

SUFFOLK'S NATURAL PAINTER

Thomas Churchyard of Woodbridge



EAST ANGLIAN TRADITIONAL ART CENTRE

An Artist Self-taught by Observation

Thomas Churchyard's lifelong passion for art was so strong it must have manifested itself at an early age, perhaps around 1810 when he was at school in Dedham in the shadow of John Constable, who had attended the school twenty years earlier. The earliest works by Churchyard which can be firmly dated are six topographical wash drawings of Norfolk and Suffolk towns, drawn in 1819 and displaying a typical 18th-century formality, possibly copies from engravings or earlier drawings. Whilst training as a lawyer he would have grasped any opportunity to further his keen interest in art, including visiting exhibitions in Norwich and London, where he is reported to have spent time in 1820 or 1821. In Norwich he would have seen the Norwich Society exhibitions, perhaps the especially influential 1821 John Crome Memorial Exhibition. Crome was one of the major influences on Churchyard's early style of painting, visible in his handling of the paint, the palette and the studied treatment of light and shade. John Berney Crome, "Old" Crome's son, visited Woodbridge in the late 1820's and it is probable he knew Churchyard, who exhibited at the Norwich Society exhibition in 1829, and which may have resulted in him being made an honorary member. Churchyard later bought and sold many of John Crome's paintings, anticipating his recognition as a leading landscape artist. At Churchyard's posthumous sale in 1866 his Crome paintings sold for high prices.

Churchyard had another more local influence - Thomas Gainsborough. Before the Woodbridge painter's departure for London in 1832, where he attempted to establish a career as an artist, in common with most 19th century East Anglian artists he had looked to this local hero for inspiration. Printed reproductions of Gainsborough's pictures were available in books and individually.

Exactly when Churchyard started to study John Constable's innovative paintings is difficult to ascertain, in my opinion it was not until the 1830s, but certainly after Constable's death in 1837. There exists a very impressionist sketch dated 1831 by Churchyard, indicating that he had by then attained great freedom when working in watercolour. They shared the same passion for sketching from nature and Constable's very personal brilliant small oil sketches started to appear on the market after the auction held following his death in 1837. These are strikingly similar to the lawyer's more inspired works in oil, but I contend that rather than one artist influencing the other, they independently arrived at similar answers when striving to record nature at a moment in time, often *en plein air*. Nature was a mistress to both artists and her ever-changing appearance and effects demanded a speedy and luminous style of painting. It has long been recognised that Churchyard's works of this type in oil are easily mistaken for those of Constable. It is likely Constable visited Woodbridge twice, in 1815 and 1830, and there is currently no evidence that the two artists met, or that Constable completed more than a pencil drawing in the town. Churchyard became a proficient painter by observing Nature and the Old Masters, and today we can learn about his techniques by studying his works, which help to create an impression of his life and times in Woodbridge almost 200 years ago.

It is not always straightforward recognising Churchyard's painting style. He was often influenced by other artists' work but his underlying dexterity with brush, pen or pencil usually shines through. After the early 1830s he often used oil paint in a similar manner to watercolour, keeping the pigment well thinned with plenty of oil as a medium. The preparation of the panel or board is often minimal, and the support's colour is allowed to show through as part of the picture, and resins in the underlying grain of the panel now show. If a painting is observed to be fully covered with a paint layer, with no mysterious passages or inferred features, then it may have been painted by one of his children. Progress is being made regarding the watercolours to identify the works of the more gifted of his daughters, but they also worked in oil. I look for a degree of 'magic' regarding the application of the paint and an effortless precision of touch, a laboured style is less characteristic. Bernard Barton was not quite accurate when he inferred Tom Churchyard was a 'slapdash' painter, in general he had an exact idea of the effect of every touch of his brush, be it a cloud or curved stroke to represent an animal grazing. During my fifty years looking at Churchyard's works I feel I have gained a good understanding of his language in paint. Rather as one knows when a letter arrives in the post from a hand you recognize, his touch is usually evident and reading his messages in paint can be most satisfying.

Thomas Churchyard 1798-1865



1. Landscape with Ploughman British Institution 1832
Oil on canvas 19x25

Ill.: Thomas Churchyard 'The Oil Paintings' by John Day
An important work dating to Churchyard's period spent in London with fellow Woodbridge artist George Rowe. The style is slightly reserved compared to some of his Suffolk sketches, perhaps due to an attempt to impress the London critics with a higher degree of 'finish' and also working on a larger scale than usual. Tom was destined to return and live his life in Woodbridge, whilst George Rowe later settled in London failing to achieve fame or fortune.



