Survival in the British Art World

The Art and Career of John Sell Cotman 1800-1840

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I certify that the work contained in the thesis submitted by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my original work except where due reference is made to other authors, and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university.

Abstract

This thesis examines the art and career of John Sell Cotman (1782-1842), one of the most inventive yet beleaguered artists to have worked in early nineteenth-century Britain. As a teenager, Cotman entered a fiercely competitive art world in which survival required artists to choose wisely their unique selling point. Throughout the subsequent four decades, Cotman alternately fulfilled, transcended and struggled with the implications of this requirement, producing an astonishing body of work as he moved between cities, regions and nations in search of distinctive subject matter, opportunities and diverse forms of self-presentation. His art and career therefore illuminate a range of issues that have been the focus of recent debates in early nineteenth-century British art regarding the place of sociocultural identities and historical experiences, forms of professional and amateur practice, the development and status of new artistic techniques, and the making and breaking of artists' reputations.

Here I offer the first full and critically-engaged study of Cotman since two bicentenary exhibition catalogues of 1982, both of which took their cue from a 1930s biography. Since these publications, our understanding of British art has been transformed, leaving Cotman behind in predominantly biographically-informed modes of interpretation. Many works and letters also remain unpublished, while his artworks have only occasionally been dealt with as works of *art*.

This thesis seeks to redress these imbalances by situating Cotman more broadly within the locations and environments in which he worked and by considering the relationship between those places and spaces as sites of artistic and personal experience. Those experiences, I argue, significantly conditioned the character of Cotman's artwork in which exceptional marks or motifs bear witness to the changing fortunes of his career. An overarching aim of the thesis, therefore, is to offer a model for rethinking the relationship between an artist's life and art, a relationship which has become a methodological sore point for the humanities.

Please note that all quotations given throughout the text are verbatim.

For Jim and Mary Francis

Table of Contents

Volume 1

List of Images		1
Acknowledgements		15
Introduction	The Work of Art	17
Chapter 1	Origins, Emergence and the Positioning of Artistic Identity: Cotman in Norwich and London 1782-1806	39
Chapter 2	Drawing, Painting and the Question of Patronage: Cotman in Yorkshire 1803-1806	67
Chapter 3	Managing a Regional Art World: Cotman in Norwich 1806-1812	112
Chapter 4	Etching, Historical Knowledge and the Effects of Collaboration: Cotman in Great Yarmouth and Normandy 1812-1822	152
Chapter 5	Maturity, Materiality and Reputation: Cotman in Norwich and London 1823-1842	197
Conclusion	Survival in the British Art World	228
Bibliography		231
Appendices		245

Volume 2

List of Images

Images

List of Images

Introduction

Figure 1. John Sell Cotman, *Horse Loaded with Artists' Paraphernalia*, c.1834, pencil on paper, 23.9 x 30.4 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Figure 2. *Statue of King Charles I, Charing Cross*, 1832, pencil, watercolour, bodycolour and brown ink, 43.3 x 31.4, Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Norwich

Chapter 1

Figure 3. *The Kitchen in the Artist's Father's House*, 1801, graphite and watercolour on wove paper, 25.7 x 20.3 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 4. Annotated Map of Norwich, T. Smith after John Ninham, *Plan of the City of Norwich*, engraving, published by T. Peck, Norwich, 10 February 1802, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 5. Annotated Map of Norwich Parishes, from Index to Norwich Marriages 1813-17, compiled by John F. Fone. Norfolk & Norwich Genealogical Society, vol. 14 (1982), Norfolk Records Office, Norwich

Figure 6. *House at St Stephen's Road, Norwich*, c.1794, pen and grey ink with grey, blue and red wash on paper, 13.2 x 17.5 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 7. Augustus Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson, *Tradecard of Rudolph Ackermann's Repository of Arts at 101 Strand, London* later published in *Repository of the Arts*, vol. 1, part 1, published London, 1809, hand-coloured etching with aquatint, 13.9 x 24.6 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 8. Thomas Rowlandson, 'Entrance of Tottenham Court Road Turnpike, with a view of St James's Chapel', plate three of *Views of London*, published by Rudolph Ackermann, London, 1798, hand-coloured 27 x 22cm, Museum of London, London

Figure 9. Detail of Rowlandson, 'Entrance of Tottenham Court Road Turnpike, with a view of St James's Chapel'

Figure 10. John Henderson, *Dover Harbour*, c.1790-5, pencil on paper, 27.4 x 43.1 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 11. J. M. W. Turner and Thomas Girtin, *Dover Harbour: Small Boats by the Quay*, 1795-6, pencil and watercolour on paper, 34 x 42.8 cm, Tate, London

Figure 12. *Dover Harbour*, 1799, pencil on paper, 14.9 x 14.8 cm, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 13. *Dover Harbour*, 1799, pencil on paper, 12.8 x 13.3 cm, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 14. *Dover Harbour*, 1799, pencil on paper, 11.2 x 18.9 cm, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 15. *Dover Harbour*, 1799, pencil on paper, 14.9 x 16.2 cm, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 16. *Dover Harbour*, 1799, pencil on paper, 11.8 x 18.5cm, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 17. *The Well House, Ashtead Park, Surrey*, pencil on paper, 15.9 x 19.8 cm, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 18. *The Well House, Ashtead Park, Surrey*, pencil paper, 15.9 x 19.2 cm, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 19. Thomas Monro, *The Well House, Ashtead Park, Surrey*, c.1795, black ink, wash and white bodycolour on paper, 11.3 x 17.8 cm, Fogg Museum, Harvard

Figure 20. Thomas Girtin, *The Well House, Ashtead Park, Surrey*, c.1795, pencil and watercolour on paper, 49.9 x 86.5 cm, whereabouts unknown

Figure 21. *A Cottage in Guildford Churchyard, Surrey*, inscribed in pencil on verso 'Cotman 14 March 1800', pencil and watercolour on paper, 35.6 x 53.2 cm, Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 22. *A Water Mill near Dorking, Surrey*, Exh. Society of Artists 1800, watercolour over pencil on paper, 48.6 x 36 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Figure 23. *High on a Rock*, 1802, pencil and wash on paper, 22.2 x 32.4 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 24. Thomas Girtin, *An Ancient Castle*, 1799, pencil and wash on paper, 20.4 x 30.3 cm, Tate, London

Figure 25. Joseph Powell, *Landscape with Castle*, 1803/4, pencil and sepia wash on paper, 30.6 x 44.3 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 26. Joshua Cristall, *Landscape with Castle*, 1803/4, pencil and sepia wash on paper, 30 x 44 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 27. Paul Sandby Munn, *Landscape with Castle*, 1803/4, pencil and wash on paper, 30 x 42.1 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 28. *Landscape with Castle*, 1803/4, pencil and sepia wash on paper, 36.2 x 49.4 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 29. *Eve*, 1803/4, pencil and sepia wash on paper, 31 x 44.4 cm Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 30. Detail of *Eve*

Figure 31. John Varley, *Pale Melancholy*, 1803/4, pencil and wash on paper, 48.1 x 37 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 32. Detail of Varley, *Pale Melancholy*

Figure 33. Joshua Cristall, *Dante and Virgil on the Bridge*, 1803-4, pencil and wash on paper, 34 x 22 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 34. *Mountainous Landscape with a Blasted Tree*, c.1803, pencil and wash on paper, 29.6 x 44.7 cm, Tate, London

Figure 35. *Wooded Scene*, 1803-4, pencil and wash on paper, 33 x 48.8 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 36. *Ode to Spring*, 1803-4, pencil and wash on paper, 34 x 49.2 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 37. *Behold Yon Oak*, 1804, pencil and wash on paper, 31.2 cm x 44.7 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 38. *Gnarled Oak*, 1804, pencil and watercolour on paper, 31.2 x 25.5cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 39**.** Joseph Powell, *Landscape Scene*, 1803/4, pencil and sepia wash on paper, 25.4 x 38.5 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 40. Detail of Powell, *Landscape Scene*

Figure 41. William Havell, *Wooded Scene*, 1803/4, pencil and sepia wash on paper, 32.1 x 59 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Chapter 2

Figure 42. *Distant View of Newburgh Priory*, 1803-4, Exh. RA 1804, pencil and watercolour on paper, 38.9 x 79.4 cm, Newburgh Priory, Yorkshire

Figure 43. *View of Newburgh Priory*, 1803-4, Exh. RA 1804, pencil and watercolour on paper, 38.9 x 79.4 cm, Newburgh Priory, Yorkshire

Figure 44. Thomas Girtin, *Kirkstall Abbey, Yorkshire*, 1800, watercolour on paper, 32 x 52 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 45. Paul Sandby Munn, *Kirkstall Abbey*, 1803, pen and grey ink over pencil on paper, 197 x 29.2 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 46. J. M. W. Turner, *Harewood House from the North East*, 1797, watercolour on paper, 50.5cm x 64.5 cm, Harewood House, Yorkshire

Figure 47. *Cottage at Bolton*, 1803, pencil and wash on paper, 17.1 x 22.3 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 48. Paul Sandby Munn, *Cottage at Bolton*, 1803, pencil on paper, 11.1 x 18.7 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 49. Thomas Hearne, *Cottage*, c.1795, pencil on paper, 32.4 x 23.8 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 50. John Varley, *Cottage at Bolton*, pencil on paper, c.1803, 19.5 x 33 cm, Tate, London

Figure 51. *Riveaulx Abbey*, 1803, pencil on paper, 37.1 x 27 cm, Tate, London

Figure 52. *West Front of Byland Abbey*, dated 7 September 1803, pencil and watercolour on paper, 31.8 x 24.8cm, Amgueddfeydd ac Orielau Cenedlaethol Cymru, National Museums & Galleries of Wales, Cardiff

Figure 53. *Teresa Ann Cholmeley*, dated 10 September 1803, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, York City Art Gallery, York

Figure 54. *Francis Cholmeley*, 1803, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, York City Art Gallery, York

Figure 55. *Francis Cholmeley the Younger*, 1803, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, York City Art Gallery, York

Figure 56. *Anne Cholmeley*, 1803, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, York City Art Gallery, York

Figure 57. *Mary Catherine Cholmeley*, 1803, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, York City Art Gallery, York

Figure 58. *Katherine Henrietta Cholmeley*, 1803, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, York City Art Gallery, York

Figure 59. *Harriet Cholmeley*, 1803, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 19.5 cm, York City Art Gallery, York

Figure 60. George Dance, *Henry Fuseli*, dated 2 June 1793, pencil and pink chalk on paper, 25.2 x 19 cm, Royal Academy, London

Figure 61. John Downman, *Frances Downman*, 1796, charcoal and stump touched with red and black chalk on paper, 22.3 x 17.3 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 62. *The Gates to Brandsby Courtyard*, 1803, pencil on paper, 25.5 x 17.8 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 63. Annotated Googlemap of Rokeby Park and immediate vicinity

Figure 64. *Distant View of Greta Bridge*, 1805, pencil and watercolour on paper, 26 x 39.4 cm, Tate, London

Figure 65. John Varley, *View of Bodenham and the Malvern Hills, Herefordshire*, 1801, watercolour and pencil on paper, 31.1 x 52.1 cm, Tate, London

Figure 66. John Varley, *Harewood House from the South East*, 1803, pencil and watercolour on paper, 55.5cm x 87 cm, Harewood House, Yorkshire

Figure 67. *Barnard Castle from Towler Hill*, Exh. RA 1806, watercolour and pencil on paper, 33 x 43.2 cm, Leeds City Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 68. *Brignall Banks on the Greta*, 1805, pencil and watercolour on paper, 18.8 x 28.3 cm, Leeds City Art Gallery, Leeds

Figure 69. *Bank of the Greta*, 1805-6, watercolour and pencil on paper, 22.5 x 32.9 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 70. *In Rokeby Park*, 1805, pencil and watercolour on paper, 327 x 22.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 71. *On the Greta*, 1805, pencil and watercolour on paper, 30.6 x 22.6 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 72. *On the Greta*, 1805, pencil and watercolour on paper, 22.8 x 33.3 cm, Tate, London

