

Acquisition of John Constable's
preliminary sketch for the
Nayland Altarpiece
July 2012



Rare find:
One of
Constable's
sketches of St
Botolph's
Priory, in
Colchester.

New Constable sketches found

Colchester work among pieces up for auction

James Calnan

PREVIOUSLY unknown drawings by world-renowned artist John Constable – including the above sketch of Colchester's historic St Botolph's Priory – have been unearthed.

Constable's landscape depictions of the Dedham Vale and the surrounding countryside were so famous, the area became known as Constable Country.

Now 15 of his sketches, which lay forgotten in a cupboard for 60 years, have been discovered and will go up for auction next month. Estimates suggest they will fetch £50,000 between them.

An art lover, who has opted to remain anonymous, brought 20 drawings and watercolours to the front counter of Christie's for a routine evaluation.

Experts discovered 15 of them were by East Bergholt-born Constable, who lived between 1776 and 1837 and whose father owned



Master: John Constable.

Flatford Mill, which is now a tourist attraction.

They include a series of sketches drawn in 1808 and 1809, among which is numbered the postcard-sized "The Ruins of St Botolph's Priory", which could fetch £6,000.

The first Augustinian Order priory in the country, which dates back to the 11th century, is

now viewed as a hidden gem at the edge of Colchester town centre.

Other drawings were preparatory sketches for famous works in Constable's oeuvre.

Elm Trees in Old Hall Park, East Bergholt, made using a sheet of glass and ink, gives an insight into how the final work – now in London's Victoria and Albert museum – was created.

Harriet Drummond, Christie's international head of British drawings and watercolours, described the collection as a one-in-a-generation find.

She said: "Such a rare and interesting group of unrecorded drawings by the master of English landscape has not appeared on the market since 1988.

"The drawing of Elm Trees in Old Hall Park is important as it shows Constable's very precise technique developed to accurately record scale when working direct from nature."

james.calnan@nqe.com

Background to the Purchase

On Saturday 30th June 2012 Mrs. Andora Carver was contacted by Mr. Robert Holden (the late Sir Joshua Rowley's son-in-law), who is a director of Robert Holden Fine Art Ltd.

He informed her that a preparatory sketch for the Nayland Altarpiece by John Constable was due to come up for sale at Christie's in London on Tuesday 3rd July. Lot 128.

The estimate was £1,000 - £2,000.

He asked Andora if she knew of anyone who would be interested in purchasing the work in order to return it to Nayland.

The Conservation Society came to mind as the most obvious organisation to acquire the picture for the benefit of the village, and to secure it for the future.

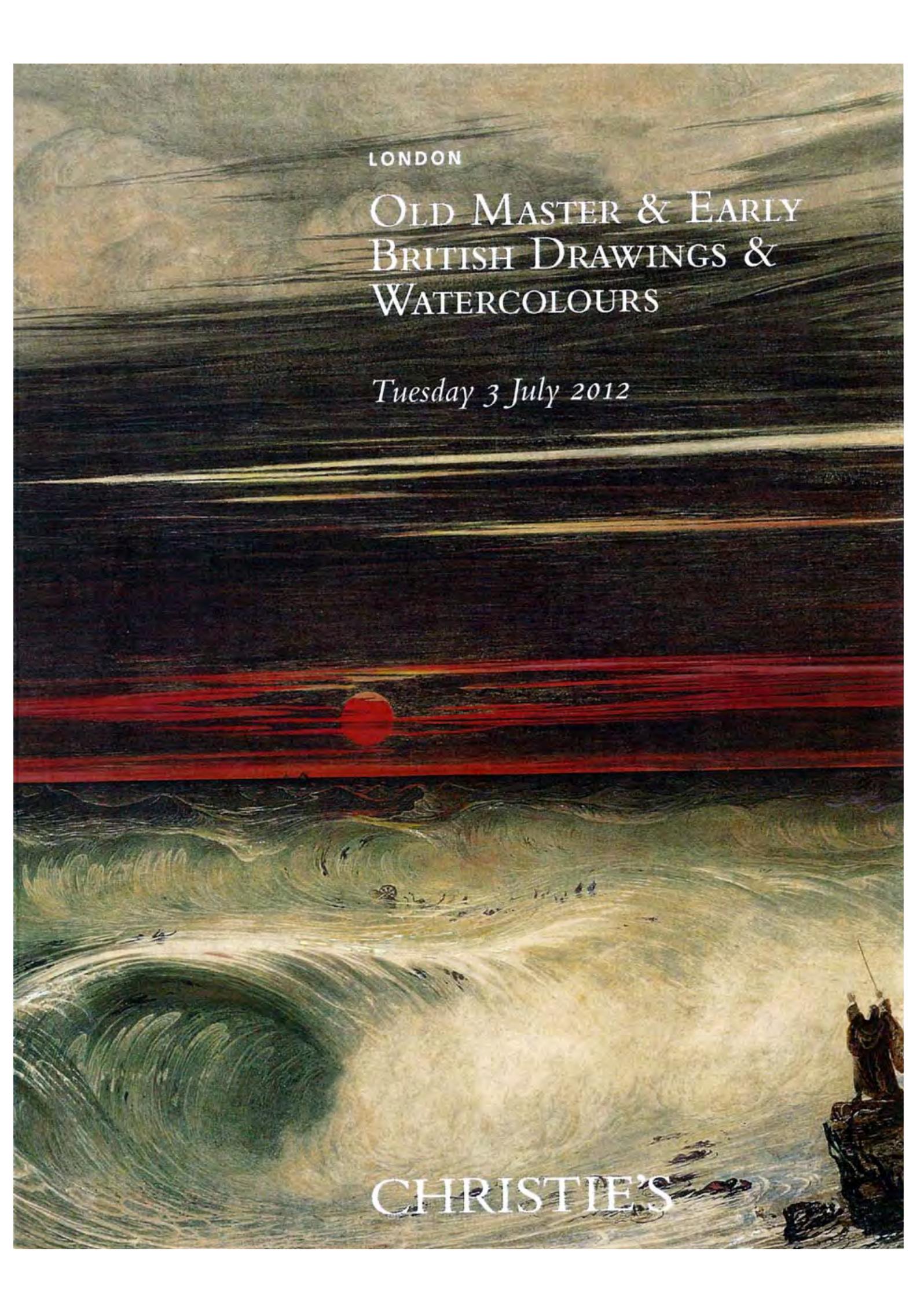
After discussion, the Committee approved the use of Society funds up to £5,000. Three other individuals agreed to guarantee up to another £3,000 between them, because it was considered vitally important that this piece of Nayland history should be returned to the village.