2. Woodbridge and River Deben (see back cover)
Six works on oak and mahogany panels 4¾x6
One dated November 1851 to the reverse



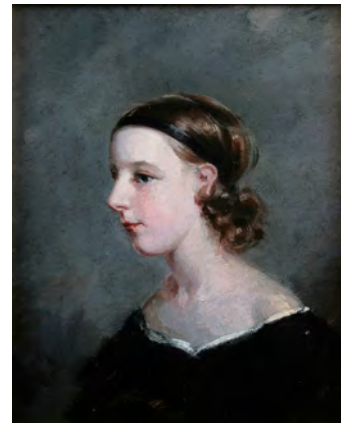
3. Woodbridge and River Deben (see back cover)
Six works, 5 on pine, 1 on mahogany 4¾x6½
Five dated November 1851 to the reverse
These are apparently within the original frames and this may indicate Churchyard received a commission to record the environs of Woodbridge. No dedications to his daughters are evident.
One other known set of 15 panels, framed in a similar manner, is held at Christchurch Mansion Museum, Ipswich.



4. Windmill at Melton Watercolour 6x4
Inscribed 'Melton'

Purchased by the Gray Family as part of an album at the 1927 sale of the Churchyard Family Collection, and retained by them in the album until 1996. Exhibited 1998 Xanthus, Woodbridge.

From the traces of black chalk showing the outlines we can learn the artist sketched the outline and then washed the colours in. It has the appearance of an on-the-spot watercolour.



5. Miss Ellen Churchyard
Painted by Thomas Churchyard Oil on panel 11x8¾
The support is, unusually, a mahogany panel labelled and stamped Roberson and Miller, artists' suppliers.
Illus: 'The Search for Thomas Churchyard' by R Blake.
This is a very sympathetic portrait and proves when painting a friend or family member Thomas could achieve a good likeness. Churchyard had ten children, the eldest son, Thomas, born soon after his wedding. Ellen was born 1826.



6. Silver Birches by Water

7.

Oil on wooden panel. 6x3¾

Exhibited: TC Bicentenary 1998, Woodbridge

Collection: H Day before 1966.

Illustrated East Anglian Painters Vol. I

Ill. Thomas Churchyard 'The Oil Paintings' by John Day
The fluid of treatment of the trees is the key to the success of this little panel, the sky was still wet when the upper trees were added resulting in the translucent effect, then a change of colour to the typical emerald green halfway down on the right. A reference work showing his treatment of summer foliage painted from the background forwards. Warm red ground showing through centre, trunks and water highlights last to go on. The painting must date to the 1850's or later to have this confidence, see front cover of the Woodbridge Bicentenary catalogue for a larger version of this technique.

7. Lane Scene with Sunlight

Oil on panel 5 x 4 ¼ Ex collection H. Day.

Ill. Thomas Churchyard 'The Oil Paintings' by John Day
Churchyard used painting almost as a language, he paints and sketches using abbreviations, and the viewer who knows the language can understand them. This work carries the minimum information to convey the subject matter. Simultaneously he tells us the weather, the season and the time of day and strength of light. There are few artists who are his equal for this technique of 'Painting the Day'. This was one of Harold Day's favourite Churchyard paintings.



9. Woodland Bank with Trees

Watercolour 6x4

Provenance: The Gray Album, 1927 Churchyard sale

This work shows the strong influence of John Crome of the Norwich School. Churchyard exhibited in Norwich in 1829. To those who have learnt to understand Churchyard's paintings this is one of his most accomplished works.



10. Farm Building with Farmhouse

Watercolour 8x12

Cover; 'Thomas Churchyard Centenary Catalogue' 1998

This well-preserved important watercolour exemplifies the confidence Churchyard displayed when approaching a challenging subject. With the differing planes and focal areas he was not tempted to simplify the composition as he did when painting an oil of the same subject. (illustrated in 'The Search for Thomas Churchyard' p. 48).

The influence of the Norwich painter John Crome is evident in the observation of light and the suggestion of shapes and details rather than fully working them up to a highly finished standard.



8. Windmill across a Field

Watercolour 8½x12

Larger than most works. Paper marked Turkey Mills 1826

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11. Broom Heath. (c.1860) Watercolour. 7½x13¼

Provenance: Dobrell Collection, Ipswich

This work is the culmination of Churchyard's forty years or more experience of painting in watercolour. The washes and general treatment, using the wet paper technique, demand a confidence not frequently matched in the 19th century. Impressionistically painted with sufficient detail to convey information about the subject and location. The sky was added at speed, one may imagine the clouds are frozen in time. Colour strength virtually as originally painted, which is most unusual for a large watercolour which has previously been framed. Few works have survived as intact as this dexterously painted harvest scene.



