size. It has browned at the edges, and in unpainted areas, and there has been some paper loss at the bottom. The white wave which stands out so boldly, painted with gouache, would not have contrasted so much with the paper originally—indeed, the whole effect would have been more cool.

### 920. Note in grey and green—St Ives

WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

Watercolour  
Support and size unknown

History: Exh. London, Dowdeswell, 1886 (13) as 'Note in grey and green—St Ives'.

The title suggests a scene such as No. 919.

### 921. Penthouse of the public house in St Ives, Cornwall

BYRON BAKER AND OTHERS, EUGENE, OREGON

Watercolour on dark cream wove paper  
162 × 112 (6 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ )

Inscribed on verso in an unknown hand 'Nocturne by Whistler / Penthouse of public-house in St Ives / Cornwall / painted about 1883 or 1884' and signed illegibly, possibly 'JH'.

History: According to Walter Sickert, who was with Whistler in St Ives in the winter of 1883–4, Whistler painted

'a minute nocturne in water-colour, done at St. Ives on the greenish outside leaf of a small water-colour block . . . The nocturne was painted at Barnoon Terrace, St. Ives, where Whistler and I were staying together. It was painted under my eyes, after we had spent the preceding evening studying the scene from Nature—a little lean-to, tiled pent-house roof outside a public house in the central place of the town'

:: according to Sickert, he acquired it directly from Whistler :: Sickert sold it, possibly at the same time as the *Portrait of H. R. Eldon* (YMSM 245) in Aug. 1905, to Hesslein, a dealer, who resold it; by Feb. 1912 it was, according to Sickert, in America :: . . . :: with a private collector in Portland, Oregon, in 1984 :: . . . :: acquired from a Nevada collection by Roger Abbott, Cottage Grove, Oregon :: sold by Abbott to the present owners in 1986.

Lit: Sickert 1912, p. 431.

'Pent-house of the Public House / in St. [Yve], Cornwall. / by J McN Whistler / formerly Walter Sickert's Collection.' is inscribed on a label on one sheet of card backing. The label bears the printed heading of the Berlin Photographic Co., Madison Avenue, New York.

In the watercolour men can be seen sitting on Doble's wall, for centuries a spot for people to gather and gossip in St Ives. The wall stands in front of what was then a public house, the Globe Inn, which had a 'pent-house', or what would now be called lean-to, stuck on the back.

It is assumed that Whistler's watercolours of St Ives were painted from nature, bold and experimental as they are, and splashy in a less controlled way than his later work. It is known that Whistler made memory sketches of nocturnal scenes in the late seventies, and occasionally in the early eighties, before he made oil paintings. One such sketch, for a *Nocturne: Chelsea* (YMSM 235) painted about 1881, is No. 858.

Whistler occasionally drew on the covers of sketchbooks (see No. 902). The surface made a slightly rough and less absorbent surface and affected the way his brush-strokes were placed on the paper.

The circumstances of the creation of this little Nocturne, and the use of the card, explain its unique and fascinating appearance. Setting off its broad and vigorous sketchiness, details, like the dark, perky figures of the men, and the street light,





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were painted with a fine-pointed brush, while broad washes of colour effectively describe the effects of the street light and shadows.

The paper has a neat diamond grain. It is browned, with uneven edges, torn at the top right corner. It has been broadly painted, with white mixed into the colours. The paint strokes go right off the paper at the top and bottom and exactly to the left edge. It is possible the drawing has been cut down. The scrappiness at top and bottom is rather like *No. 860*.

### 922. Surf breaking on the beach

PRIVATE COLLECTION, NEW YORK

Watercolour on cream wove paper, laid down on card

162 × 254 (6 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 10)

Signed with butterfly

**History:** Possibly painted 1883/4 :: . . . :: 'French Coast' bought at some time 'forty years ago' in London by an unknown collector (inscription on label) :: . . . :: sold at auction, New York, Doyle, 22 Sept. 1982 (104, repr.) as 'Surf breaking on the beach' and bought by a private collector, Sarasota, Florida :: sold to Hope Davis, New York dealer, 1988 :: sold to the present owner in 1991.

The paper is wove cartridge with a slight pebble grain, a little darkened by exposure to light. The colour has been affected by light. The barely visible clouds were originally more noticeable, making the vivid blue of the sea less dominant. The pinkish areas in the surf may have been grey (if sepia and blue were mixed to make a grey, the blue might fade, leaving the uncharacteristic sepia tones). While the painting of the sea is fresh and bold, the angular brush-strokes on the beach are awkward and untypical.

The butterfly is well placed and drawn but not easy to date. It is possible that it was added by another (skilful) hand. The painting with its rather uneven style shows similarities with both paintings of about 1884 and ones of the French coast ten years later.

There are pin-holes at centre right, and a small tear at the right edge which has been repaired.

### 923. Landscape with farm buildings

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM, CAMBRIDGE

Watercolour on off-white paper, laid down on card  
123 × 205 (4 $\frac{13}{16}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ )

Signed with butterfly

**History:** Painted 1883/4 and signed *c.* 1884, possibly for exh. London, Dowdeswell, 1884 :: in Whistler's studio at his death in 1903 and be-



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queathed to his sister-in-law, Miss R. Birnie Philip; on 14 May 1904 C. L. Freer saw a watercolour of 'Cottage and trees at right—very softly and prettily done: *superb*' in Whistler's studio (diary, FGA) :: 'Landscape with farm buildings amid trees' sold to Colnaghi, London dealers, on 26 Oct. 1955 :: bought by the Fitzwilliam Museum from the R. H. Biffen Fund on 26 Nov. 1955.

Acq. No.: PD 17-1955

**Lit:** Pennell 1920, repr. f. p. 337 as 'Landscape'; exh. cat., London, Liverpool, and Glasgow, 1976 (82) as 'Landscape'; exh. cat., Cambridge 1988 (no cat. no.) as 'Landscape with farm buildings'.

Pennell suggested that this was owned by Mrs Mortimer Menpes in 1920. She may have had a photograph of it, but certainly not the original (see *No. 1015*).

The subject is a half-timbered house or barn and out-buildings, among trees on the edge of fields, with a tower in the distance. A fine-pointed brush was used to paint the trees in a spiky style. In the 1920 photograph there appears to be a vivid contrast of dark and light, which suggests that the watercolour has faded, although it is possible that the photograph exaggerated this contrast.

It is a lovely fresh watercolour, with pale washes of autumnal greens, grey, orange, and brown allowed to run freely into one another. Small drops of green and blue were dropped into the grey of the shadowed barn. Sketchy details were drawn with a fine-pointed brush held almost at right angles to the paper, to give spiky, not flowing strokes.

*No. 923* might possibly have been drawn at Coombe (see *No. 848*), or near Moreby Hall, Yorkshire (see *No. 908*), while Speke Hall, near Liverpool, is another possibility.

It is on a medium-weight, rough paper with very little tooth. There is a big spot on the left. Quite a lot of paper was left unpainted, in the sky, under the clouds, and in the foreground. There was some running of washes, for instance, at bottom right and left—at left, a dark wash spread down into the foreground, and at right, the foreground spread upwards.

The picture has a somewhat unfinished look, and it is difficult to identify the exact nature of the buildings. In the photograph reproduced by Pennell, it was not signed. The signature may have been added for exhibition in 1884 or 1886, although it has not been possible to identify it with any of the titles known.