Robert Holden arranged for one of his assistants to attend the auction and bid on behalf of the Society. She was in touch with Andora via the telephone, throughout the bidding process. In the event the hammer price for the Lot was £1,200. Christie's buyer's premium was a further £360 and the total cost of £1,560 was paid entirely from the Society's funds. Robert Holden Fine Art Ltd. waived their usual agent's commission.

The picture was collected two weeks later.

The Society wishes to thank Mr. Holden for his foresight, initiative and generous practical assistance to the village.

Note: At a Christie's auction of Old Master Pictures on the same day, John Constable's The Lock sold for £22,441,250.

The background of the entire page is a dramatic painting of a stormy sea. The sky is dark and turbulent, with horizontal streaks of light and color. A bright red sun is positioned on the horizon, casting a glow across the water. The sea is depicted with swirling, textured brushstrokes in shades of green, yellow, and white, suggesting a powerful storm. In the bottom right corner, a small figure of a person is visible on a rocky outcrop, looking out over the sea.

LONDON

OLD MASTER & EARLY
BRITISH DRAWINGS &
WATERCOLOURS

Tuesday 3 July 2012

CHRISTIE'S



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Tuesday 3 July 2012

AUCTION

Tuesday 3 July 2012

at **2.00 pm**

8 King Street, St. James's
London SW1Y 6QT

AUCTION CODE AND NUMBER

In sending absentee bids or making enquiries, this sale should be referred to as **MARTINA-5688**

VIEWING

Saturday	30 June	10.00 noon - 5.00 pm
Sunday	1 July	10.00 noon - 5.00 pm
Monday	2 July	9.00 am - 4.30 pm
Tuesday	3 July	9.00 am - 12.00 noon

AUCTIONEERS

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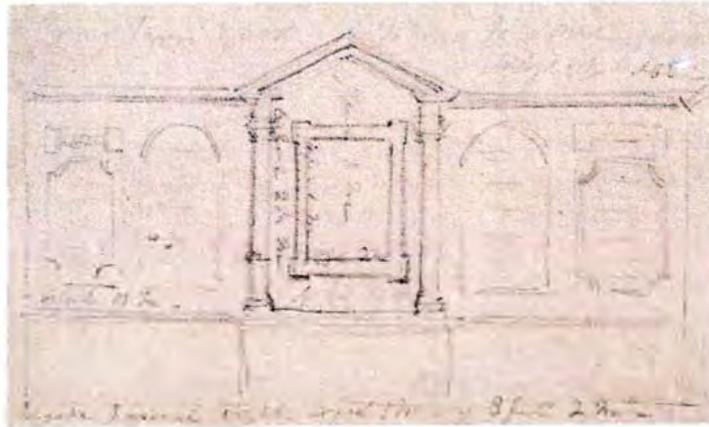
This auction is subject to Important Notices, Conditions of Sale and to Reserves [25]



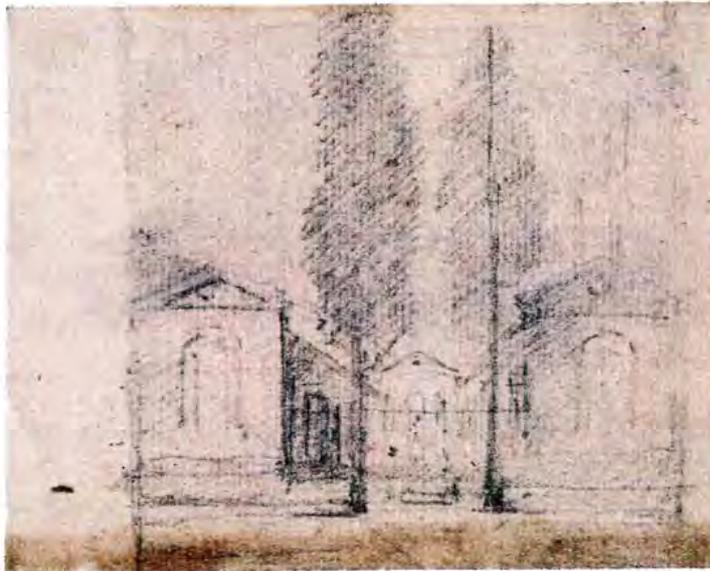
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CHRISTIE'S

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128



129

128

JOHN CONSTABLE, R.A. (EAST BERGHOLT 1776-1837 HAMPSTEAD)

The altarpiece in St James's Church, Nayland

inscribed 'Pray turn your Mind to some good/subject soon' (upper centre) and further inscribed 'Inside surround might ...' and with measurements

pencil, fragmentary watermark '18..'

3¼ x 6½ in. (9.5 x 16.5 cm.)