12. Woodbridge from Sutton Oil on board 4¾x 7

Inscribed Emma?...Churchyard. Ex. John Badley, Sussex. Day Collection

The Impressionist movement in France was under way when this inspired oil was painted.

Constable is known to have influenced the Continental artists and contributed to the birth of Impressionism when his works were exhibited in Paris in the 1820's. Churchyard owned and studied his works, and as a result his paintings often have an Impressionist feel. The small economically painted panels are some of his most delicate, with the use of linseed oil to keep the paint fluid. This example perhaps sums up Churchyard's love of Woodbridge showing all the local landmarks, painted in the 1850's. Over the years many Churchyards have been attributed to Constable as their initials can be very similar.



13. Woodbridge Quays (Jesups and Common) (c.1850's)

Oil on board. 6½x9

Collection: Laura Churchyard (inscribed);

Ill: 'The Oil Paintings' by John Day Coll; Harold Day, 1960's

A well-preserved oil which demonstrates Churchyard's liquid style, achieved by mixing oil with the paint, giving an almost watercolour-like effect. There is just enough pigment used throughout to give a solid effect. Note how he has progressed and become more of an impressionist style painter when compared to No.35. The shafts of the wagon are scratched in the paint. The picture must have been kept in the family as it was copied by one of the daughters after Churchyard's death.



14. Beach Scene, probably at Aldeburgh

Watercolour 2½x4¾

Provenance: The Grey Album, purchased at the 1927 sale; 1998 Xanthus Exhibition.

Churchyard was often inspired to paint small studies such as this example, which excel in artistic merit. The foam effect is achieved by 'scratching out'. Size is not relevant, this small work is full of Churchyard's natural talent.

The albums, containing up to sixty works each, were probably compiled by the daughters towards the end of Churchyard's life and have enabled a body of work to survive in good condition. From the 1960's many have been framed and subject to fading of the colours, but today modern glass has a UV filter to preserve them.

Harriet Churchyard.

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15. Landscape, Storm Approaching Oil on panel 18x25

Provenance: Simon Carter; Harold Day before 1965.

Illustrated: Vol. 1 East Anglian Painters by H. Day

Ill: Thomas Churchyard 'The Oil Paintings' by John Day

Exhibited Bicentenary Exhibition, 1998, Woodbridge.

Eastbourne Fine Art, 1998

The scale of this work makes it unusual within Churchyard's output. The style is similar to the smaller oil sketches but the whole scene is conveyed with an airiness not found in the little pictures.

This Exhibition provides a good opportunity to observe and analyse the artist's working methods.



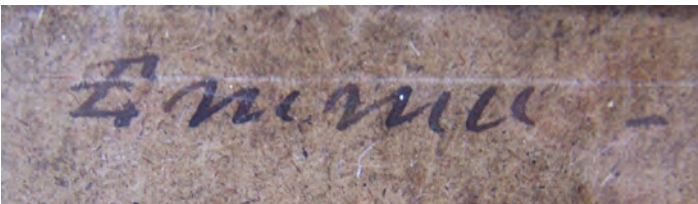
16. Woodbridge, Windmills and St. John's (Post 1846)

Watercolour. 1½x2

Exhibited: Woodbridge Bicentenary Exhibition 1998 no 15.

Provenance: Denis Thomas. Day Family.

This miniature work may have been painted for one of the children, possibly to fit a small autograph album or even for a dolls house. Churchyard has included two Woodbridge mills and St John's with the spire, dating the work to post 1846.



17. The Deben at Melton Quay c.1830's (detail)

Watercolour 2½x4¾

Collection: Denis Thomas. From an Album in London in the 1960's. 1998 Bicentenary no 17.

This small, very controlled, watercolour displays the great delicacy of touch of which Churchyard was capable. It was once implied in a description of Churchyard's work (by B. Barton) that he was "slapdash" but in my opinion most of the time this was not true. I believe he was aware of the effect almost every brush stroke would achieve. This work is within an ornate decorated border and may have been mounted by one of the children.



18. Girl and Children on a beach Watercolour 5x4

Dated to reverse: August 1855, and 'Felixstowe'

Illustrated in colour in Denis Thomas' book.

Prov; Thomas Collection prior to 1965; Day Collection

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19. Willy Lotts House, Flatford Pen ink and wash
Given by H Day to John Day c. 1968.
See note to No. 18.



22. Figure in a Landscape Pen, ink and wash
Collection; Harold Day. Illustrated 'Art Jottings'



20. Harvesting and Windmill, probably Woodbridge

Pen and Ink. 3½x 4½

Exhibited: Woodbridge 1998 Bicentenary No 50.