Figure 73. *On the Greta*, 1805, watercolour and pencil on paper, 45.1 x 35.1 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 74. *On the River Greta*, 1805-6, watercolour and pencil on paper, 32.6 x 22.9 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 75. Anne Cholmeley, *Rectory Barn, Brandsby*, pencil on paper, 19 x 23.5 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 76. Anne or Katherine Cholmeley, *Crayke Castle*, 1803, pencil on paper, 19.3 x 29 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 77. Katherine Cholmeley, *Timbered House, Wales*, dated 19 June 1804, pencil on paper, 17.6 x 14.3 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 78. *Urn on a Pedestal, at Castle Howard*, 1805, pencil on paper, British Museum, London

Figure 79. *Urn on a Pedestal, at Castle Howard*, 1806, monochrome wash on paper, 20.6 x 16.1 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 80. *Durham Cathedral*, Exh. RA 1806, pencil and watercolour on paper, 43.6 x 33 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 81. *Durham Cathedral* – split, Exh. RA 1806, pencil and watercolour on paper, 43.6 x 33 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 82. Thomas Girtin, *Durham Cathedral*, c.1796, watercolour on paper, 47.1 x 41.5 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 83. William Daniell, *Durham Cathedral*, 1805, 40 x 64 cm, watercolour and pencil on paper, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Chapter 3

Figure 84. *Fountains Abbey*, Exh. RA 1804, watercolour and pencil on paper, 85.9 x 60.6 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Figure 85. J. M. W. Turner, *Transept of Tintern Abbey, Momouthshire*, Exh. RA 1795, watercolour, pencil and pen and ink on paper, 35.5 x 26 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Figure 86. Thomas Girtin, *Interior of Lindisfarne Priory, Northumberland*, c.1797, watercolour on paper, 53.1 x 39.5 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 87. *Bolton Abbey from the south*, c.1803, pencil and watercolour on paper, 20.7 x 32.8 cm, Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham

Figure 88. *Castle Acre Priory*, c.1804, pencil on paper, 38.1 x 25 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 89. *Fountains Abbey*, c.1804, pencil on paper, 36.2 x 26.7 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 90. *Yarmouth Beach with Figures*, Exh. NSA? 1808, oil on canvas, 62.2 x 74.9 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 91. *Boy at Marbles*, Exh. NSA 1808, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 92. *Beggar Boy*, Exh. NSA 1808, oil on millboard, 72.7 x 61.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 93. *Portrait of a boy as Yung Norval* or '*Portrait – For, I heard of battles, and I long'd to follow / to the field some warlike Lord.– DOUGLAS',* Exh. NSA 1808, oil on canvas laid down on board, 56.5 x 46 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 94. John Opie, *Master William Henry West Betty as Young Norval*, Exh. RA 1804, oil on canvas, 198.5 x 149.5 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London

Figure 95. John Opie, *John Vivian of Pencalenick*, oil on canvas, 75 x 62 cm, Royal Institution of Cornwall, Cornwall

Figure 96. John Opie, *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green and his Daughter*, oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Figure 97. *Ferry House, Bristol*, Exh. NSA? 1808, oil on canvas, 36.20 x 31.10 cm, National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh

Figure 98. *Ferry House, Bristol*, Exh. NSA? 1808, watecolour and pencil on paper, 30.4 x 24.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 99. *Fish Swills*, Exh. NSA 1809, watercolour and pencil on paper, 18.3 x 26.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 100. 'Rules to be Observed in Drawing', c.1817, pen on paper, Private Collection, UK

Figure 101. Robert Dixon, *Ferry House, Lower Close, Norwich*, c.1807, pencil and grey wash on paper, 14 x 23.7 cm, British Musuem, London

Figure 102. Robert Dixon, *City Wall, Junction of Barrack Street and Silver Road, Norwich*, Exh. NSA 1809, watercolour and pencil on paper, 57.5 x 79.8 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 103. Rudolph Ackermann, Plate three, etching with hand-coloured grey wash, from *Lessons for Beginnners in the Fine Arts* (London, 1796), Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 104. 'Croyland Abbey', plate twenty-two from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, 1811, etching, plate size: 37.8 x 27 cm, paper size: 49.6 x 32.8 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 105. *Croyland Abbey*, Exh. RA 1805 and NSA 1807, watercolour and pencil on paper, 42 x 35.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 106. 'St. Boltoph's Priory', plate twenty-four from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, 1811, etching, plate size: 25.5 x 36.5 cm, paper size: 32 x 49.7 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 107. *St. Boltoph's Priory*, 1804, Exh. NSA 1807, 35.7 x 52.1 cm, watercolour and pencil on paper, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 108. 'Byland Abbey', plate thirteen from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, etching, 1811, plate size: 30.3 x 21.2 cm, paper size: 49.6 x 32.8 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 109. *Byland Abbey*, 1804, Exh. 1808, watercolour and pencil on paper, 34.8 x 27 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 110. *Byland Abbey*, 1809, watercolour and pencil on paper, 52.1 x 43.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 111. 'A Garden House on the banks of the river Yare', plate fifteen from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, etching, 1811, plate size: 30 x 22 cm, paper size: 49.7 x 33 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 112. Detail of ‘A Garden House on the banks of the river Yare’

Figure 113. ‘North Creake Abbey’, plate seven of *Micellaneous Etchings*, 1811, etching, plate size: 30 x 22.4 cm, paper size: 49.5 x 32.9 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 114. One of the Turner daughters, *North Creake Abbey*, 1811, pencil on paper, 28.5 x 22.9 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Figure 115. ‘Duncombe Park, Yorkshire’, plate three from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, 1810, etching, plate size: 21.1 x 14.2 cm, paper size: 49.7 x 32.8, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 116. *Duncombe Park, Yorkshire*, 1810, pencil on paper, 22.2 x 14.6 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 117. *Byland Abbey*, 1810, pencil on paper, 32.6 x 22 cm, Courtauld Institute of Art, London

Figure 118. *Garden House on the Yare, Norwich*, c.1811, pencil on paper, 23.9 x 18.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 119. *A Garden House on the banks of the river Yare*, c.1811, watercolour and pencil on paper, 30.2 x 22.5 cm, Private Collection, UK

Figure 120. Attributed to James Stark, *A Garden House on the banks of the river Yare*, c.1811, watercolour and pencil on paper, 29.9 x 22.7 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 121. ‘The East End of Howden Church’, plate twenty-three from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, 1811, etching plate size: 38 x 27.4 cm, paper size: 49.6 x 32 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 122. ‘A Doorway at Valle Crucis Abbey, North Wales’, plate four from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, 1810, etching, plate size: 21.4 x 14.2 cm, paper size: 49 x 33 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 123. ‘A Doorway Leading to the Refectory of Rievaulx Abbey’, plate ten from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, 1810, etching, plate size: 30.1 x 22 cm, paper size: 49.5 x 32.1 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 124. ‘Dedication’, plate two from *Miscellaneous Etchings*, dated 1 July 1811, 30.2 x 22 cm, etching paper size: 49.8 x 32 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Chapter 4

Figure 125. ‘West End of East Barsham House’, plate twenty-nine of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1813, etching, plate size: 22.5 x 30 cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 126. ‘South Front of East Barsham House’, plate sixty of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1 vol. (1818), 1817, etching, plate size: 29 x 22.5 cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 127. ‘Yarmouth Priory’, plate four of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1 vol. (1818), 1812, etching, plate size: 22.5 x 30 cm, paper size: 34.5 x 48.2 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 128. ‘The Monument of Thomas Lord Morley in the Church at Higham’, 1817, etching, plate fifty-eight of the *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk* bound in Strickland Charles Edward Neville Rolfe’s extra-illustrated copy of Frances Blomefield, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk.*, 11 vols, expanded by Rolfe into thirty-seven vols (London, 1805-10), vol. 2, part. 3, Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norwich

Figure. 129. James Basire the younger after James Adey Repton, ‘View of Wolterton Manor House, at East Barsham, Norfolk, taken from the high Road’, published in *Vetusta Monumenta*, vol. 4, 1811, engraving, 34.6 x 50.7 cm, Christchurch Art Gallery, New Zealand

Figure 130. James Basire the younger after James Adey Repton, ‘View of Wolterton Manor House, at East Barsham, Norfolk, taken from a Spot near the Abbey Barn’, published in *Vetusta Monumenta*, vol. 4, 1811, etching, 33.8 x 50.3 cm, Christchurch Art Gallery, New Zealand

Figure 131. ‘The North-West Tower, Yarmouth’, plate three of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1 vol. (1818), 1812, etching, plate size: 36.2 x 27 cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 132. Detail of ‘The North-West Tower, Yarmouth’

Figure 133. ‘The Late Vicarage House, Methwold’, plate eight of Architectural *Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1 vol. (1818), 1812, etching, plate size: 30.3 x 22.9 cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 134. Detail of ‘The Late Vicarage House, Methwold’

Figure 135. ‘The Bishop’s Palace Gate, Norwich’, plate forty of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1 vol. (1818), 1814, etching, plate size: 37.5 x 27.4 cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 136. Detail of ‘The Bishop’s Palace Gate, Norwich’

Figure 137. Joseph Clarendon Smith after Frederick Mackenzie, ‘East Barsham House, Part of the South Front, Norfolk’, published in John Britton, *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, 4 vols (1809), vol. 2, 1808, etching, plate size: 20 x 14.3 cm, paper size: 26.7 x 20.5 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 138. Detail of Smith after Mackenzie, ‘East Barsham House, Part of the South Front, Norfolk’

Figure 139. ‘The Monument of Thomas Lord Morley in the Church at Higham’, plate fifty-eight of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1 vol. (1818), 1817, etching, plate size: 42.1 x 26.7cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 140. Detail of ‘The Monument of Thomas Lord Morley in the Church at Higham’

Figure 141. ‘Interior of South Runcton Church’, plate nine of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1 vol. (1818), 1812, etching, plate size: 30 x 22.5 cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 142. ‘Bromholm Priory’, plate sixteen of *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk*, 1812, etching, plate size: 22.5 x 30.1 cm, paper size: 34.5 x 48.2 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 143. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Ruins of the Temples of Jupiter Tonans and Concord*, plate seven in the print series, *Antichità romane de’tempi della Repubblica, e de’primi imperatori*, 1748, etching, plate size: 13.8 x 27.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Figure 144. ‘Chapel on the Mount, Lynn’, plate fifteen of *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, 1812, etching, plate size: 30.2 x 22.4 cm, paper size: 48.2 x 34.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 145. John ‘Antiquary’ Smith after Frederick Mackenzie, *The Red Mount Chapel, at Lynn, Norfolk*, published in John Britton, *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, 4 vols (1812), vol. 31812, etching, plate size: 20.4 x 15.5 cm, paper size: 26.7 x 20.5 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 146. *South Front of East Barsham House*, c.1817, pencil on paper, 33.5 x 22.2 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 147. *The North-West Tower, Yarmouth*, 1811, pencil on paper, 30.2 x 21.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 148. ‘Abbey Church of St Georges de Bocherville, View from the South East’, plate three of *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 1, 1819, etching, plate size: 26.4 x 36.8 cm, paper size: 53.5 x 37 x cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 149. ‘Church of St Peter, at Lisieux, South Transept’, plate seventy-three of *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 2, 1821, etching, plate size: 39.2 x 24 cm, paper size: 53.5 x 37 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 150. ‘Abbey Church of St. Etienne, Caen. West Front’, plates twenty-one and twenty-two of the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol.1, 1819, plate size: 50.4 x 34.8 cm, paper size: 37 x 53.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 151. ‘Chateau Gaillard, North East View’, plate eighty of the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 2, 1821, etching, plate size: 23 x 41.5 cm, paper size: 37 x 53.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 152. ‘Cathedral Church of Notre-Dame at Rouen, South Transept, from the Place de la Calande’, plates forty-nine and fifty of the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 1, 1819, etching, plate size: 50.5 x 34.5, paper size: 52 x 34.9cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 153. ‘Great House At Great Andelys’, plate fifteen of the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 1, 1819, etching, plate size: 24.7 x 37.8 cm, paper size: 37 x 53.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure. 154. ‘Church of St Nicholas, at Caen: East End’, plate fifty-six of the A*rchitectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 2, 1821, etching, plate size: 33.1 x 29.5 cm, paper size: 37 x 53.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 155. ‘Cathedral Church of Notre-Dame at Rouen, South Transept, from the Place de la Calande’, 1817, pencil and brown wash on paper, plate size: 47.7 x 33.2 cm, NG Commercial Banking UK