1,200

£1,000-2,000

US\$1,600-3,000

€1,200-2,200

The present drawing is from the same sketchbook as lots 127 and 129. It was executed during Constable's 1809 autumn visit to his Aunt, Martha Smith (1739-1820) who lived in the village of Nayland, Suffolk. This drawing records the measurements for parts of the Reredos and another drawing, Reynolds, *op.cit.*, no. 10.9, pl. 835, shows how his altarpiece would look *in situ*.

The present drawing's witty inscription 'Pray turn your Mind to some good subject soon' is a rather good natured reference to the difficulty Constable encountered in deciding upon a subject matter. Constable's Uncle, David Pike Watts, wrote to Constable in January 1810 criticizing the original choice of *The Resurrection* and suggesting a copy of a painting by Carlo Dolci at Burleigh, which had been worked in worsted by Miss Mary Linwood. Constable's next plan was to paint *The Agony in the Garden*, for which there is a sketch in the Louvre sketchbook, Reynolds, *op.cit.*, no. 10.3. By

mid July, after further advice from Mr Watts, the subject changed again and Constable settled on the *Christ blessing the Elements*, Reynolds, *op.cit.*, no. 10.8. Soon after the painting's installation in the church Mr Watts spent an hour contemplating it with his nephew only to send him a list of 25 criticisms in a letter of 24 November 1810, (R.B. Beckett (ed.), *John Constable's Correspondance*, IV, 1968, pp. 20-22).

129

JOHN CONSTABLE, R.A. (EAST BERGHOLT 1776-1837 HAMPSTEAD)

Study of a house with two trees (recto); Drawing of a dog (verso)

pencil

3¼ x 4¾ in. (9.5 x 11.1 cm.)

£1,200-1,800

2,200

US\$1,900-2,700

€1,400-2,000

This sheet has been slightly trimmed but is probably from the same sketchbook as lots 127 and 128. Stylistically the drawing is similar to those from August 1809 of *Malvern Hall* (see Reynolds, *op.cit.*, nos. 09.16, 09.20, 09.21 and 09.22). The architecture of the building does not relate to Malvern Hall, however the sketchbook includes other drawings of houses at Twyford executed earlier that year (Reynolds, *op.cit.* nos. 09.09-09.13). The object of Constable's visit was to execute a portrait of Henry Greswold Lewis's ward Mary Freer (Reynolds, *op.cit.*, no. 09.23).

ROBERT HOLDEN LTD

FINE ART AGENTS

13 OLD BURLINGTON STREET, LONDON W1S 3AJ
TEL: 020 7437 6010 FAX: 020 7437 1733
e-mail: robertholden@robertholden.com

The Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society
c/o Mrs Andora Carver,
Mill House,
Nayland,
Suffolk,
CO6 4HU

06/07/12
2570/12

Invoice

Purchase at Auction
Old Master and Early British Drawings,
Christie's King Street
3rd July, 2012

Lot 128 John Constable, R.A.
The Altarpiece in St James's Church, Nayland £1,200.00

Total Hammer Price: £1,200.00

Plus

i) Christie's buyer's premium charge (incl.VAT) £360.00

TOTAL DUE: £1,560.00

VAT No. GB 242 8439 55



Precious: Constable's *The Lock* was bought at auction by an anonymous buyer for £22,441,250.

Stour Valley painting fetches Constable record of £22.4m

A PAINTING of the Stour Valley by John Constable sold at auction for a record £22,441,250. *The Lock*, completed by the East Bergholt-born romantic painter in 1824, was the fifth in a celebrated series of six large-scale paintings of the valley which were exhibited between 1819 and 1825.

The *Lock* had been housed in Madrid's Bornemisza Museum, but was sold by owner Baroness Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, a former Miss Spain and member of one of Europe's greatest art-collecting families.

The sum paid at Christie's by the anonymous buyer makes the painting one of

£6,000 – for a postcard

TWO previously unknown Constable sketches of Colchester's St Botolph's Priory fetched £6,000 at auction.

The postcard-size drawings, called "The ruins of St Botolph's Priory, Colchester", were among 11 lots which went for £69,500.

An anonymous art lover discovered the sketches by the East Bergholt-born



artist, which had been in a cupboard for 60 years, and took them to Christie's front counter.

The biggest interest was in a preparatory sketch for one of the artist's renowned paintings, *Elm Trees in Old Hall Park*, East Bergholt, which fetched £13,750.

the most expensive British works of art ever sold.

It was also a world record price at auction for a

Constable. The painting shows the lock at Flatford Mill on the River Stour, on the Essex/Suffolk border.

Announcement on the Society's website
copy for Dedham Vale Society's newsletter and
Dedham Vale AONB Project newsletter

A Constable work returns to the Stour Valley

The Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society are delighted to announce that they have acquired an original drawing by John Constable.

The subject is a pencil drawing showing the reredos (decorated stone screen) at St. James Church, Nayland indicating how the proposed altarpiece might look in situ.

It is inscribed 'Pray turn your Mind to some good subject soon' and below 'Inside surround right 4 feet 1 in – by 3 feet 2 in -'

The pencil drawing is thought to have been executed during Constable's 1809 autumn visit to his aunt, Martha (Patty) Smith, who lived at Longwood House, Nayland. The original size is 3 ¾ x 6 ½ in. (9.5 x 16.5 cm.).