Collection: Day Family

Prized by John Day from a young age since being given both this work and the other small ink sketch of Willy Lott's House as a present by his father Harold Day. Churchyard was very dexterous with ink, resulting no doubt from years of legal writings and court sketches. Only John Constable and very few others can match Churchyard at his best with a pen. The Kingston Farm ink drawing in the 'Creating Constable' Exhibition at Ipswich Museum is a powerful confirmation of this statement.



21. Norwich, After Crome.

Watercolour 5½x7½

Included here as an example of Churchyard copying a picture he had access to by a famous artist. Probably he owned this picture, there was a similar work in one of his inventories, may be a lost Crome today.



23. Cottage by a Pond pencil 4x4 signed T.C.
Illustrated; Denis Thomas 'Thomas Churchyard of Woodbridge', published in 1966 and the first to detail the life and work of the artist, followed in 1967 by Harold Day's 'East Anglian Painters' Volume I. Churchyard signed few of his oil paintings on the front, preferring to inscribe the reverse, but a number of the pencil and ink sketches

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24. Harvesting Scene with the River Deben (c.1840's)

Oil on Panel 5½x8 Panel edged with beading.

By the 1840's the influence of Constable on Churchyard's work is stronger. The brushwork is becoming more fluent and impressionistic. The distant harvesters especially reflect Constable's technique, also to be seen in the highlights in the sky, and the light through the trees



26. Harvesting by the Deben (c.1850's)

Watercolour 3¾x4¾ Provenance: David Messum.

This is a late work by the artist and was removed about 20 years ago from one of the albums compiled for the artists' children, consequently the colours have been preserved very close to when they were painted. The harvest subject appears regularly within Churchyard's oeuvre. The shadows seen here indicate an early morning in late summer, possibly from the hill overlooking the Deben towards Methersgate.



25. Kingston Farm House, Woodbridge

Oil on board 7x5 ½ Inscribed with title.

Illus: Thomas Churchyard 'The Oil Paintings' by John Day
Note the Dutch-style gable end. The panel was previously used, apparently for a landscape, as the old underpainting is just visible. Very good paint textures. Churchyard frequently painted the area around Kingston Farmhouse and Jetty Lane but this is unusual showing the rear of the house.



27. Horse by a haystack

Watercolour

From a Churchyard Family Album



28. Cottage in Landscape

Pencil

Coll; H A E Day, from the Potter Album

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29. Woodbridge Quay (Jesups) (c.1830's)

Oil on card laid on panel (edged) 8½x11½
Labeled: Woodbridge Quay by Churchyard £5.0.0.
Provenance: Dobree Collection, Ipswich

This is a typical early-period work painted on card laid on panel, edged with timber strips. The style is more restrained than the later impressionists works. The figure in the foreground is similar to the ploughman in the 1832 Society of British Artists exhibit. The observation of cloud effects and assortment of textures in the foreground show Churchyard experimenting with his technique. The ship's mast behind the buildings on the quay is slightly curved due to the prevailing wind catching the sail, which is also blowing the stormy clouds from right to left. The cart awaits this loaded ship arriving on the tide. One of Churchyard's children copied this subject in watercolour.



30. Doe's Alley Melton

Watercolour 6x8

Prov; Eastbourne Fine Art

This is a typical watercolour of a local subject between Melton and Woodbridge, the paths in the area were well trodden by Churchyard.

The artist usually had the ability to create a satisfying composition, here the tree frames the mid-distance.



31. Watermill with Millrace

Oil on compressed board, inscribed Emma 11x15
Provenance: Sotheby's 1995; Day Collection

This is one of at least three views of this mill, and the likelihood is that it was on the Deben within walking distance of Melton. Considered one of his economically painted landscapes, he uses a thin paint layer displaying his natural gift of composing a picture which is informative but also leaves a degree of mystery, hence the rooftops to the left and the quaint little figure at the window. The inscription revealed when the backing was removed indicates it was one of the works gifted to his daughter Emma. It is believed this was not a bequest but was part of a distribution of pictures when his financial position was precarious, which led to his threatened bankruptcy. (The Poster for the Sale of his Life Insurance Policy, which he sold in 1855 confirms this). Each daughter then inscribed their names on the reverse of their allocation, often also with a 'T.C.' in an attempt to avoid future confusion by confirming authorship.



32. Byng Bridge, Pettistree

Watercolour 6x8

Churchyard's Uncle Isaac lived at Byng Hall, and frequented Wickham Market. Thomas also recorded the Market Square area in this village. Thomas must have visited his Uncle many times and upon his death acted professionally.

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33. Glimpse of the Deben c. 1850 Oil on Panel 7x 5

This is Churchyard at his most confident when he is able to achieve a fluid effect with no further reworking after he has applied the paint. His fluency in watercolour is often carried over to his oil paintings. Most oil painters would commit to heavier layers of paint but Churchyard uses the ground colour in a similar fashion to a watercolourist using tinted paper. A charming sketch of figures on the reverse.