Figure. 156. ‘Cathedral Church of Notre-Dame at Rouen, West Front, from the Place Notre-Dame’, plates fifty-one and fifty-two of the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 1, 1821, etching, plate size: 56 x 40.6 cm, paper size: 65.5 x 53.3 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 157. James Basire the elder after John Carter, *West Front of Lichfield Cathedral*, 1782, engraving and etching, 22.5 x 12.5 cm, British Museum, London

Figure 158. ‘Church of Oystreham’, plate ninety-eight of the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 2, 1821, etching, plate size: 34.5 x 26.4 cm, paper size: 53.5 x 37 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 159. ‘The Church of St Ouen, at Rouen, plate seventy-six of the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 2 vols (1822), vol. 2, 1821, etching, plate size: 27 x 33.8 cm, paper size: 37 x 53.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 160. *Domfront*, 1820, pencil and sepia wash on paper, 24.8 x 45.8 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 161, Charles Turner after J. M. W. Turner, 'Norham Castle', 1816, etching and mezzotint, 17.8 x 26 cm, plate fifty-seven from the *Liber Studiorum*, part twelve, Royal Academy Archives, London

Figure 162. Cotman after J. M. W. Turner, *Norham Castle*, c.1820, pencil on paper, 9.5 x 13.5 cm, plate fifty-seven of the *Liber Studiorum*, 1820, British Museum, London

Chapter 5

Figure 163. *Castle Tower with Battlements by Water*, c.1830, pencil on paper, 20 x 17.1 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 164. *Conway Castle*, after 1834, pencil on paper, 33.8 x 24.3 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 165. *Shipping*, pencil on paper, after 1834, 16.5 x 26.7 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 166. *Guildford, Surrey*, after 1834, pencil on paper, 23.6 x 29.4 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 167. *Roman Soldier on Rearing Horse*, after 1834, pencil on paper, 16.9 x 21.6 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery

Figure 168. *Soldier with Sword and* Shield, after 1834, pencil on paper, 24.9 x 17.2 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 169. *Man in armour*, after 1834, pencil on paper, 25.4 x 16 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 170. Detail of signature contained in *Roman Soldier on Rearing Horse*

Figure 171. Detail of signature contained in *Man in armour*

Figure 172. *Dieppe from the Heights to the East of the Port, looking down upon the Harbour Churches of St. Jacques and St. Remi, and along the coast towards St. Vallery*, Exh. NSA 1823 and/or 1824 and SPWC 1825, 28.4 x 53.3 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Figure 173. Detail of *Dieppe from the Heights*

Figure 174. *Landscape*, c.1835, pencil, black chalk and watercolour, 34.7 x 45.9 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 175. Detail of *Landscape*

Figure 176. *Silver Birches*, 1831, watercolour on paper, 41.2 x 29.2 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 177. *Silver Birches*, c.1835, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 62.7 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 178. *Storm on Yarmouth* Beach, 1831, watercolour, bodycolour, paste medium, pen and ink on paper, 36.8 x 53.7 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 179. *St Benet's Abbey*, 1831, watercolour on paper, 32 x 47 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 180. *Drainage Mills in the Fens*, c.1835, oil on canvas, 55.2 x 91.8 cm Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 181. *The Baggage Wagon*, c.1824-28, oil on panel, 43 x 35.2 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 182. *Mount St. Michael, on the side of Pontorson, Normandy: showing the Phenomenon of the Mirage*, Exh. NSA 1823 and/or 1824 and SPWC 1825, watercolour over pencil on paper, British Museum, London

Figure 183. *Abbatial House, of the Abbey of St. Ouen at Rouen, taken down in 1817*, Exh. NSA 1824 and SPWC 1825, watercolour, pen, ink and bodycolour on paper, 42.3 x 57.3 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 184. *Hôtel de Ville, Ulm*, Exh. SPWC 1831, watercolour on paper, 50.6 x 70 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottowa

Figure 185. J. M. W. Turner, *Richmond Hill*, c.1820-5, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 29.7 x 48.9 cm, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight)

Figure 186. Bernard William Cooke after J. M. W. Turner, 'Torbay from Brixham' from *Picturesque Views on the Southern Coast of England*, 1821, engraving on paper, 15.8 x 24.2 cm, Tate, London

Figure 187. *In the Bishop's Garden (Landscape)*, c.1824-5, oil on millboard, 25.6 x 18.9 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 188. *The Mishap*, c.1824-8, oil on panel, 43 x 35.4 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 189. *The Drop Gate*, c.1826, oil on canvas, 34.9 x 26 cm, Tate, London

Figure 190. *The Silent Stream, Normandy*, 1824-8, oil on canvas, 40.2 x 33.5cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 191. Richard Parkes Bonington, *A Wooded Lane*, oil on millboard, 27.9 x 22.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 192. Richard Parkes Bonington, *In the Forest of Fontainebleau*, 1825, oil on millboard, 32.4 x 24.1 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Figure 193. J. M. W. Turner, *A Beech Wood with Gypsies round a Campfire*, c.1799-1801, oil on paper laid on panel, 27 x 19 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Figure 194. *Dutch Boats off Yarmouth, Prizes during the War*, Exh. BI 1823 and NSA 1824, oil on mahogany panel, 43.5 x 63.5 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 195. *An Ecclesiastic*, Exh. Bath Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts 1839, oil and pencil on panel, 44.7 x 33.9 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 196. *A Monk*, Exh. Bath Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts 1839, oil and pencil on panel, 44.8 x 34 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

Figure 197. John Sell and Miles Edmund Cotman, *The Wreck of the Houghton Pictures Consigned to the Empress Catherine of Russia, including the gorgeous landscape by Rubens of the Waggoner*, Exh. SPWC and Royal Institution, Manchester 1838, watercolour on paper, 68 x 90.2 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Figure 198. *The Drawing Master*, Exh. Norfolk and Norwich Art Union 1839, watercolour, pencil, and painted paper pasted onto paper, 33.2 x 47.8 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich

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Introduction
The Work of Art

In a small pencil drawing that John Sell Cotman produced during the last decade of his career, a horse is shown in mid-motion before a sketchy hint of a mountainous backdrop (Fig. 1). In place of a human rider is a pyramidal assemblage of various artists' materials, including a lofty easel, large portfolio, palette and brushes – the tools central (and compositionally so here) to the artist's work. A rider is nevertheless implied by various visual clues, namely in the precise positioning of the various accoutrements: a human head is alluded to by the top-hat-clad easel, that easel's prop stands in for a leg, and the brushes function as a hand which 'holds' a maulstick protruding, like fingers, from the palette. This pictorial statement of artistic paraphernalia and identity is accompanied by a verbal one in the form of Cotman's signature which emerges from the grassy ground.

This emblematic drawing is an unusual work within Cotman's oeuvre. Yet perhaps because of its anomalous status, it is also one of the richest in what it can intimate about the artist's experience of his career – taking 'experience' in its double meaning as both 'an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted.'[1] With its references to artistic practice and mobility, and the implied presence and status of Cotman himself, this drawing appears to meditate on what it meant to be an artist at the beginning of the modern period.

For it was during that period, in early nineteenth-century Britain, that the identity of 'the Artist' was shifting tremendously and often becoming the subject of heated debate. Previously lacking in an academic tradition of the arts (unlike its European counterparts), the establishment of London's Royal Academy (hereafter RA) in 1768 was instrumental in stimulating this debate, raising the social profile of the artist and giving currency to their career. The decades following 1768 witnessed an explosion in the numbers of artists entering the art world, itself expanding beyond the capital city into the regions, including Cotman's hometown, Norwich, which saw the foundation of the Norwich Society of Artists in 1803, the country's first recognisable 'art world' beyond London.[2] The

[1] Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991), 773-97, 797.
[2] After Norwich, these societies were the Northern Society for the Encouragement of Fine Art in Leeds (1808), the Liverpool Academy of Arts (1810), Edinburgh's Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Scotland (1819), the Royal Dublin Society (1820), the Birmingham Society (1821), the

expansion of the British art world was attended by fierce competition, commercialisation and crowding, a phenomenon which has led recent historians of British art to regard this period as the point at which the country moved towards accommodating (although not easily) a 'modern art world'.[3]

With a rapidly transforming artistic realm in which the numbers of artists increasingly exceeded demand, a tension between art and its enabling structures emerged in which the previous, comparatively settled, equation between what produced art (for instance, an artist with the regular support of a patron) and the art that was produced, was set in flux.[4] In other words, and as this Introduction will go on to discuss, the sheer oversupply of artists destabilised the structure of the British art world, shifting the ground in ways that had serious implications for artists' identities and practices. Marking oneself out from the crowd (itself already distinctly varied in its personnel and character) was now significantly more difficult than it had been earlier in the eighteenth century. More than ever, survival in the British art world required artists to consider, and choose wisely, their unique selling point. As we shall see throughout this study, this meant carefully selecting one's materials, techniques and subject matter, considering the scale on which one worked, the mode of practice one adopted and the artistic references made, and deliberating over such matters as place of work, affiliations and associations forged, and the artistic persona(e) adopted. Survival was not always about being forward or future-facing; it also required artists to remain aware of their position in relation to others and to produce work that might allude to or invite comparison with the work of their peers, whilst also perhaps attempting to surpass it.

The drawing of the horse appears to register some of these multiple perspectives that characterised aspects of the British artist's experience. With the presence of the top hat securing a certain gentlemanly status for the subject whilst also sartorially locating it within the nineteenth century, the horse trots forward confidently. Yet the drawing also makes allusions to a heraldic past. The carefully positioned palette and maulstick, for example, evoke a shield and lance which, along with the inscription 'King's College'

Carlisle Academy of Arts (1822), the Associated Artists of Manchester (1823) and the Bristol Institution (1824).

[3] Brian Allen (ed.), *Towards a Modern Art World: Art in Britain 1715-1914* (New Haven and London, 1995).

[4] It has been proposed that the number of artists working in Britain during the period 1660-1730 was roughly equal in size to a rising urban middle class of patrons. See Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkley and Los Angeles, 1989), 73-4, and Geoffrey Holmes, *Augustan England: Profession, State and Society, 1680-1730* (London, 1982), 20-42.

(where Cotman became Professor of Drawing in 1834), give the image an air of noble pretensions and might recast the implied artist as a medieval knight. Its steed strikes a pose worthy of a seventeenth-century regal statue and calls to mind that of Charles I on horseback by Hubert Le Sueur (1633) which stands prominently at the west end of the Strand at Charing Cross, just a few hundred metres from where King's College School was located. A couple of years before his appointment to King's, Cotman depicted Sueur's statue in a watercolour (Fig. 2).

As the pencil drawing of the horse combines various personae and references to elevated status, Cotman also plays different materials and techniques off against one another. Pencil marks alternate between the calligraphic (Cotman's handwriting emerging from the loosely articulated passage of grass) and the more resolved (the strong dark line of the horse's hind quarters and the worked-up area of its genitals). Yet other than the drawing's pencil medium, there is little else on first impression to hint at drawing itself. Instead, the iconography's main adherence is to the comparatively 'liberal' art of easel painting and life-size equestrian statuary – notably not watercolour drawing for which Cotman is now best known. This combination of actual and implied materials hints at a dialectical relationship between the status and meaning of different media and techniques, a tension which pervaded Cotman's practice throughout his career.