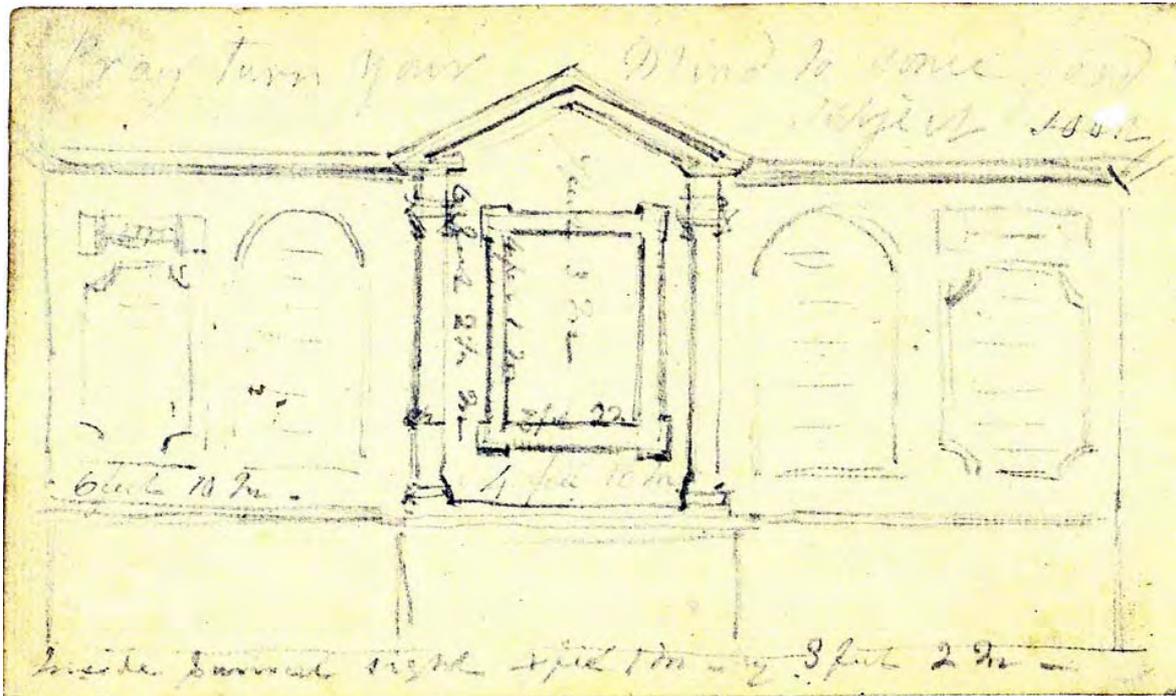
The witty inscription is a reference to the difficulty Constable encountered in deciding on a subject matter for the painting in the centre of the reredos (a decorative stone screen behind the altar). Constable's uncle, David Pike Watts, wrote to Constable in January 1810 criticising the original choice of *The Resurrection*.

Constable's next plan was to paint *The Agony in the Garden*, for which there is a sketch in the Louvre sketchbook. By mid July, after further advice from Mr. Watts and his family, the subject changed again and Constable settled on the *Christ Blessing the Elements of Bread and Wine at the Last Supper*.

Village records show that in 1767 £35.18.3 was paid out in Nayland Charity money for half the cost of a new reredos which consisted of 4 panels of black stone – probably marble – on which were inscribed The Commandments, with a painting of Moses in the centre. In 1810 Constable's painting was placed in an oak frame within this reredos, which was replaced by the present Caen stone screen in about 1869. At the time, the picture was removed, but the parishioners demanded its restoration and it has been there ever since.

The Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society purchased the original sketch at a Christie's auction in July 2012 and have made a copy available to St. James Church.

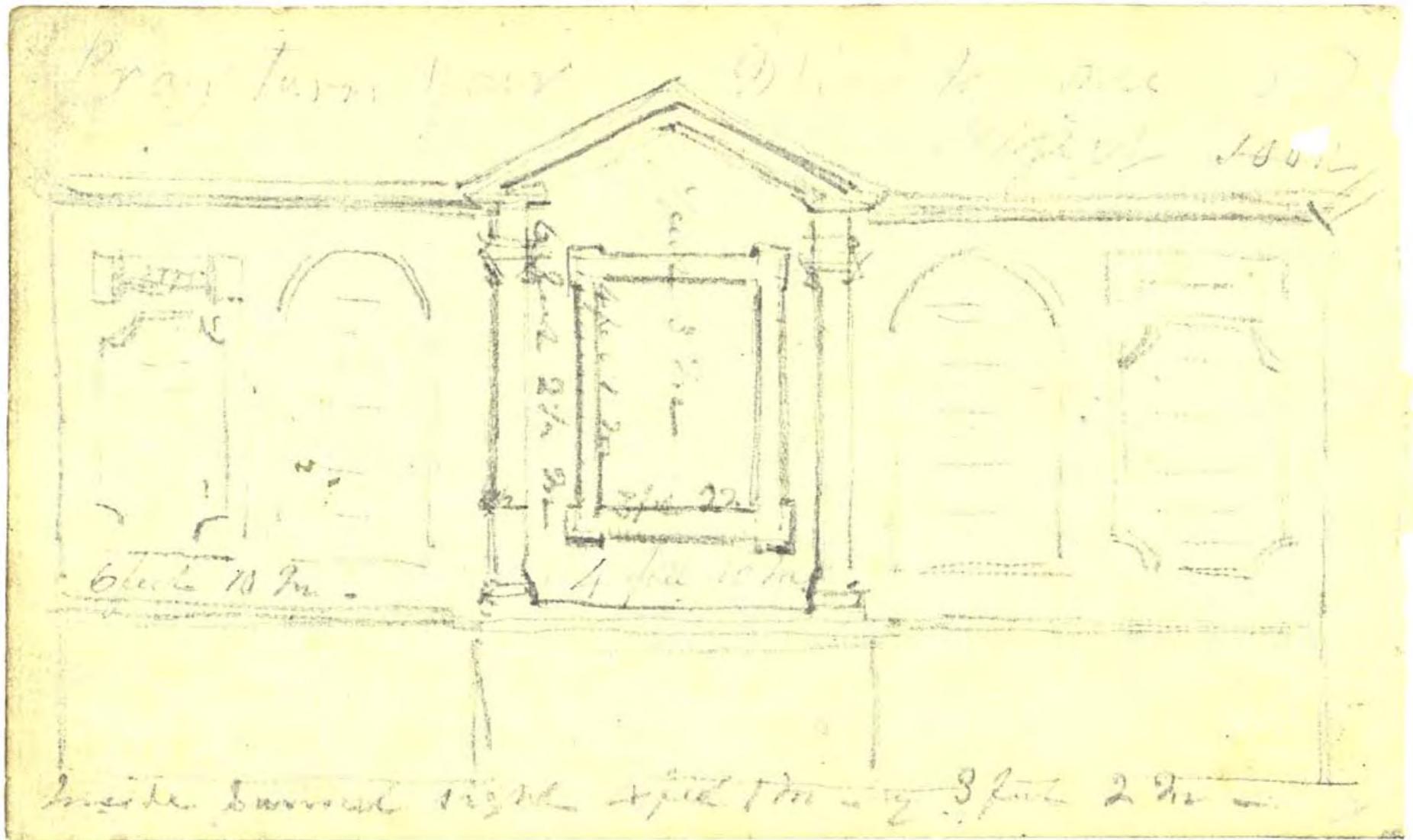
The original work has been framed and will be kept in a secure place. It will be displayed at the Society's open meetings.