34. Gateway with figures by a River Oil on card

Inscribed with Laura (del) and Harriet also TC

This is perhaps an ice house near the Deben which would be kept cool by the damp soil. Many products were stored here



35. Landscape towards Boulge Watercolour 8x12

There are a number of views of this location, and the most likely area is heading to Boulge, a route Churchyard would have known well from his visits to FitzGerald. A confident work, most probably from the 1840's, avoiding abstract impressionism but managing to convey a feeling of fluency with a very light touch. This example has been mounted in an album, relatively rare for a work of this size, resulting in the rich original colour being retained.



36. Lane with Cottage Oil on Panel 9½x7

Insc: Kate and TC. Provenance; Spink, St.James's London; Day Collection. The untreated panel on which this sketch is painted can be clearly seen under the paint, as there is no primer coat, and the artist is using it as a ground colour. Fortunately with this example the grain of the panel is not obvious as can the case when discoloured resin is

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37. Major Moor's Farm Oil on canvas 10x8
 Inscribed: Anna & Laura also 'Great Bealings'
 Watercolour version at Christchurch Museum, Ipswich.
 The Moors were a well respected farming family based for generations in Great Bealings and it is likely Churchyard knew them through both the Woodbridge artistic circle and also a shared liking for game shooting. Several views of the farm are recorded. Unusually for a smaller work this is painted on canvas. Often two girls' names are inscribed, indicating works passing down to a surviving sibling.



38A Cattle in a Paddock (verso of 38)
 A version of this subject is held at Anglesea Abbey (N.T.)
 Possibly a view from the family house at Melton with a holding paddock for livestock.



39. Lane with horse and cart Pencil
 Prov; Harold Day; Potter Album



38. Boat by the Deben Oil on board, double sided, 5x6½
 Prov; 1927 sale, Woodbridge; Edgar Dowsing; D Thomas Illustrated; both sides, 'Thomas Churchyard of Woodbridge' by Denis Thomas 1966.
 Recently cleaned and now showing great light and subtlety.



40. Beach Scene with boats
 Oil on card mounted on panel, with edging strips 6x9½
 Inscribed 'Harriett Churchyard' and 'T.C.' on reverse.
 Churchyard was one of the few artists of the 19th century, together with Constable and John Moore, to regularly paint on paper or thin card often mounted on panels. The name on

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41. Overlooking the Deben with harvesters

Oil on panel 13x22

Prov; Simon Carter Gallery, Woodbridge

Ingram-Smith family (Builders of Woodbridge)

Larger works by Churchyard are very rare (over 20" may be considered large) and are especially satisfying when the style is fluent, similar to his smaller pictures. Here we find a painterly sky and the brush turned so the handle can be used to scratch in the detail of the stooks.

The view is from Kyson looking down river.



42. Overlooking the Deben, Sunset effect

Oil on edged panel 5½x8

Labeled 'Ex Harriet Churchyard'

Provenance; Eastbourne Fine Art

Illustrated; The Search for Thomas Churchyard, R. Blake

Taken from a similar viewpoint to no. 46, the position of the sun indicates an autumn day. This may be an on-the-spot oil sketch or worked up from drawings annotated with colour notes. Turner would have been known to Churchyard and he owned copies of Turner's 'Liber Studiorum' and 'River Scenery of France'.

Churchyard's library indicates he admired a range of English and Continental artists, no doubt his reference books were useful in his capacity as an amateur dealer and collector. He was regarded as a good judge of paintings of all ages and handled many fine works over many years.



43. Ready for the Sickle, Kyson Watercolour 7¾x11¼

This was sold in London in the 1950's by the reputable and elite company Colnaghi, of Bond Street. Churchyard was appreciated in London, but it is intriguing to consider that he warranted showing in such a prestigious Gallery.



44. The Artist's House

Oil on board 7x5 ¼

Inscribed Emma and 'Harriett'.

The old label's inscription that this is a view of one of the Churchyard family homes is reinforced by the house being the same property as depicted in a picture in Sally Kibble's book 'The Artist's Daughter', page 96. The windows, door and tree on the far left are similar to that work by Emma Churchyard, which also includes two girls, likely to be her sisters. This walled rear garden would be a suitable location for a young lady to sit and paint.

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45. Low Tide on the Deben from the Tide Mill

Oil on canvas laid on panel 4½x5½

Inscribed: Emma, and also Kate. Provenance; Messums

This accomplished sketch has Churchyard's typical pink glazes in the sky and foreground. Considered one of his most intuitive paintings, flowing from the brush.