The move I am making here between context, the artist and his artwork with specific reference to personal experience, marks a departure from the conventional approach offered by the secondary literature on Cotman. That approach has been represented in its most critically-engaged form by Andrew Hemingway who published various essays on Cotman between 1978 and 1997.[5] These essays analysed various watercolours and etchings that Cotman produced over two decades of his forty-year career, with each focusing on the ways in which social structures determined their production and appearance. Any intelligent interpretation of Cotman's art, Hemingway argued, should attend to the contemporary historical associations of its subject matter in conjunction with the aesthetic interests of the artist's own patrons who were understood to represent a particular class structure with specific cultural interests. As Hemingway put it in 1984,

[5] See Andrew Hemingway, 'Cotman's "Architectural Antiquities of Normandy": some amendments to Kitson's Account', *Walpole Society*, vol. 46 (1978), 164-85; '"The English Piranesi": Cotman's Architectural Prints', *Walpole Society*, vol. 48 (1982), 210-44; 'Meaning in Cotman's Norfolk Subjects', *Art History*, vol. 7, no. 1 (March 1984), 57-77 and 'The Constituents of Romantic Genius: John Sell Cotman's Greta Drawings', in Michael Rosenthal, Christiana Payne and Scott Wilcox (eds), *Prospects for the Nation: Recent Essays in British Landscape, 1750-1880* (New Haven and London, 1997), 183-204.

the subjects and meanings of Cotman's art were 'only comprehensible in relation to the ideologies of his day', and on that basis should be read as ideology's pictorial results.[6]

Hemingway's contextualising approach expanded upon and problematised a substantial body of biographical writing on Cotman, most prominent among which is the first full biography, *The Life of John Sell Cotman* by Sydney Kitson in 1937.[7] Casting Cotman as a blighted artist-genius who had pulled himself up by his bootstraps from his father's Norwich haberdashery to become one of the most forward-looking exponents of British watercolour, Kitson's cradle-to-grave account and its hyperbolic tone were born of a much earlier mode of biographical writing. The genre had resurfaced during Cotman's lifetime and again, about one hundred years later, in Kitson's own.[8] By the time Hemingway came to take a critical interest in Cotman, Kitson's *Life* was the standard work on the artist. It was reprinted in 1982 to coincide with the bicentenary of Cotman's birth, an event also commemorated in two UK exhibitions, one curated by Andrew Moore at Norwich Castle Museum where the majority of Cotmans are held, and the other a touring exhibition organised by the Arts Council and curated by the former keeper of Norwich Castle, Miklos Rajnai. Both exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues which largely took their cue from Kitson.[9] While the hyperbole was toned down, the authors' discussions of Cotman's artworks, particularly those presented in the Arts Council catalogue, tended towards romanticised readings which saw the artist's 'forward-looking', 'abstract' and therefore 'best' works (always his early watercolours) 'reflecting' his inner character.[10] Cotman was, it was further claimed, prone to episodes of personal

[6] Hemingway, 'Meaning in Cotman's Norfolk Subjects', *Art History* (March 1984), 72.

[7] See Laurence Binyon, 'Life and Work of John Sell Cotman' in Binyon, 'The Life and Work of John Sell Cotman' in Charles Holme (ed.), 'Masters of English Landscape Painting, J. S. Cotman, David Cox, Peter de Wint', *The Studio*, Special Number (Summer 1903), 1-16, plus plates 1-55; William Frederick Dickes, 'John Sell Cotman' in *The Norwich School of Painting* (London and Norwich, 1905), 245-410; James Reeve, *Memoir of John Sell Cotman* (Norwich, 1911); Paul Oppé, 'The Watercolour Drawings of John Sell Cotman', *The Studio*, Special Number (1923); Sydney Kitson, *The Life of John Sell Cotman* (London, 1937, reprinted 1982); Michael Harrison, 'John Sell Cotman, 1782-1842, A Memoir', *Apollo* (July 1942); and Victor Rienaecker, *John Sell Cotman, 1782-1842* (Leigh-on-Sea, 1953).

[8] Kitson's *Life* appeared at the same time as a wave of biographies and monographs on 'great' British artists were being produced, including W. G. Constable, *John Flaxman, 1755-1826* (London, 1927), A. J. Finberg, *The Life of J. M. W. Turner, RA* (Oxford,1939) and Ellis Waterhouse, *Reynold*s (London, 1941), while William T. Whitley's *Artists and Their Friends in England: 1700-1799*, published in two volumes in 1928, presented biographical entries on a large number of eighteenth-century artists, including passages from contemporary newspapers and anecdotes.

[9] See Andrew Moore, *John Sell Cotman, 1782-1842* (Norwich, 1982) and Miklos Rajnai (ed.), *John Sell Cotman 1782-1842*, exh. cat. (London, 1982).

[10] The Arts Council catalogue regarded Cotman's early watercolours as having 'more in common, in terms of compositional pattern, ... [with] the *cloisonné* effect of a Beggarstaff Brothers poster or even the landscapes of Klimt and Schiele, than ... [with] any other nineteenth-century painter', David Thompson, 'Cotman: romantic classicist' in Rajnai, *Cotman*, 17-18.

neurosis, frustration and 'black despair', an aspect which could provide the key to interpreting his art.[11]

Hemingway criticised such essentialist connections between Cotman's perceived personality and his 'abstract' artwork, instead shifting the focus from Cotman-the-man to the historical contexts and ideological structures to which he and his work could be related.[12] Yet in diminishing Cotman's individual agency and reading his works in terms of external structures such as class, the market and ideology, Hemingway presented a totalizing vision of the artist as a conduit for a broader set of sociohistorical ideas – as somebody who in a relatively unmediated fashion could give those ideas visual form. That artists might have ambitions, attitudes and agency in relation to their experiences, careers and products was a line notably absent from Hemingway's account, which is therefore almost as deterministic as the biographical mode he was taking to task.

In critiquing the two prevailing interpretative frameworks that have characterised approaches to Cotman, it is not my intention to position this study methodologically in-between them.[13] Instead, this thesis will situate Cotman and his oeuvre within their wider aesthetic, cultural and sociohistorical contexts in order to think broadly about the artist during this period in relation to themes of social change, the shifting institutional context, and idea(l)s. Simultaneously, it aims to get closer to the artist and his artworks by considering his career as having been formed of passages of lived experience involving 'perceptions, opportunities, threats, desires and choices, as well as material conditions'.[14] In so doing, I will argue that alongside and in relation to social circumstance, lived experience meaningfully informed and inflected many of the actions, manoeuvres and artworks that Cotman made throughout his life. My account is aimed as a revisionist contribution to the literature on Cotman, but if not reverting to the traditional biographical presuppositions of the likes of Kitson and Rajnai, what does it mean now in art history to talk about the life of an artist? As this thesis intends to get close to Cotman's artwork without rehearsing the romanticised correlation customarily noted between his 'character' and his art's formal characteristics, what should we do with the artist in relation to the work of *art*? And why does it matter that we consider in detail an early nineteenth-

[11] Rajnai, *Cotman*, 14.
[12] See Hemingway, 'Meaning in Cotman's Norfolk Subjects', *Art History* (March 1984), 57-77, 57-58.
[13] See David Hill, *Cotman in the North: Watercolours of Durham and Yorkshire* (New Haven and London, 2005) and Timothy Wilcox, *Cotman in Normandy*, exh. cat. (London, 2012) represent the most recent scholarship on Cotman, both of which nevertheless echo the conventional approach.
[14] Sarah Monks, 'Introduction, Life Study: Living with the Royal Academy, 1768-1848' in Monks, John Barrell and Mark Hallett (eds), *Living with the Royal Academy: Artistic Ideals and Experiences, 1768-1848* (Burlington and Farnham, 2013), 1-31, 6.

century artist's career; that is to say, the *work* of art? This Introduction will consider these questions in particular.

1. The work of *art*

To ask such questions is itself indicative of a new move in the history of British art which has begun to consider the complexity and fluidity of artists' career paths and experiences in an early capitalist society.[15] This thesis aims to contribute to this move and, despite its monographic form and chronological framework, troubles the conventional notion that an artist's career trajectory ascends in a seamless, ascending and progressive pattern. It does so by complicating two modes: the traditional biographical one which presumes that individuals self-consciously operate on the basis of what Pierre Bourdieu parodied as the 'original project',[16] and the still-prevalent model of the 'professional project' premised on the (strikingly similar) assumption that artists consciously will themselves into advantageous positions towards a predictably successful and universally-recognised goal.[17] Following insights gained from sociology, most notably Bourdieu's model of the *habitus* (discussed in Chapter 1), we now understand that the logic of success and failure, primary intentions and end goals as well as professional status, are rarely self-evident to artists, their audiences and, indeed, to those studying them at an historical remove.

In fact, in the context of a modern art system, it might be argued that it is when artists do *not* struggle or are perceived to have 'had it easy' that they are seen to have failed; that apparent failure in one sense (institutional rejection, financial loss) may be viewed by some as signifying success in another (symbolic autonomy, apparent commercial disinterestedness[18]). Positivist models will not therefore do in assessing an artist like

[15] This move has been addressed most directly in Monks et al, *Living with the Royal Academy*.

[16] Bourdieu took issue with one of the central tropes of biography, what he called the 'projet originel', based on the assumption that an individual's life is 'a whole, a coherent and directed ensemble ... made to manifest in every experience, especially the earliest'. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge, 1996), 187-91, 187 and 'The Biographical Illusion', trans. Yves Winkin and Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz (1986), *Working Papers and Proceedings of the Center for Psychosocial Studies*, no. 14 (Chicago, 1987).

[17] See, for example, Greg Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760-1824* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2002).

[18] Yet as Bourdieu argued, a disinterested act is never truly possible: 'all apparently disinterested actions conceal intentions to maximise a certain kind of profit ... of being inspired by the search for the symbolic profit of saintliness, or celebrity, etc.' Bourdieu, 'Is a Disinterested Act Possible?' in *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Cambridge, 1998), 86. Also see Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Centur*y (New Haven and London, 1997) which is illuminating on the idea that an artist's 'genius' could enable him to appear commercially disinterested while simultaneously allowing him to compete cynically in the marketplace.

Cotman whose trajectory, identity and output were highly distributed and multiple. Instead, my adopted methodology is concerned with bringing a revised sense of the artist's life (with all of its inconsistency, variety and multiple experience) back into the set of sociohistorical contexts within which his artworks were produced.

Thanks to the social history of art, we now recognise those contexts to broadly encompass the market and the institution, aesthetic trends and conventions, patronage and audiences, the exhibition and journalistic criticism, and themes around display, collaboration and reputation. During the last twenty years or so, seminal texts on the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British art world have demonstrated how profoundly the art of this period was conditioned by these structures.[19] Expanding upon the sociological insights into 'art worlds',[20] it is now commonplace to regard artworks as collaborative products whose making, distribution, valuation and consumption involves intersubjective networks of agents, including artists, publishers, critics, patrons and other 'support personnel'.[21] Bourdieu's model of the artistic *field* has emphasised the social construction of ideas specific to that field, which itself is embedded within the larger 'field of power', and thus the broader structures of society.[22] As such, we now commonly consider the artist as a vehicle for those broader structures, ideas and value systems whose artworks can, in turn, be read as symptomatic of, and shaped by, them.

It is of course important that we recognise the significance of the role that social structures, ideas and systems (including ideals and myths)[23] played in shaping artists' identities, careers, practices and products. As Sarah Monks has noted of the RA, its

[19] See Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London: The Rise of Arthur Pond* (New Haven and London, 1983); Allen (ed.), *Towards a Modern Art World* (1995); David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780-1836* (New Haven and London, 2001) published to accompany the exhibition of the same name held at the Courtauld Gallery in 2001, Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist* (2002); Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture,1760-1840* (Oxford, 2003); Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art, 1750-1810* (New Haven and London, 2005); and Matthew Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame: The Society of Artists of* Great Britain, 1760-1791 (New Haven and London, 2006).

[20] Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, 2nd edn. (Berkeley and London, 2008). Other influential sociological studies on art worlds include Simpson, *SoHo*; Vera L. Zolberg, *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts* (Cambridge, 1990); Harrison and Cynthia White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French painting world* (New York and London, 1993); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. and ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge, 1993) and *Rules of Art*; Katherine Giuffre, 'Sandpiles of Opportunity: Success in the Art World', *Social Forces*, vol. 77, no. 3 (1999), 815-32; and Alexander, *Sociology of the Arts*.

[21] Becker, 'Art as Collective Action', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 39 (December 1974), 767-76.

[22] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*.

[23] On the power of myths to shape artists' realities, see Philip Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old: The Ageing of Art and Artists in Italy, 1500-1800* (New Haven and London, 2007), 1-15.

presence in cultural life instituted 'towering new ideals for British artists on social terrain which made their achievement as desirable as it was problematic.'[24] Encouraged by these 'new ideals', the re-formation of the British artist after 1768 cast him (rarely her) as a liberated, self-aware and commercially-disinterested individual, one whose life was entirely devoted to producing liberal art (understood in the period as the most elevated and principled form of art, untainted (in theory) by market conditions and practiced by free-thinking, liberal-minded gentlemen) able to transcend the routine realities of everyday life. As Karen Junod has shown, the concurrent reflorescence of the artist's written biography and surge in arts journalism anchored these exemplary characteristics, or *topoi*, in British culture in ways that had an extraordinary ability to influence artists' outlooks and choices.[25]

Nevertheless, there remains a tendency to regard the artist as a *medium* for these contexts and constructs. This has meant that fundamental questions to do with who these artists were, where they came from, how they emerged, and in what ways they negotiated the possibilities and limitations of their careers, are largely overlooked. As a consequence, we pay too little attention to artists' own experiences of those contexts and constructs, and how those experiences might have conditioned their career choices, actions and artworks. One of this thesis's main aims, therefore, is to confront this neglect and offer one model for rethinking the relationship between an artist's life and art. A sustained, monographic focus on one artist best enables that aim.