Actual Size



The Chancel, St James Church - July 2012



An enlarged version

Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society

Registered Charity no 268104

Longwood Barn
Fen Street
Nayland
CO6 4HT

Robert Holden Esq.,
Robert Holden Ltd.
13 Old Burlington Street,
London W1S 3AJ

20th July 2012

Dear Mr. Holden

**Original sketch of the interior of St. James Church
by John Constable**

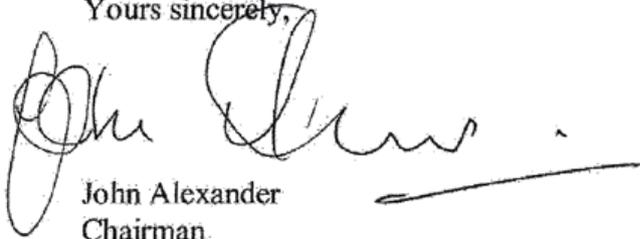
I am writing on behalf of the Conservation Society to thank you very much indeed for, in the first instance, contacting Andora about the sketch coming up for auction at Christie's, and then for helping us to purchase this very important work. We are also most grateful to you for waiving your fee on this occasion.

An opportunity such as this only comes very rarely and we are so delighted that, with your assistance, we were able to acquire this important work and return it to Nayland after over 200 years.

Everyone who has seen the sketch is entranced by it and we are having a copy framed to present to St. James Church, as well as framing the original and having it on show at our meetings and other special occasions.

With grateful thanks

Yours sincerely,



John Alexander
Chairman

Copy for Church 'paddleboard'

John Constable R.A. 1776-1837

The altarpiece at St. James Church, Nayland

Inscribed '*Pray turn your Mind to some good subject soon*'
and below
'*Inside surround right 4 feet 1 in – by 3 feet 2 in -*'

The pencil drawing is thought to have been executed during Constable's 1809 autumn visit to his aunt, Martha (Patty) Smith, who lived at Longwood House, Nayland. The original size is 3 ¾ x 6 ½ in. (9.5 x 16.5 cm.) as shown above.

This sketch shows how his altarpiece would look *in situ*

The witty inscription is a reference to the difficulty Constable encountered in deciding on a subject matter for the painting in the centre of the reredos (a decorative stone screen behind the altar). Constable's uncle, David Pike Watts, wrote to Constable in January 1810 criticising the original choice of *The Resurrection*.