46. Boat on the Deben, low Tide

Pencil

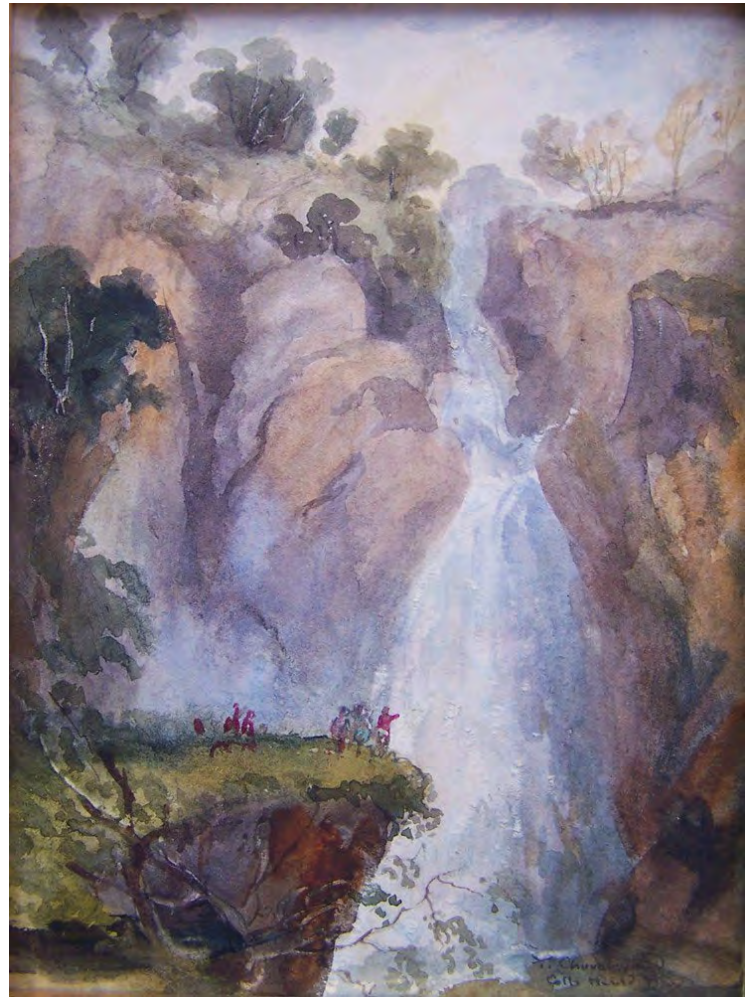
Provenance; Harold Day; Potter Album



47. Coastal Scene with Pier

Watercolour

A powerful drawing with scratching-out to allow the paper to show through. Research ongoing but this work compares closely to an oil in the Woodbridge Museum Collection.



48. Waterfall Scene with figures.

Watercolour

Provenance; Harold Day

A fine work in good condition. There are several recorded pictures by Churchyard of subjects which may be imaginary, but are most likely taken from works he had owned or seen. He visited Cheltenham and may have gone into Wales.



49. Lane with Windmill Pencil

His profession as a lawyer gave Churchyard a dexterity with both the pen and the pencil, acquired from years of quick note-taking. Here we have a shorthand record of a scene typical of a subject he may later work up into an oil or

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50. Study of a Tree Pen and Ink
As described above, an ink version of a thumbnail sketch.



51. Village Scene with Horsemen. Watercolour
This appears to have a military content with a soldier bottom right. Churchyard's horse generally has a small head and the whole has a flow compared to the children's works.



52. Study of a Saddled Horse Watercolour
Prov; Messum, from the 1998 Exhibition Album
An irresistible urge to sketch, to use any spare moment!



53. Study of a Horse at the Blacksmith's Pencil
Prov; Messum, from the 1998 Exhibition Album



54. Boulge Hall, birthplace of E. FitzGerald Watercolour
It is interesting to speculate for whom this was painted, perhaps it was requested by FitzGerald for one of his later homes. A complex restoration of this interesting work was undertaken which has now been saved after a life of neglect.

Churchyard Family Works



55. Ellen Churchyard Watercolour 8x6

Thomas Churchyard and Friends at Dinner
From album of Ellen's work dated 1852.

Probably depicting the Woodbridge Wits with the following characters: Bernard Barton on the left, then young Charley Churchyard, next is Edward Fitzgerald with Thomas Churchyard on the right. Note that Bernard Barton and the boy have no glasses, one being too young and the other a Quaker. The port and two glasses are making an entrance. The quote states that Papa will be getting into trouble for making the curtains smell with his cigar. The subject may have been taken from 'Punch' magazine (a favourite with the family) adapted by Ellen.