In the case of Cotman, this means thinking about the breadth and variety of his working practices, strategies, manoeuvres, actions, techniques, styles and marks. I argue that it is no coincidence that the exceptional marks and manoeuvres that can be detected in the works I consider tend to correspond with moments in Cotman's life that were particularly uncomfortable, ambivalent or in flux, or which coincided with a particular security, satisfaction or (over)confidence. Accordingly, Cotman's artistic variety, whilst a hallmark of British art during the period, registers the need to remain diverse due to his highly distributed working life, which required him to make a virtue out of that necessity in order to negotiate his own ideals with the realities of an art-world career. In other words, Cotman's marks and manoeuvres bear witness to his various responses to changing personal circumstances. That might be, for instance, when he displayed an eagerness to

[24] Monks et al, *Living with the Royal Academy*, 2.
[25] See Karen Junod, *Writing the Lives of Painters*': *Biography and Artistic Identity in Britain, 1760-1810* (Oxford, 2011).

engage with the market but in ways that show him to have misjudged, exceeded or overtly pandered to it, or when he made striking stylistic shifts or marks which appear contradictory or resistant to certain aesthetic dictates being imposed upon him. In short, Cotman seems to have frequently *worked* the personal experiences of his career as the material or impetus for his own artwork. To arrive at a more meaningful history of (Cotman's) art, therefore, it is imperative that we consider the implications of an intelligent return to the ground of the artist as agent, conditioned by sociohistorical forces but not a mere conduit for them, for our visual analyses.

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At this juncture let us revisit Cotman's drawing of the horse, for its unusual subject matter and formal qualities can help elucidate the claim being made here that art bears some relation to the maker's personal experience.

Claiming the centre of the composition is the unshaded negative space of the portfolio, the only accoutrement of the selection of artists' props and materials which is not humanised to imply a limb or a relational feature to the artist's 'body'. Instead, the portfolio is identified as the goods which are being transported. The representation of this object, one ostensibly large enough to carry a sizable number of drawings, may be a direct reference to Cotman's long-term project, the Circulating Portfolio of Drawings from which he lent out his own graphic material to subscribers for copying (discussed in Chapter 3). Launched in Norwich in 1809, the Portfolio initially comprised 600 drawing-copies, which had grown to several thousand by the time he took up his position as Professor of Drawing at King's College in 1834. Initially, these drawings were delivered to the subscribers by Cotman himself who made the more distant journeys on horseback.

The sketchy landscape against which the horse is seen to move serves to thematise the mobility of art and artist in this drawing. Travelling on sketching tours was something the artist was expected to do during this period, providing proof of his experience, knowledge, competence and, even, machismo.[26] Yet for an artist like Cotman, travelling was also a necessity, a means to survive, as the administration of his Circulating Portfolio

[26] See Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York and London, 2009), 145-7, although he concentrates specifically on early nineteenth-century architects.

enterprise demonstrates. Repeatedly changing his street address and region of residence, as well as his artistic role and persona, Cotman was an exceptionally mobile artist whose movements over time and through space responded to changes in his own circumstances. As he moved, so his art was made to move in a variety of innovative ways. Indeed, the drawing of the horse bears the physical signs of a past life as one of Cotman's drawing-copies developed off the back of his Circulating Portfolio. Various points on the horse have been pricked through in a manner which Cotman developed so that his students could mark out the salient points on the surface of blank sheets placed beneath and then join them up before adding the detail.

In his full-time role at King's College, Cotman taught boys of varying artistic ability. And yet, up until (and even during) this post, he had always tried to avoid working solely as a drawing master, a role widely perceived to corrode an artist's professional status, success and ultimately his creativity, not least because teaching drawing to amateurs and children seemed to erode the distinction between master and student.[27] Indeed, the defined, dark and stiff lines delineating the horse's rear may reveal the physical traces of various interventions by his students, as if pencil pressure had been frequently applied to this area in order to leave an impression on their sheets beneath – the smudge around the horse's genitals may be another echo of his students' hands rubbing against the cumulative pencil via copying or a piece of schoolboy rudery subsequently rubbed out.

Throughout his career, Cotman had a difficult relationship with teaching and was keen to maintain a distinction between his own sense of artistic status and the amateur standing of his copyists. This tension appears to find some external manifestation in the horse drawing. With its grubby patina, punctuations and area-specific graphic pressure, it is clear that this drawing was meant to be handled, passed about and used by Cotman's students. Yet such traces of the drawing's functionality jar with its more fluid and accomplished pencil markings, its various status symbols (top hat, maulstick, noble-looking horse and the artist's assured signature linked to the name of a royal institution) and the allusions to aspects of Cotman's own career experience (the theme of travel, painting and the possible reference to the Circulating Portfolio). As the horse appears to levitate on the surface of the page amidst the light, sketchy lines and unresolved marks, the discrepancy between the drawing's use-function and its iconography suspends the drawing between two dialectical states. It is as if Cotman (now in his fifties) is acknowledging the knotty intersection of his multiple identities as a professional artist

[27] To this point, see Smith, *Emergence*, 107-15.

and a drawing master, a London gentleman and a school employee, and questioning what precisely was the value and status of his art.

Such a reading of an artwork in relation to the kinds of artistic experience being raised here is not without its limitations. Firstly, we must be prepared to accept the provisionality of any analysis which addresses the relationship between personal experience and artistic form given that its method is essentially one of close, visual interpretation and relation. Secondly, we should remember that personal experience is given form and acquires meaning through a society's structures and ideologies – for artists that might mean responding to pictorial precedents, consumer economies, expectations of audiences, clients and/or pupils and the academic ideals surrounding artistic identity. A work of art is not the result of an immediate and unmediated externalisation of an artist's subjectivity; art is always retrospective, made *after* an education, conventions or taking on a new role, say. Yet we should also remember that the act of producing art is always inescapably current within an artist's own life; it is *experienced* by the artist when, for example, he sharpens his pencil, alters the position of his body while drawing, or travels long distances to take a subject. Rather than envisage art as an autonomous realm of experience, then, we should consider it as having an indirect relationship to lived experience which, itself, might be reflected upon, responded to, or resisted.[28]

Indeed, whilst it resists analysis, the residue of experience is often to be found most clearly (which is not to say straightforwardly) in those works which bear the marks, motifs, utterances or gaps that most preclude (and might therefore beg) interpretation. Throughout the following five chapters, I have focused on those works and actions which seem to me to pose significant questions in this regard. It has not been my intention to provide a survey of Cotman's entire oeuvre and the reader may be surprised to find certain works absent. Instead, my research interest lies in the complex relationship between Cotman's life and art, leading me to focus on those works and the moments of their production in which that relationship is revealed most overtly as an issue or is otherwise illuminated in some significant form.

[28] Influencing me here is T. J. Clark's pioneering model of the social history of art as described in his *Image of the People* where he addressed the idea of art as bearing symptoms of the maker's personal experience: 'the encounter with history and its specific determinations is made by the artist himself ... How, in a particular case, a content of experience becomes a form, an event becomes an image, boredom becomes its representation, despair becomes *spleen*...' T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London, 1973), 13.

2. The *work* of art

Before outlining the five chapters, I want to shift my attention from the question of how we might approach the work of art in relation to the artist's lived experience, to how we might conceive of the *work* of art: the practice of working as an artist. Indeed, one of this thesis' main aims is to offer a way into thinking about the wider narratives of British artists' careers and the relevance of that enquiry now. In particular, I am interested in how Cotman negotiated his artistic and professional *survival*, a keyword for this thesis and one which may help make more intelligible the multiple moves he made between his boyhood in the 1780s and his death in 1842.

The son of a Norwich haberdasher father and a milliner mother, Cotman was from relatively lowly social origins. As we shall see in Chapter 1, nothing suggests that he or his family had the financial capital, metropolitan connections or links to the art world that might have helped him enter and sustain a career there – kinds of capital that were held by the majority of his artist-contemporaries. The time it took to establish oneself in the art world, the material factors involved in doing so, and the amount of risk that entailed, could all be somewhat alleviated by the possession of artistic, educational, financial and emotional capital, usually inherited from birth. Thus, for an artist like Cotman who had reduced access to particular forms of capital, the stakes of art-world survival were raised dramatically. As we shall see, Cotman's personal situation forced him to negotiate a number of positions and identities simultaneously as well as move repeatedly between different places and spaces as he created new possibilities for himself and his work. Straddling the marketplace and the landscape, the school room and the exhibition room, the patron's house and the private studio, Cotman's working life was distinctly varied. But while necessary for survival, this variety clashed with the singular, solipsistic ideal of an artistic career promoted by the art establishment. Clearly, then, survival in the British art world entailed much more than making ends meet; an artist's survival was about carefully balancing a variety of ideological factors with one's personal needs.[29]

In its broader definition, 'survival' is '[t]he continuing to live after some event ... remaining alive, living on'; '[s]omething that continues to exist after the cessation of

[29] While historians customarily emphasise the economic implications of human survival, they tend to overlook its psychological implications. One example is Laurence Fontaine and Jürgen Schlumbohn, 'Introduction' in Fontaine and Schlumbohn (eds), *Household Strategies for Survival 1600-2000: Fission, Faction and Cooperation* (Cambridge, 2000), 1-18.

something else...'.[30] Survival is the ability to confront life's challenges, to ride its changes of pace, to earn it. But, if survival comes after something, then that something was also once experienced by the survivor. As such, the term can also be understood in relation to a more desperate sense of living in the here and now, of struggling to exist, of clinging onto dear life. There is a bittersweet dualism to survival where life perpetually alternates between a state of having survived and the experience of surviving; an experience bound up with the relentless flux of life's possibilities and perils, of modernity itself.

Conventionally, the moment of modernity is pinpointed to the advent of industrial capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century which saw the effect of what David Harvey has called 'time-space compression', a process whereby the pace of life appears to speed up, shrinking our conception of time and space, and dissolving traditional boundaries between centre and periphery, near and far, past and present.[31] To quote Marshall Berman, modernity from this moment on

> cut[s] across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.[32]

Yet as Miles Ogborn and David Solkin have argued, these kinds of 'crises, confusions and contradictory processes and experiences' were being felt by the close of the eighteenth century when Britain was undergoing profound changes in class structure, urbanisation, technology and population growth.[33] Whilst I do not want to suggest that we can simply map a singular 'moment' of modernity onto a specific date, I do want to propose that the jumbled, multiple and contradictory effects of modernity that Berman and others have located in a later period were, in fact, being experienced by Cotman and his contemporaries.

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[30] 'survival *n.*', *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (1989), https://www.oed.com, accessed 12 September 2013.

[31] See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1989), Nigel Thrift, 'Inhuman Geographies: Landscapes of Speed, Light and Power' in Paul Cloke (ed.), *Writing the Rural: Five Cultural Geographies* (London, 1994), 191-250 and Tim Cresswell, *On the Move, Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York and London, 2006).

[32] Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Harmondsworth, 1988), 15.

[33] Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York, 1998), 2 and see David H. Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven and London).