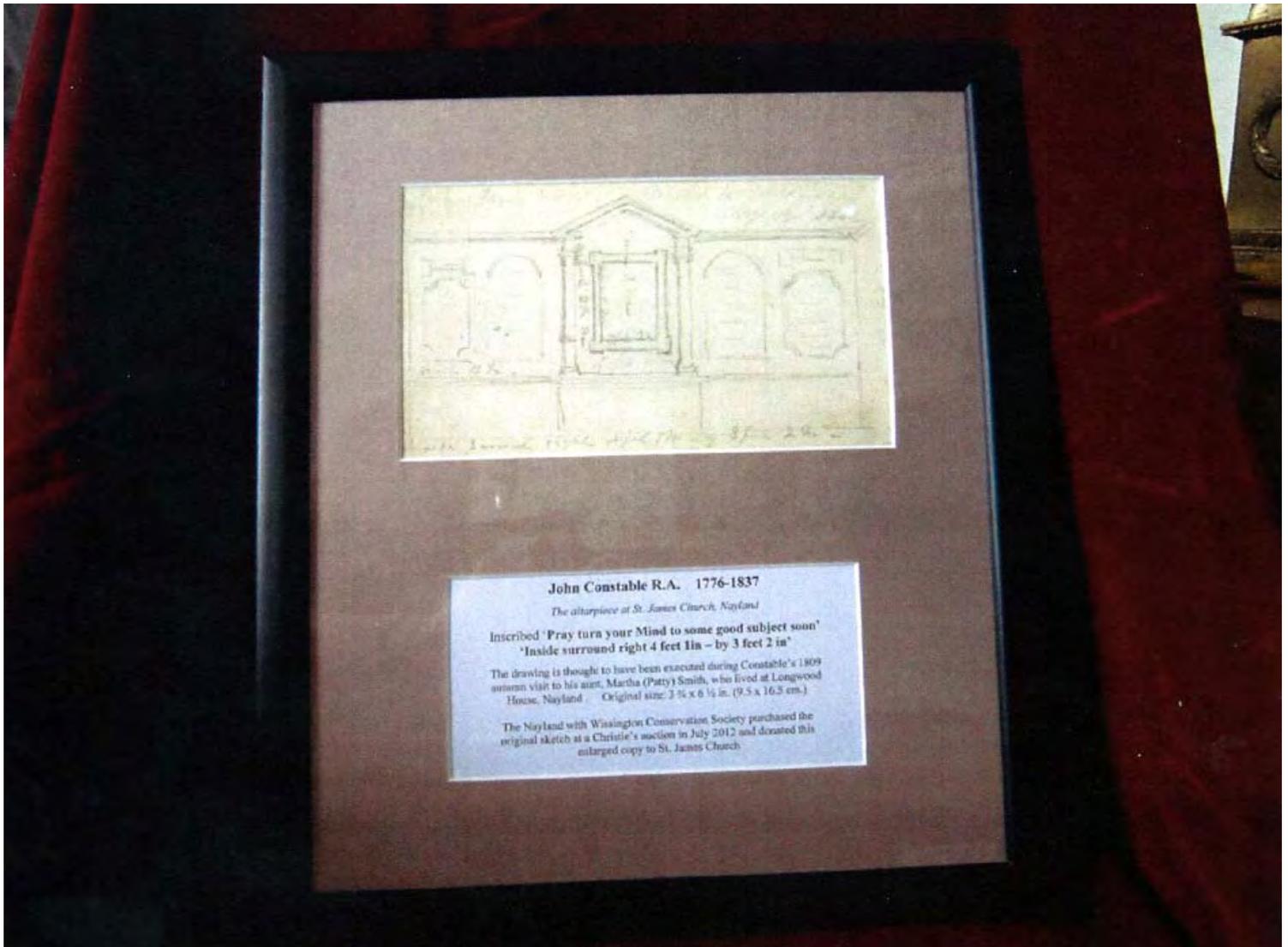
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The original sketch is the property of the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society. They purchased the work at a Christie's auction in July 2012. An enlarged framed copy has been donated to St. James Church, together with a 'paddleboard' giving background details of the work and its acquisition.

Further information about Constable's altarpiece is in the leaflet which can be found on the table in church. This was produced by the Conservation Society for the Bicentenary of the Altarpiece in 2010. Copies of the leaflet were donated to St. James Church for sale.

Sources: Dr. Slade's Notes on the History of Nayland 1938
Christie's Catalogue of the sale of Old Master & Early English Drawings
& Watercolours 3rd July 2012



John Constable R.A. 1776-1837

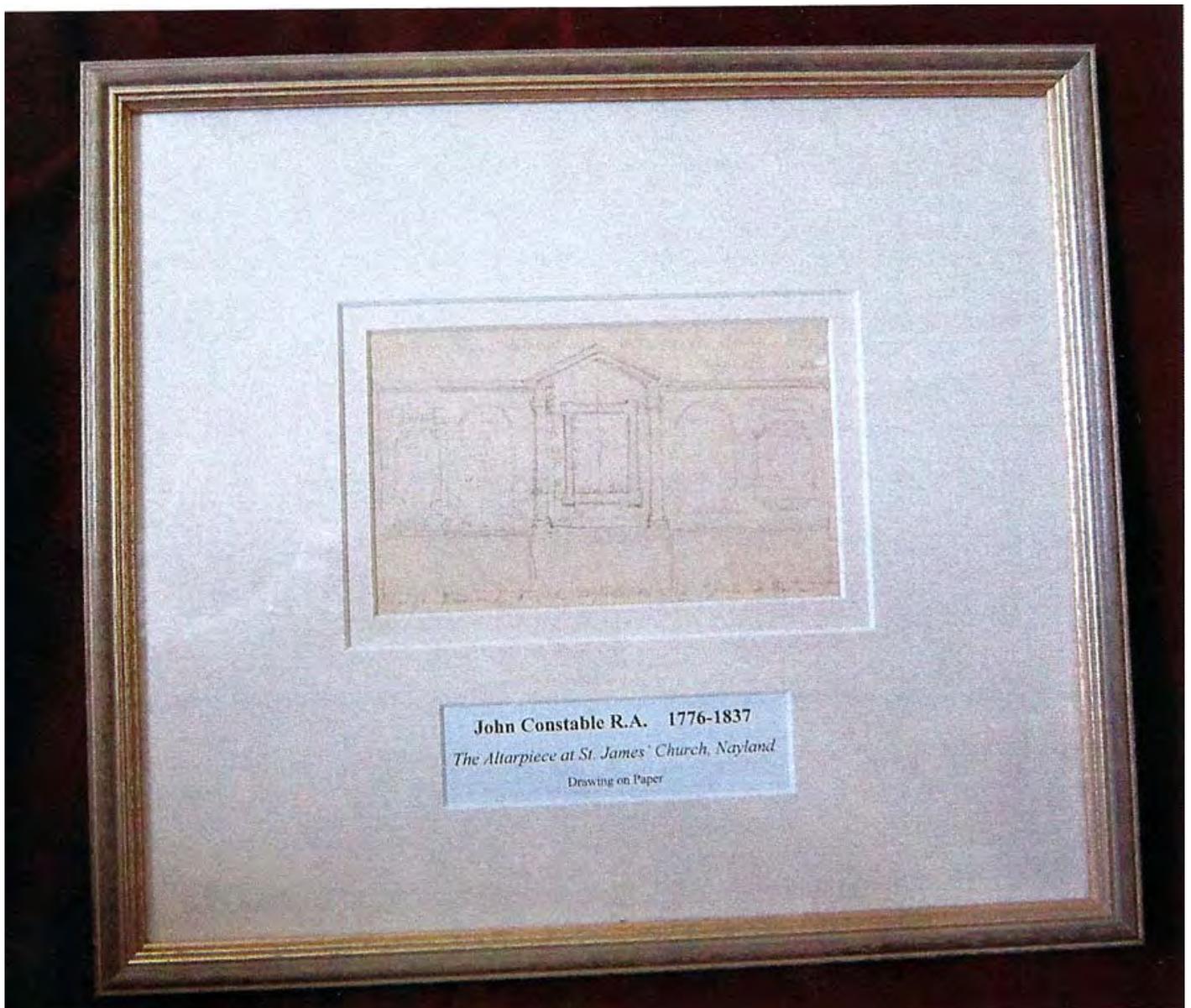
The altarpiece of St. James Church, Nayland