57. Thomas Churchyard (and family) 3¼ x 4¼

Woodbridge Church and Abbey

The Abbey grounds were harvested for hay, proved by the presence of two hay carts. The trees in the centre are shown on the 1827 map but this watercolour dates to the 1850's. The authorship is described as Thomas Churchyard and family due to the fact it has many strong points but also a certain weakness in the drawing. The works by his children are being researched and in the future we will be able to attribute works such as this example more firmly.



58. Charles Churchyard

Watercolour 3½x4½

Low tide on banks of the Deben.



56. CHARLES CHURCHYARD Watercolour 6 x 8

signed and dated 1891 Cherry Tree Inn, Ipswich Road, Woodbridge. After Thomas' death Charles continued to paint local scenes, often subjects previously recorded by his father, which he reputedly painted for 'beer money'.



59. Kate Churchyard watercolour 2¼x2½

Girls on a bench by the Deben. Possibly depicting two of the artist's sisters watching a boat race.

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60. Charles Churchyard Watercolour
The Avenue, toward the Railway Crossing
signed and dated

After Thomas Churchyard's death his family was not well off, despite an Appeal Fund which was established and raised money from various friends and associates. Charlie was an amateur who is said to have funded his drinking habit by producing acceptable but uninspired pictures of local scenes. This example is one of his more important works, which displays a competent technique but not in any way comparable with his father's natural talent.



61. Charles Churchyard Watercolour
Prov; Harold Day. Sketch of horses to reverse



Harriet Churchyard The Meeting, Pen and Ink. 5¼x4¾



Thomas Churchyard in his study (C&IMS)

Other works will be on view by Artists with Woodbridge associations:
George Rowe; Edward FitzGerald; John Moore
Rev Perry Nursey; James Pulham; Fiske and other members of the Suffolk School.

Authenticity, Inscriptions and Signatures

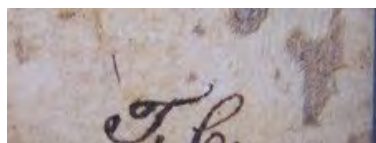


On April 11th 1927, an auction was held in Woodbridge, Suffolk, of between four and five thousand paintings and drawings, all entered for sale by Thomas Churchyard's surviving son Charles. The daughters, who had preserved their father's paintings and upheld his reputation since his death, had all passed away and Charlie wanted ready cash. The auctioneer declared not all the pictures in the sale were by Thomas Churchyard, and works by the family were mixed in with many lots. The result was a state of confusion, which was destined to last until the present day. Added to this is the fact that Thomas was not always consistent regarding quality, and it is recorded many pictures were painted against the clock, due to his work and family commitments.

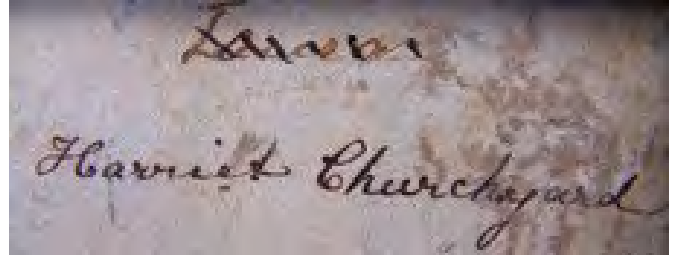
For today's collector or researcher there are several sources available when attempting to unravel the mysteries relating to Churchyard provenance. Books have been published since the 1960s, but perhaps 'Painting the Day' by Wallace Morfey, 1986, is the most comprehensive, and the best starting point. Another useful source are the dealer and auction catalogues produced over the years. General dealers and auctioneers often still use 'Churchyard' as a stand-by name for unsigned generic landscapes and river scenes, which has been the case for many years in London and the provinces. Labels have been affixed to mislead the unwary. Provenance is often based on flimsy evidence as we have few detailed lists giving sizes of the works in the various auctions since Churchyard's death. Many of the albums (or guard books as Wallace Morfey refers to them), containing the watercolours given by Churchyard to his daughters, have been dismantled, but only the Messum volumes have been accurately recorded. Here again the 'not all works by Thomas' warning was also given. We have available the fully illustrated catalogue from this 1998 Exhibition as a useful reference and usually stock the other books on Thomas Churchyard.

Considering the above background, it may appear to be difficult to find, and perhaps buy, a good example of an oil or watercolour definitely by Thomas Churchyard. Fortunately Thomas Churchyard effectively branded all his best works with his own personal mark, which is the effortless application of passages of paint, which leave one in awe of how he achieved that particular effect. This body of accepted superior works may be used as a reference source for others displaying similar mannerisms and techniques. 'Painting the Day' was a very apt book title as often one can garner information such as the time of day, the season and the weather, even if, for example, it had recently rained. Having established that the painting is of sufficient quality for it to be the work of Thomas Churchyard, then is the time to look for supporting evidence in the form of initials, inscriptions or labels giving provenance, and then to try to establish if any of these are in his own hand.