Shifting back the conventional 'moment of modernity' is important for a thesis concerned with analysing the modernity and multiplicity of an early nineteenth-century artist's career. The origins of the 'modern career' have similarly been located later in the nineteenth century when work became much more regularised as larger industries and mechanised trades replaced old forms of individual and apprentice-based work.[34] Yet as this thesis will show, 'the modern career' – which in the current socioeconomic climate of the early twenty-first century we might broadly characterise as 'mobile', 'boundaryless', 'kaleidoscopic' and 'protean'[35] – already characterised the daily lives of many by 1800. With a slumped wartime economy, rising inflation, growing population and underemployment, the historical reality of work during this period was one in which job insecurity, flux, self-determination, threats of bankruptcy and the need to change place, style, identity and 'voice' were common experiences. The extent of geographical movement undertaken by people who variously shifted their location to find work or occupy new positions is known to have been widespread during the period. Similarly, we know that occupational plurality characterised the working lives of many, whether in the same sector such as the common 'painter and glazier', or multiple sectors as in the late eighteenth-century Bristolian who styled himself 'glover, hosier, parchment-maker, orange-man, and undertaker (entrepreneur)'.[36]

Individual examples such as these are often noted in the secondary literature on work of the long eighteenth century. Yet questions about why the phenomenon occurred on a large scale rarely receives attention at a deeper interpretational level. Moreover, historians tend to focus on the working poor (usually manual labourers or servants) rather than those positioned further up the social scale, admittedly for whom evidence of changing career paths is harder to garner since it requires regular encounter with a recording institution which the more fortunate might not have beyond parish registers. Thus, if we are to look for indicative cases to help set Cotman's working life in its broader historical context, then the distinct lack of scholarship on the fractured character and experience of historic work enables me to say little more than that the varied shape of his career was far from

[34] See David Mitch, John Brown and Marco H. D. van Leeuwen (eds), *The Origins of the Modern Career* (Aldershot, 2004).
[35] To use the categories outlined in Michela Cortini, Giancarlo Tancucci and Estelle M. Morin (eds), *Boundaryless Careers and Occupational Well-Being* (Basingstoke, 2001), 1.
[36] Quoted in Penelope Corfield, 'Defining Urban Work' in Corfield and Derek Keene (eds), *Work in Towns 850-1850* (Leicester, London and New York, 1990), 207-30 216 and 226, f.n. 50. On job plurality and its related spatial mobility in Britain see John Rule, *The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Industry* (London, 1981), Andrew Miles and David Vincent (eds), *Occupational Change and Social Mobility in Europe, 1840-1940* (Manchester, 1993), Fontaine and Schlumbohn, *Household Strategies for Survival*, and the London Lives project: https://www.londonlives.org/static/Work.jsp.

unusual. In any case, it would be anachronistic to transfer insights from other job sectors directly onto Cotman's 'story' given that artists' careers are comparatively 'non-standard' and '*risky*', making them 'difficult to count in a meaningful statistical sense.'[37] To get a better sense of the common or uncommon character of Cotman's working life, we might look more productively to the careers of artists born in and around his own birth year – 1782 – and who worked in a similar genre (mainly landscape) and medium (predominantly watercolour). As Greg Smith has observed, 'the watercolour domain was structured by a series of distinct practices' in which 'a fragmented pattern of employment was the norm for the period, even for successful members of the SPWC [Society of Painters in Water Colours]',[38] a condition lamented by the critic Robert Hunt in 1815 when he wrote of the SPWC's members as being:

> compelled by the wars, and corruption, and the financial expenditure of this country of taxation, to appropriate a considerable part of their time in the theoretic teaching of others, instead of their own uninterrupted practice.[39]

Cotman's friend, John Varley (*b*. 1778) was one of those watercolourists whose artistic practice was constantly interrupted by teaching and other pedagogically-inflected roles such as producing material for drawing manuals or publishing art treatises. By his late twenties, Varley was teaching many of the rising generation of landscape artists including William Mulready, John Linnell and Copley Fielding as well as affluent amateurs. He simultaneously made artwork for prestigious patrons and submitted the largest number of watercolours by any such artist to the exhibitions of the SPWC (of which he was a co-founder), their sales bringing him vast financial return. In 1812, however, his circumstances changed with the collapse of the SPWC, its demise due to its own internal instabilities as well as the downturn in the national economy which affected the contemporary art market.[40] While Varley quickly reformed the Society, his income waned while the number of watercolours he submitted to the new Society of Painters in Oil and

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[37] This is largely because career success involves formal qualifications and affiliations, material rewards, and issues of perception (of the self and by peers) in unpredictable ways. See Alexander, *Sociology of the Arts*, 134, Judith Adler, 'Artists' Job Market Experiences', *The Journal of Arts Management and Law*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 1983), 177-182, 177 and 181, Simpson, *SoHo*, and, more specifically to our period, Martin Myrone, 'William Etty: 'a Child of the Royal Academy" in Monks et al, *Living with the Royal Academy*, 171-94, which explores 'the fundamentally contradictory and conflicted nature of the artist and, most importantly, the potential for self-destructiveness, awkwardness and failure as characteristics of artistic identity' in relation to the artist, William Etty (172).

[38] Smith, *Progress and Professions: Competing Practices in the Watercolour Medium, 1795-1824*, PhD thesis (Courtauld Institute of Art, 1997), 18.

[39] Robert Hunt in *The Examiner*, 30 April 1815, 285-6.

[40] On the demise of the Society's first 'phase', see Smith, *Progress and Professions*, 78-93.

Water Colours (SPOWC) fell dramatically, as did the Society's overall profits. As his career and finances were thrown into flux, Varley diversified his work, turning to teaching and publishing printed drawing manuals for artists and amateurs, and the production of watercolours more commercially in-tune with the popular demand for highly-finished surfaces, classical compositional arrangements and moral or literary content. Varley's financial situation nevertheless worsened (exacerbated by his nine dependents) and in 1820 he was declared bankrupted and gaoled briefly in the Fleet Prison.[41]

Many others, such as William Havell (*b.* 1782) and David Cox (*b.* 1783), who were also members of the SPWC, made multiple geographical shifts in their careers, not only to fulfil the obligatory sketching 'Grand Tour' but to improve their status, patronage and possibilities of belonging. Cox travelled repeatedly between his hometown of Birmingham, London, Hereford and numerous continental sites, gathering material, exhibiting his watercolours, holding a handful of teaching positions and producing works for publication in various antiquarian volumes. Like Varley, however, Cox began to experience financial problems around 1812 with the simultaneous collapse of the Associated Artists in Water Colour society (of which he was the President) and reformulation of the SPOWC (which he joined at that moment).[42] Havell moved more extensively, first from his native Reading to Wales on a sketching tour with Varley's brother Cornelius, before settling in London in 1804 where he co-founded the SPWC. In 1816, following a dispute with the British Institution over an unaccepted and subsequently unsold oil painting, he agreed to accompany William Earl Amherst, 2nd Baron of Amherst, as draughtsman on an embassy voyage to China. However, when Amherst was dismissed for insulting the Chinese court, Havell was forced to find new meaning for his geographical displacement. He travelled to India and, by 1820, was established as a portrait painter in Madras, remaining geographically mobile for a further six years. Within two years of returning to London and recovering from bad health, Havell departed again, this time to Italy for two years. The last decades of his career were beset by financial problems.[43]

[41] See C. M. Kauffman, *John Varley (1778-1842)* (London, 1984), 56.
[42] According to his biographer, Cox even had to borrow funds from one of his pupils. Nathaniel Neil Solly, *Memoir of the Life of David Cox* (London, 1873), 32.
[43] His savings were lost in the failure of an Indian bank. In 1856, Havell eventually became a recipient of the Royal Academy's Turner Fund for the relief of poor artists. See Lucy Peltz, 'William Havell' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12625?docPos=1, accessed 4 November 2013.

Briefly sketching out the various mobilities that characterised the working lives of just three of Cotman's contemporaries does not grasp the full picture of artists' career experiences during the period. Nonetheless, these, together with a glance at the careers of a number of contemporary artists, show that a similarly varied career pattern and, with it, fluctuating personal circumstances and frequent fits of financial instability, were the rule rather than the exception. That said, the timing and character of Cotman's various positional and geographical moves appear to have differed in important respects from the majority of his contemporaries, and in ways which might actually have been more enabling. Varley, Cox and Havell all stumbled in their careers primarily due to the demise of London's two watercolour societies to which each had pinned their colours. In 1806, Cotman failed to gain SPWC membership and in any case lacked the financial capital, artistic membership and familial connections to the art world shared by Varley, Cox and Havell. He thus seems to have judged it best at that point to cut his losses in London and try his luck elsewhere (Norwich) and in other ways (painting in oils, etching and exhibiting at other places). By the time Varley, Cox and Havell were forced to respond to the watercolour society crises by recouping lost funds and finding alternative ways to sell and show their work, Cotman was already adept at making a virtue out of necessity and mobilising his art in new ways. Ironically, then, Cotman's lowly social origins might have provided the impetus for the extraordinary inventiveness and displays of ambition on which the following chapters provide focus. This may, perhaps, explain why Cotman and his art remain art-historically and commercially germane today. [44]

Given the struggles, competition and flux that characterised the early nineteenth-century British artist's career – of which Cotman's provides an acute example – why, we might ask, did an unprecedented number of individuals enter the profession? One answer might be found in the distinct bourgeois character of the British art world which, as Martin Myrone has shown, was composed of artists who were broadly middle class (two-thirds to be precise) and whose bourgeois lived experience shaped their attitude to the profession:

> ...the great risks inherent in the artistic career, and the fact that the rewards of success were symbolic (in the form of personal independence and social status) at least as much as material (i.e.

[44] Influencing me here is Martin Myrone's observation that those artists from relatively lowly social origins who lacked the financial capital or direct links to the metropolis or art world might be those who ultimately endure in art history 'as an object of study and art-market interest'. Myrone, 'A child of the Royal Academy' in Monks et al, *Living with the Royal Academy*, 171-94, 183.

> money) might be said to be particular to the middle-class, where the desire for personal autonomy was a defining feature. [45]

Similarly, Bourdieu argued that the artist's social profile tends to be bourgeois, attended by specifically middle-class dispositions:

> ...like audacity and indifference to material profit, or a sense of social orientation and the art of foreseeing new hierarchies, which incline a person to head for the most exposed outposts of the avant-garde and towards investments which are the riskiest because they are ahead of demand....[46]

According to Myrone, and Bourdieu before him, then, being an artist is the iconic career of autonomy, and autonomy is the value almost always associated with a middle-class conception of life and careers. In the early nineteenth century, the seductive power of autonomy contributed to the bourgeoisification of the art world and came to define the attitude of the artist.

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In recent years there has been an intellectual concern with the modern career, artistic or otherwise. Careers now commonly lack linearity and associated predictability; workers have to move more frequently across and between different organisations, places or new forms of work during their lifetimes.[47] As the global economy buckles, the political terrain shifts, technology is reconfigured, and the relationship between supply and demand is recalibrated, issues of qualification, ambition, trajectory and achievement have become problematised. Rather than how much financial gain one receives during one's career (which, we might say, is currently regarded as a rather vulgar subject in the non-financial sectors) the focus has shifted to the career itself, infusing it with an aura which drives a fascination with professional trajectories. We now talk of certain workers as being 'career driven'; by and large career success is measured in terms of flexibility, position and the ability to ride the wave of job market flux, together with quality and skill.[48] Top-down emphasis is increasingly placed on entrepreneurialism, dedication, adaption and self-direction (including internships and zero-hour contracts). Richard

[45] Myrone, 'William Etty: 'A child of the Royal Academy" in Monks et al, *Living with the Royal Academy*, 171-94, 181.
[46] Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 262
[47] See Arne L. Kalleberg, 'Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 74, no. 1 (February 2009), 1-22.
[48] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven and London, 2008).

Sennett has observed how workers 'are asked to behave nimbly, to be open to change on short notice, to take risks continually, to become ever less dependent on regulations and formal procedures', and thus to willingly embrace the flux of the modern everyday.[49]

Beyond the mainstream, flux theory has given weight to the exhilarating opportunities said to be offered by the new capitalism. Gilles Deleuze embraced the de-territorialising effects of flux, claiming that it frees and empowers the individual to redefine and re-territorialise themselves.[50] Yet other commentators, notably Terry Eagleton and Slavoj Žižek, have provided a retort to flux's positive embrace, arguing that those who provide it with a positive sheen are effectively complicit with the ideologists of today's fast capitalism.[51] They draw attention to the systematising totality of speed-based modernity which corrodes personal character and disorientates societies, particularly victimising those who may not be able to ride rapid ebbs and flows so easily. While '[w]e may forget about totality', says Eagleton, by internalising it and going with the flow, 'totality, for good or ill, will not forget about us, even in our most microscopic meditations.'[52] Modernity does not go away; everyone must contend with its paradoxes and problems. Those who struggle most with its requirements (due perhaps to diminished forms of capital) are nevertheless forced to do so. The development of certain coping mechanisms, nomadic dispositions and strategic moves are therefore imperative for survival. In this sense, Cotman's story of survival in the British art world offers evidence for the socially disorientating consequences of modernity that precede our present-day conceptualisations.