Inscribed 'Pray turn your Mind to some good subject soon'
'Inside surround right 4 feet 1in - by 3 feet 2 in'

The drawing is thought to have been executed during Constable's 1809
summer visit to his aunt, Martha (Patty) Smith, who lived at Longwood
House, Nayland. Original size: 2 3/4 x 6 1/4 in. (9.5 x 16.5 cm.)

The Nayland with Wixington Conservation Society purchased the
original sketch at a Christie's auction in July 2012 and donated this
enlarged copy to St. James Church

An enlarged copy of the sketch was framed,
by Foster Jones, Fen Street, Nayland
and was donated to St James Church



The original sketch was framed by
Goslings of Sudbury
and is kept in a secure place

By Adam Edwards

MARTHA HAVERSHAM is a modern young British artist. Her work includes writing "Ilove" on a paper scroll attached to a piece of driftwood and a sliced photograph of a human wrist hanging from a nail titled: *The Manipulator Being Manipulated*. John Constable she ain't.

Yet she does have one thing in common with Britain's greatest landscape painter. Her most successful painting now adorns tote bags, T-shirts and iPhone covers. It is called *Drone Over The Hay Wain* and depicts the grey, unmanned military aerial vehicle buzzing about in the sky of Constable's most celebrated painting.

It is a measure of the 19th-century artist's brilliance that a painting which has for decades adorned biscuit tins and chocolate boxes is being plagiarised by the achingly trendy modern art world.

It also explains why John Constable's oil on canvas masterpiece *The Lock* fetched £22.4million at a Christie's auction. It is one of six large-scale canvases of the River Stour and its surrounds that included *The Hay Wain* which Constable exhibited at the Royal Academy in London between 1819-1825. It was last bought by Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza in 1990 for £10.8million and auctioned by his widow. It is now one of the most expensive British paintings ever sold and a record amount for the artist.

One reason for this extraordinary price is that *The Lock*, *The Hay Wain* and Constable's other masterpieces have influenced every single

'He did in paint what Wordsworth did in poetry'

generation of fine artists, both British and foreign.

"Constable's six large canvases depicting the area around the River Stour in Suffolk changed the course of art," says critic Will Gompertz. "Pictures such as *The Lock* might seem a bit traditional now but in 1824 the artist's use of colour, expressive brushstroke and contemporary subject was radical. It influenced artists such as Theodore Gericault and Eugene Delacroix who responded by changing the way they approached painting. Their Constable-like innovations led directly to Impressionism and the birth of modern art."

Or as another critic once wrote: "This genius - so unrecognised in his lifetime - was doing in paint what Wordsworth did with poetry."

CONSTABLE'S reputation rests on his landscapes - he has been described as "hamfisted" when it came to portraits - and he painted the pastoral simplicity of a world untouched by the Industrial Revolution with brilliant use of the clouds and sky. "The sky is the source of light in nature and governs everything," he wrote in 1821.

Yet this amazing painter struggled for most of his life to be recognised by the art establishment. He was repeatedly refused membership of the Royal Academy (RA) because he was thought of as "a mere painter of landscapes" and when *The Hay Wain* was first exhibited one critic described it as just "water, air and sky".

It did not sell and it was not until Constable was in his 50s that he found acclaim. The artist, who was born in 1776, was the son of a wealthy East Anglian corn



AUCTION:
This painting by Constable sold at auction for £22.4million; Right, a portrait of the artist as a young man



OUR VERY SPECIAL CONSTABLE

This month *The Lock*, a painting by John Constable, sold for £22.4million, a record for one of Britain's best-loved artists whose work is too often regarded as 'chocolate box'

merchant. As a small boy he sketched the countryside of Essex and Suffolk that was to make up a large proportion of his art in later life. He loved "the sound of water escaping from mill dams, willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts and brickwork" and later said that early experience "made me the painter I am".

His parents sent him to boarding school but it did not suit him and he subsequently moved to Dedham Grammar School where the headmaster described him as "lacking academically but excelling in penmanship". After school Constable briefly joined the family trade but eventually persuaded his father to send him to the Antique Academy School in London, which he entered in 1799. Three years later he returned to East Anglia and struggled to establish himself as an artist, painting portraits of local worthies and studying all aspects of landscape. It was there he met his good friend Dr John Fisher, the son of the Bishop of Salisbury, and told him that "to be a painter would be like giving the gift of life to a newborn babe, to be able to breathe life into them is awe-inspiring".

IT WAS during these years that he fell in love and married Maria Bicknell after much opposition from her father who felt Constable was not earning any real money from his painting and had nothing to offer his daughter.

Once married the painter moved to London and with a private income following his father's death found he didn't need to sell his

'He sold only 20 paintings in England'

work - in fact he rather resented the rare occasions it did sell - but he resented even more the fact that he was not recognised by the RA.

In the 1820s Constable worked on his famous Stour landscapes described by Tate Britain director Stephen Deuchar as "the very essence of his achievements" and known by Constable as his "six-footers".