In the art world it is not just Churchyard who suffers from his best works being taken from his known oeuvre and attributed that of to another more famous name. But he is doubly unfortunate that so many inferior works have been attributed to him. The confusing provenances as detailed above are the cause of many of the daughter's works bearing his name, in addition to the many dubious dealer and auctioneer attributions. It should be noted that the daughters, and son Charlie, spent decades painting and sketching in watercolour and painting in oils around Woodbridge. We have examples of them making straight copies of Thomas' pictures and sitting alongside him whilst on sketching expeditions. After 1865 they were generally short of money and sold not only Thomas' works locally but also produced their own versions for sale. The Exhibition lists at the Ipswich Fine Art Club from 1875 show the girls painting many pictures of Woodbridge subjects which 100 years later may well have been judged as being by their father. Proven examples of the misattributed cases include views of local landmarks such as Melton New Church, the building of which post-date Thomas' death. The skills the girls developed, especially in watercolour, will become apparent in the next phase of research into the eccentric, but gifted, Churchyard family of painters from Woodbridge.



There are very few paintings signed to the front, but pencil drawings and ink sketches may be found embellished with a T C, which is his standard signature, as also inscribed in many cases in ink on the reverse of his oil paintings. These T. C. initials vary in form but are generally thought to have been applied when the Thomas Churchyard paintings were shared out within the family to indicate which are by the father. It is suggested the distribution took place shortly before Churchyard's death, but equally as a lawyer he may also have been keen to remove them from his assets list before he was declared insolvent in 1855. Inscriptions giving daughters' names are sometimes in a different hand to the 'T. C.' initials, giving rise to the possibility that he gave groups of pictures to the girls, who then carefully added their names to avoid future confusion. When one daughter died a re-allocation took place, leading to a further daughter's name being added. Stored in trunks, the daughters were custodians of this vast archive of Thomas' pictures for over 60 years, but even that was not sufficient time to have passed for them to be appreciated (as their father had predicted) for it was not until 100 years after his death that a revival of interest took place.



The exception to this long-term lack of appreciation was when one of the painterly oil sketches from the 1927 sale appeared in London. In Woodbridge it was known the 'T.C.' inscription stood for Thomas Churchyard, but when appearing on the London art market with a little subterfuge it could pass as 'J.C.' suggesting John Constable's work. Some signatures and inscriptions were tampered with, but even the standard 'T.C.' initials can be read as 'J.C.' by the optimistic owner. Recognition of these 'mistaken identity' pictures has been acknowledged over the past sixty years, as virtually every reference book referring to Constable identification has warned the reader to be wary of the more brilliant Thomas Churchyard oil sketches, and to check the inscriptions. Whilst many misattributions have been corrected it is apparently still happening in recent years, the resulting accolades illustrating the remarkably high standard of painting Churchyard could achieve. John Day 2022

Thomas Churchyard Research Group.

If you have an interest in Thomas Churchyard or his Family and other Woodbridge and Suffolk Artists, you are invited to join fellow enthusiasts in an informal research project we are setting up. Please advise your email or postal address and we will add you to our circulation list to keep you informed of progress, there is no obligation to join in. john@eatac.co.uk

The East Anglian Traditional Art Centre specialises in the works of Thomas Churchyard. We have unique experience regarding the cleaning and restoration his works, and have carried out treatments to many included in this Exhibition. Conservation advice is available. eatac.co.uk.

References; we have a list of publications relating to Churchyard's life and usually have the titles available

Where to find Thomas Churchyard paintings; Tate Britain, British Museum, Ipswich and Colchester Museum Services, Norwich Castle Museum, National Trust Anglesey Abbey, Fitzwilliam Museum, and many other Museums. Check availability

Sizes are given in inches, height before width. Most watercolours have UV reducing glass and acid free mounts. The oil paintings are often glazed with special ultra-clear non reflective museum glass with Perspex to the rear of the frame which assists with long-term preservation by creating a micro-climate and reducing temperature variations.

All images and text not to be reproduced without written permission. We acknowledge previous authors, researchers, photographers and exhibition planners who have provided the material to help further the cause of Art History Research.

This online catalogue is released prior to the printed version being available in the week of the Exhibition, which is available for sale.

The items available for sale will be indicated at the Exhibition, and prices shown. Items 1 to 20 and some further works are courtesy of several Collectors to whom we are very grateful for permission to display them for the duration of the Exhibition.

SUFFOLK'S NATURAL PAINTER



Thomas Churchyard of Woodbridge 1798-1865



EAST ANGLIAN TRADITIONAL ART CENTRE

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