How Cotman and his artwork responded to and were affected by such consequences of working within modernity can be usefully considered through the prism of resistance,

[49] Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York, 1998).
[50] See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, Constantin V. Boundas (ed.) (New York, 1990 [1969]).
[51] See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990) and *After Theory* (2003) and Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London, 2004). See also Charles Leadbeater, *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy* (London, 1999), Charles Handy, *The Future of Work* (Oxford, 1984) and Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York, 2002) which promote a positive spin on the modern-day 'portfolio' career.
[52] Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 346.

which serves to deconstruct the notion of the artist as a singular, easily-graspable being.[53] Right the way through Cotman's art and career we can see the effects of resistance at work; they are the sites at which the symptoms of an internal grumble, personal predicament, instability or struggle with his survival in a constantly changing art world were played out in multiple ways. In Chapter 2, for example, we see how through his mark-making Cotman began to disobey certain stylistic and behavioural expectations that were being placed upon him during moments of personal ambivalence; in Chapter 3, we witness him resisting straightforward categorisation as an artist; whilst in Chapter 4, he pushes back against the implications of working 'collaboratively' with his patrons through a powerful kind of architectural representation. Resistance is also registered in Cotman's looseness, taking the word in its multiple significations: in, for example, his varying lack of picture finish, pictorial adherence to 'truth', combination of and experimentation with a variety of different materials and mark-making, simultaneity of practice, fluidity of identity and in our inability *now* to pin him down as a particular 'kind' of artist (contra the conventional 'watercolourist' tag given to him by his biographers). As historians of British art are becoming increasingly concerned with the various ways in which art gets made in modernity, the art and career of John Sell Cotman provides a compelling topic for research.

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I have approached the issues outlined here through five chapters which treat Cotman's career chronologically and are structured around the different locations in which that career was played out. Chapter 1 examines Cotman's early career trajectory in Norwich and London. Working outwards from Bourdieu's argument that social origins matter in making possible artistic careers (in not wholly predictable ways), I begin with an archaeology of Cotman's social beginnings in his native city in order to account for how the son of a regional shopkeeper with no apparent links to the world of visual culture emerged as an ambitious artist in the London art world. As a young London-based artist, Cotman took a number of positions between which he shuttled, adapted and readapted as

[53] The relationship between work, representation and resistance (with particular reference to William Blake's poetry) is productively explored in Bill Readings, 'Mobile supplement II: work' in *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London, 1991), 140-53. On resistance as 'line of flight' to the modern-day experience of economic austerity and uncertainty about work and employment in the creative sectors, see Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* (Cambridge and Malden, 2016).

he diversified his practice, skills and experience. Via interlocking analyses of each of these positions, the social environments which attended them and the artworks he produced, I problematise the singular, untroubled and progressive narrative of artists' career trajectories that continues to dominate the writing on artists. These analyses will also show what an artist of Cotman's social profile had to do in order to emerge and survive in a competitive and decidedly middle-class art world. A closing account of his fleeting and injurious encounter with the SPWC in 1806 and his return to Norwich will demonstrate just how unpredictable the role of an artist could be.

In Chapter 2, I turn my attention to the travels Cotman made beyond London during the same period in which he was emerging in the capital's art world. The main focus is given to the three visits he made to the estate of the landed Cholmeley family in North Yorkshire. I argue that his experiences of the social scenarios in which Cotman found himself in the company of the Cholmeleys and their friends gave rise to an ambivalence which threw into question the character of their patronage and, in turn, the status of his professional and personal identity. How this uncertainty contributed to a noticeable shift in the character of his artwork between the years 1803 and 1805 is one of this chapter's presiding questions.

In light of the findings presented in Chapter 2, the third chapter will pick up where it left off at the conclusion of Chapter 1, at the point at which Cotman left London for Norwich at the end of 1806. My principle consideration is how he presented himself in his hometown and what kind of manoeuvres he made in order to relaunch his career within the particular cultural landscape of Norwich. Via an in-depth analysis of the mechanics of the Norwich art world, I will show how Cotman capitalised on the possibilities the city could offer him while simultaneously having to confront the complexities of being an artist there. I argue that he had to manage both the potential and the limits of Norwich by continually reassessing and altering his artistic identity and output.

After six years in Norwich, Cotman moved to Great Yarmouth to become the drawing master to the family of the banker and art patron, Dawson Turner. The salary and part-time hours of this role enabled him to travel extensively within East Anglia and also in Normandy, whilst experimenting with different printing and publication techniques. The artistic results of these travels and experiments were a number of etched volumes of architectural subject matter, with Turner playing an active part in their production, including the writing of the volumes' letterpress. Two of these volumes, the *Architectural*

Antiquities of Norfolk and the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, form the focus of Chapter 4 which examines the possibilities and the tensions of Cotman's collaboration with Turner and, subsequently, a wider group of stakeholders involved in the works' production. The different implications these social intersections and expectations had on Cotman's artistic identity, experience of practice and artwork is my overriding preoccupation.

The closing chapter evaluates the last two decades of Cotman's career in Norwich and London, years which saw him self-consciously reposition himself in relation to fine art, his work characterised by a high colour key, eclectic thematic range and an emphasis on materiality. These years also saw Cotman identify himself as a teacher, first at a drawing school which he opened in Norwich and subsequently at King's College School in London where he became Professor of Drawing and Perspective. The character of his output and practice was therefore split quite dramatically during this period. I examine this split through representative examples of his work in relation to a set of issues connected to his status as a mature artist and related issues of reputation and legacy. Cotman died in 1842 at the age of sixty. As a kind of natural coda, I ask how his career was conceived in the immediate wake of his death.

To conclude, I review this thesis's overarching argument, methodological approach and its relevance to developments in historiography and art history today.

Chapter 1

Origins, Emergence and the Positioning of Artistic Identity: Cotman in Norwich and London 1782-1806

Let us begin with an image, an image of the young artist temporarily returned home to the house of his parents (Fig. 3). Clad in boots and coat as if only just alighted from the stagecoach from London, only his top-hat is removed to signal a willingness to relinquish his metropolitan guise and readjust to the simple cottage environment from which he came. Placing the hat between his thighs as he pulls up a stool, the artist appears alert and animated. In mid-pivot and forward shift, he leans affectionately towards the older man (his father), who appears to do the same, bearings which are reflected in the lean-to ceiling above. Tottering on the edge of his high stool, the father simultaneously presides over a seated lady, no doubt his milliner wife and the artist's mother, with whom he appears to be in the midst of some interchange over textiles. As if having walked straight back into the familiar family business, the artist appears to take an interest in his parents' occupation (haberdashery and millinery). Meanwhile, to the right, a dog stands to rest its chin on his thigh, clearly having missed his presence. With all four paws firmly planted on the ground and head pressing down on the young man's leg, its gesture of loyalty serves to stabilise the artist as he twists and leans forward on his stool.

Above and around the pyramidal group presides a mismatch of plates, dishes, tea pots and other wares, lined up along the wall-join and mantel and spilling onto the ledge below. Seemingly intended for display, this procession of crockery signifies the results of decades of conviviality and care but also of social aspiration. The objects are cluttered, awkwardly placed and over-present within the modest interior with its exposed rafters and irregular flagstone floor. Over at the hearth, something appears to be cooking in a pot, emanating an air of hospitality. Yet none of these domestic elements sit at the centre of the image. Instead, the dark patch of the artist's clothed elbow claims the compositional fulcrum of what appears to be an image about his own story; a joint or hinge in the narrative.

♦

This watercolour bears the inscription, 'JS Cotman Aug 22.1801', and was made during the artist's annual summertime visit to his parent's haberdashers shop in Norwich, Cotman's teenage home. Since leaving his native city two years previously, the 19-year-old had been living and working in London. He nevertheless maintained social links with Norwich, leading to his honorary election to the local pseudo-masonic fraternity, the Society of United Friars, in 1801.[1] 'In consideration of his extraordinary talents as an Artist', the members decided that 'the usual expense of admission to the Society should be dispensed with' and substituted for his 'masterly sketches of scenes in Wales', where Cotman had toured the previous summer.[2] Thus, while the young Cotman was evidently well-regarded by the educated professionals of Norwich, their acceptance of his art as an alternative to cash signifies the comparatively unusual nature of the artist's profession.

♦

Returning to the image, the artist appears as an ample figure of somewhat disproportionate scale, one who is self-assured but perhaps straining to please, and poised between familial familiarity and performative behaviour, ease and awkwardness. We might read these contradictory positions not as technical flaws in the artist's self-representation, but as deliberately self-characterising – an individual who does not sit still. His pose is about readjustment, not only to social circumstance and geographical place, but to himself in new or revisited space. This image thus dramatises the performance of dual roles, ones which did not always make for a smooth or seamless demeanour or representation but which were necessary for personal and professional survival. This opening chapter is about those initial and divergent positions: the shifts and hinges that characterised Cotman's nascent career.

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In writing the lives of artists, biographers and monographers typically jump to the 'interesting' episode where their subject assumes the position of 'Artist' and actively pursues their chosen career path. The question of how such individuals actually became artists is, at best, romanticised and, at worst, overlooked entirely. This chapter addresses

[1] The Society was founded in 1785 by William Beechey, then resident in Norwich, and the proprietor of the *Norfolk Chronicle*, William Stevenson, who proposed Cotman for honorary membership.
[2] Minutes, 27 January 1801, Col/9/2, Norfolk Records Office (hereafter NRO).

this question head-on in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of what Cotman had to do in order to emerge and survive in a competitive, congested and decidedly middle-class art world. My founding premise is two-fold: that social origins matter in conditioning and making possible – though not always predictable – the emergence, shape and passage of artists' careers; and that artists rarely invent themselves instantaneously or emerge harmoniously in an ascending pattern. Rather, the unpredictability and 'unreasonable logic' of their profession requires them to straddle multiple occupations, make positional swerves, and to interpret and internalise myriad and conflicting identities.[3] Over three parts, this chapter argues that Cotman's early career in Norwich and London elicits a highly fragmented entity, one which became widespread during the period but was more pronounced for Cotman due to his specific social origins.

1. Origins

The first part of this chapter examines Cotman's early movements in Norwich and considers what it was about his background that encouraged him to follow both the profession of an artist and the route to London.

John Sell Cotman was born on 16 May 1782 in Norwich, the first son of a barber, Edmund Cotman (1759-1843), and a milliner, Ann Sell (1763-1835). While Edmund's forbears are unidentifiable, we know that Ann was the daughter of James Sell (1737-1800), a woolcomber-turned-yarnmaker of Saffron Walden and Elizabeth Archer (1736-1811) who was from a line of Essex butchers (see an updated family tree in Appendix 1).[4] Edmund and Ann married in Norwich in 1781 at the Church of St Mary Coslany, a relatively impoverished parish north of the river Wensum. This was the same church in which John Sell was baptised fifteen months later.[5] In 1783, the young family moved to the neighbouring parish of St George Colegate, another working class area, where they remained until at least 1787. Parish records show that over the next five years the Cotmans moved eastwards along the river within the slightly more up-market St Clements parish.[6] By 1793, they were living south of the Wensum in centrally-situated St Andrew's where

[3] Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 82.
[4] Will of James Sell, MS PROB 11.1353, 1798, proved 1801. The family tree in Appendix 1 is developed from that published in 1982 in Moore, *Cotman*, 17.
[5] 3 April 1781 and 9 June 1782, Parish Records, NRO.
[6] Three more of Cotman's siblings were baptised here.

Cotman, now eleven, enrolled at Norwich Grammar School.[7] These moves are plotted on two maps of Norwich in Figures 4 and 5.

The Cotmans' migration from north to central Norwich was accompanied by various shifts in Edmund's occupation. Like his older brother John, who had died in 1788, Edmund switched from being a barber to a hairdresser, the latter involving work with artificial wigs rather than natural hair which necessitated interaction with a more affluent clientele.[8] Around 1798, he shifted profession again, this time to haberdashery, a seemingly more durable trade for economic survival following William Pitt's 1798 tax on wig powder in an (unsuccessful) bid to help finance the war with France. In 1801, Edmund advertised his occupation in the *Norwich Directory*, giving his shop's address as 18 Cockey Lane, a thoroughfare off the north-east corner of Norwich's central marketplace.[9]

Although small, these geographical and occupational moves are significant, not only in terms of the family's commercial ascent but in what they can tell us about their social orientation.[10] Whilst only a few hundred yards south of the river-bordering streets of Coslany, Colgate and St Clements, St Andrews was a social world away from these parishes' population of grocers, throwsterers, barbers and the like.[11] The Cotmans' socially-upward movement across parish boundaries thus placed them within closer proximity to Norwich's symbolic associations with mercantilism, fashion and culture. This meant that from around the age of eleven, Cotman was living on the doorstep of a concentrated pool of artists, auctioneers, dealers, binders, framemakers, gilders, engravers, printsellers,[12]

[7] Cotman's youngest sister Elizabeth was christened in St Andrew's Church in 1792. The Court Corporation Records for Norwich Grammar School contain an entry for 3 August 1793 which shows the enrolment of Cotman as 'John, son of Edward Cotman, Hairdresser of St Andrew's Parish', no. 36, 1789-96, NRO.