It was also during this time that he had his run-in with Britain's other great landscape painter JW Turner. While Constable praised Turner in public, in private he described his contemporary's work as "just steam and light" and the two men disliked each other intensely.

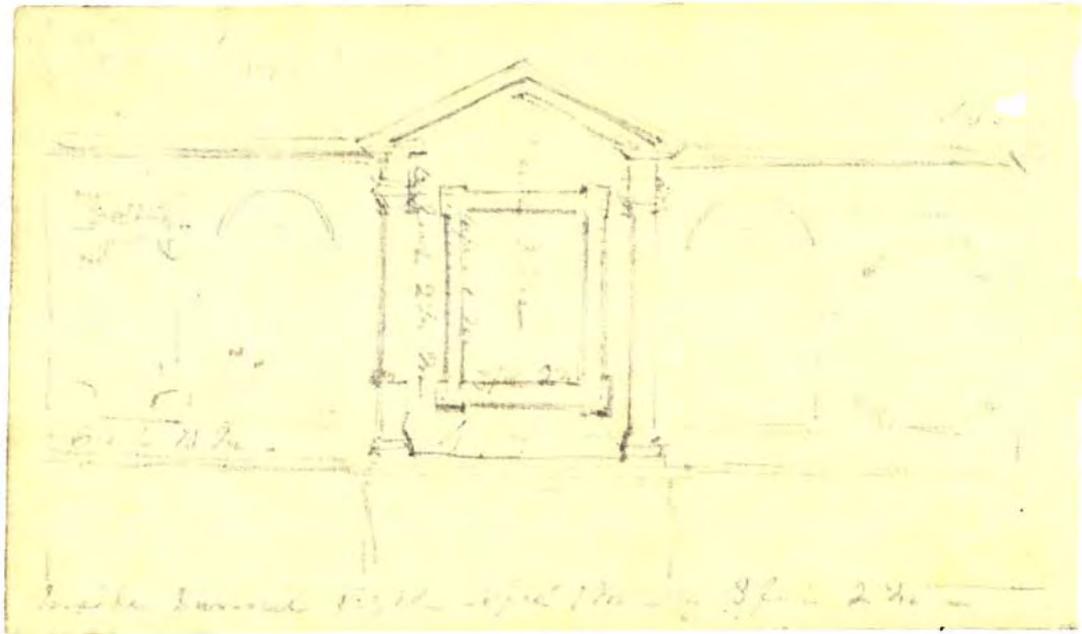
It was not until he was in his 40s that Constable's genius was finally acknowledged - by the French who awarded him the medal Charles X in Paris for his painting of *The Hay Wain*.

However it was a further five years, in 1829, before he was accepted into the RA. In his lifetime Constable sold only 20 paintings in England and was constantly criticised for doing what he did best: landscapes. It was not until after his death in 1837 that he would be recognised as England's greatest ever landscape artist.

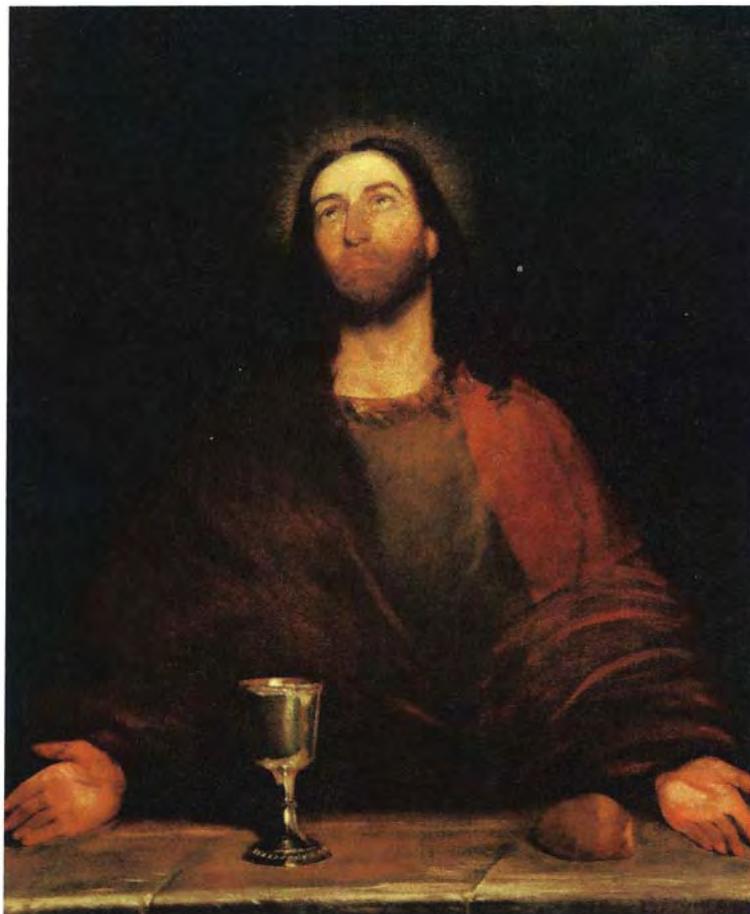
Two centuries later his work is known to every Briton whether they are interested in art or not.

It is not just because *The Lock* is the most expensive British painting ever sold or that *The Hay Wain* still appears on chocolate boxes, jigsaw puzzles and iPad covers, it is also because more than any other painter, including JW Turner, Constable captured the romantic soul of our country.

His was a rare genius and it is doubtful if in 200 years the same will be said of Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, or even dare I say it, Martha Haversham.



John Constable R.A. 1776-1837
The altarpiece at St. James Church, Nayland (1809)



John Constable, R. A. (1776-1837)
CHRIST BLESSING BREAD AND WINE
St. James' Church, Nayland, Suffolk, England