[8] See Rachel Lara Cohen, 'Rethinking 'mobile work': boundaries of space, time and social relation in the working lives of mobile hairstylists', *Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 24, no. 1 (March 2010), 65-84.

[9] Edmund seems to have taken this premises in 1792, running it as a hairdressers until 1798 when he changed it to a haberdashery.

[10] Such manoeuvres are also symptomatic of a broader trend amongst the period's urban non-elite. See Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), 289, John A. Phillips, 'Working and Moving in early-nineteenth-century provincial towns', and Penelope Corfield, 'Defining Urban Work' in Corfield and Derek Keene, (eds), *Work in Towns 850-1850* (Leicester, 1990), 207-30 and Andrew Miles and David Vincent (eds), *Building European Society* (Manchester, 1993), 18.

[11] On the fine social gradations in Norwich's urban landscape, see Penelope Corfield, *Towns, trade, religion and radicalism: the Norwich perspective on English history*, PhD thesis (University of East Anglia, 1980), 564. On social fluidity within classed urban space, see Andrew Miles and David Vincent (eds), *Building European Society: Occupational and Social Mobility in Europe, 1840-1940* (Manchester, 1993).

[12] Analysing the *Norwich Directory* for the years 1783 and 1801 reveals at least two dozen printsellers in 1783, which rose by over a third by 1801.

publishers,[13] stationers and booksellers, the last of whom sold colours, brushes, paper and other artists' materials, all of which we can imagine helped him to imbibe a disposition towards practical art. As Penelope Corfield has argued, cities have the ability to condition their residents' social experiences, linguistic ties and everyday perceptions.[14] Norwich was a proud city prone to cultural aspiration, self-improvement, even precociousness, qualities that the various geographical and social manoeuvres undertaken by the Cotmans between 1781 and 1798 can be seen to signify. The potential impact of these manoeuvres on Cotman as a child should therefore not be underestimated.

Whilst a historic subject's lived experience is difficult to recapture, a sense of how Cotman perceived, interpreted and assimilated his family's positional pivots and geographical distinctions may be detected in a wash drawing he made in Norwich at the age of twelve. It is Cotman's earliest surviving artwork (Fig. 6) and depicts an irregular-shaped buttressed building alone on a quiet lane in apparently rural surroundings. The dainty brushstrokes with which the building and those surroundings are delineated recall the technique of artists like Paul Sandby (1731-1809) and Henry Edridge (1768-1821). However, the pains to which Cotman went in delineating the criss-crosses of the building's roof tiles and the over-methodical attempt to articulate spatial recession in the straight diagonal of the roof also indicate a forced sense of effort characteristic of artistic juvenilia. The oblique swipes and dark inky blots on the dirt lane (now partially obscured by surface abrasion) imply cart and human tracks and thus a relatively high footfall. Following the lane is a fence, behind which stands a haystack or thatched outbuilding which is compositionally complemented at the opposite end by hanging washing: quotidian traces of those who occupy the cottage. The door at an ajar and the open window provide further signs of life, indicating a temporary interlude between work and rest.

Cotman's decision to represent a mundane building on a dirt-track lane and to include the motifs of drying washing and haystack/outbuilding implies a somewhat precocious, aestheticising attitude towards his local surroundings. This, in turn, might signify a degree of social distancing between Cotman, now of central Norwich, and the houses and inhabitants of marginal existence from which he had come. This cleavage may further register something of his own father's aspiration for urban self-improvement and social mobility,

[13] Three doors down from 18 Cockey Lane lived Richard Bacon (1745-1812), the proprietor of the liberal local newspaper, the *Norwich Mercury*.
[14] See Corfield, 'The identity of a regional capital: Norwich since the eighteenth century' in P. Kooij and P. Pellenbarg (eds), *Regional Capitals: Past, Present, and Future Prospects* (Assen, 1994), 142.

which appears to have been absorbed, assimilated and expressed here by the young Cotman with ink and colours on a sheet of paper.

The materials from which to recoup how Cotman learnt the practical skills of making art are non-existent: there is nothing to suggest that he or his parents paid for formal training from local drawing masters such as William Stevenson (1741-1821), Charles Hodgson (1769-1856), John Crome (1768-1821) or Robert Ladbrooke (1769-1842). And while Cotman's headmaster Dr Samuel Forster had artistic leanings, later becoming the first vice-president of the Norwich Society of Artist (the exhibiting society which Cotman would later join), there is no evidence that a drawing master was on the school's staff at this time.[15] In the year before his death, Cotman boasted to his long-term patron, Dawson Turner (1775-1858), that he had been 'born apparently with a love of my Art, as I never knew the time when I was not fond of drawing, and I have often heard my dear Mother say I drew "tips" [ships] long before I could speak.'[16] This quote was employed by Sydney Kitson as evidence for the young Cotman's 'receptive and creative' temperament,[17] and yet it is in the vein of nineteenth-century tropes retrospectively fabricated by artists of their early years, their art having been borne of natural inclination rather than the product of external kinds of impetuses, such as a physical proximity to cultural vicinities for which I have been arguing here.

We might look more productively to the work of Pierre Bourdieu who saw social origins as a crucial determinant of an individual's career path. From their youth, Bourdieu argued, individuals are conditioned by primary experiences and external circumstances such as their class origins, physical locations, social environments and family background. These experiences and circumstances conspire to provide individuals with their own set of socially-learnt skills, conceptual schemes and dispositions that guide their life strategies and manoeuvres, what Bourdieu termed the *habitus*.[18] The *habitus* does not manifest itself as conscious behaviour, nor does it lead individuals to head for a determined end goal. Instead, as they move through social time and space, individuals acquire a modified *habitus*, fashioned by their own mobility, experiences and the positions they take in the world. While not conscious, these dispositions are relatively predictable because they tend to be determined by an individual's *earliest* experiences, which have important class implications.

[15] See Richard Harries, Paul Cattermole and Peter Mackintosh, *A History of Norwich School: King Edward VI School at Norwich* (Norwich, 1991), 191.
[16] John Sell Cotman (hereafter JSC) to Dawson Turner (hereafter DT), 12 August 1841, MC 2487/54, NRO.
[17] Kitson, *Life*, 4.
[18] See Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 87.

As we have seen, the Cotmans were a lower-middle class family of mercers, and while we might imagine their eldest son's entry into the art world to have been habitually conditioned by his father's evidently aspirational character, his upbringing, social milieu and earliest experiences were likely to have been very different from the son of an artist or a more socially-elevated member of society who had a more predictable link to that world. Bourdieu claimed that early social prohibitions or opportunities play a key role in limiting or encouraging the potential of an individual's career passage: the more promising the initial situations through which an individual's dispositions operate, the more predictably promising their career is likely to be. It follows that the early nineteenth-century art world was generally composed of the sons of individuals connected to the world of visual arts or those with metropolitan associations and who therefore possessed the material capital to support their artist-children in what was an unpredictable and risky occupation.[19] In their social origins, values and trajectories, these individuals were generally middle class which, as discussed in the Introduction, led to a bourgeoisification of the British art world – a lower-middle or working class presence in this world was extremely scarce. Thus, for a boy who was both geographically and socially distanced from London and its art world, and with no evidence to suggest that his family had social links with this city or with the visual arts, Cotman's move to the capital in 1799 appears notably unpredictable.[20]

Taking a sample of native Norfolk artists who were born around the same year as Cotman helps to frame his departure to London more broadly. This sample is analysed in Appendix 2 and examines how typical Cotman's move was in the context of the career paths of his contemporaries. What we can initially glean from this sample is a pattern which shows that

[19] Influencing me here is Bourdieu's analysis of the highly ambiguous social category of 'artist', an inherently risky, contested and non-normative occupation which invariably inverts the 'reasonable' logic of success and failure. Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 214-77. Also see Myrone, 'William Etty: 'a Child of the Royal Academy" in Monks, *Living with the Royal Academy*, 171-94.

[20] Cotman's biographers have pointed to 1798 as the year in which he left Norwich for London, but three pieces of primary evidence push the date forward to 1799. An entry in Joseph Farington's diary, dated 15 December 1799 notes that 'Dr Monro is bringing forward another man, who comes from Norwich.' (Joseph Farington, 15 December 1799 in Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (eds), *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 6 vols, (New Haven and London, 1979), vol. 4, 1326 (hereafter FD with date, volume and page references). As no other native Norwich artist is known to have been connected to Dr Monro (Cotman's future employer), it is likely that this man was Cotman rather than Norwich-born artist, Joseph Clover, who was in his hometown until 1802 when he moved to Aylsham. Secondly, a letter written by Cotman to Dawson Turner in 1841 recounts an early dining experience 'with a party made at Mr. Norton's, Soho Square, my first acquaintance in London at the age of seventeen' (see JSC to DT, 12 August 1841, MC 2487/54, NRO). Lastly, advertisements for a School of Drawing and one-man exhibition which Cotman staged upon resettling in Norwich in late 1806 refers to his 'labours of seven years', which puts Cotman's arrival in London as 1799 (*Norwich Mercury*, 20 December 1806). Following these references, I shall refer to the date of Cotman's departure from Norwich as 1799.

those artists who were born into the upper or middle 'division' of the middle class were more likely to move to London than those from families whose occupations, connections and status were further down the social scale.[21] Following the ratios outlined in the Appendix 2, we can surmise that those artists from a 'middle' or 'upper' middle-class background with professional family standing had the financial and/or cultural capital to reduce the risk inherent in the act of leaving their Norfolk birthplace to embark on the intrinsically risky vocation of an artist. In turn, we can reasonably speculate that the smaller numbers of artists born into the 'lower division' – some of whose fathers were Norwich tradesmen and whose comparative national networks were limited, if non-existent, trained in their native city because they lacked the social influences, personal resources and symbolic capital to pursue the London route. What the sample shows us, therefore, is that the majority of Norfolk-born artists who came from comparatively privileged, professional and connected backgrounds were more likely to behave homologously by moving to London than the son of a Norwich haberdasher.[22]

In sampling with a modest control group such as this, care should be taken not to insist that the acknowledged existence or lack of connections, social origins or material means either compelled or blocked these Norfolk artists' entry into the London art world. Nor should we overlook the fact that those Norfolk-born artists whose families were rooted in the lower-middle or working classes had a common starting point to artists elsewhere who came from similar social backgrounds but who also entered the art world – two frequently cited examples being J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) and Thomas Girtin (1775-1802) who were sons of a London barber and brushmaker respectively.[23] However, Turner and Girtin were granted an immediate advantage over non-London artists, particularly those sharing their social lot, because of their physical proximity to the metropolitan art world. It followed that the likelihood of provincial-born artists setting up in London depended on their social genetics, a significant point which the sample findings corroborate but which Cotman's move to London complicates.

[21] In the nineteenth century, 'middle class' encompassed a wide social demographic from shopkeepers to minor gentry. For this reason, Richard Altick's identification of middle class 'divisions' can be useful in designating different strata within the middle class. By Atick's classifications, the 'upper division' includes professions such as merchants and brokers, the 'middle division' incorporates clergymen, professional artists, architects and insurance agents, while the 'lower division' comprises tradesmen, artisans and bookkeepers. Richard D. Altick, *Writers, Readers and Occasions: Selected Essays on Victorian literature and Life* (London, 1988), 99.

[22] 'Though it is impossible for all (or even two) members of the same class to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for the members of that class', Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 59-60.

[23] That said, Girtin's mother remarried a pattern draughtsman after her husband's death in 1778.

Clearly, then, there was a significant social distance between Cotman and the majority of those contemporary Norfolk-born artists who did make the one hundred mile journey to London. He was distanced geographically and socially from its art world, had seemingly little in the way of national or artistic connections, no familial precedent to indicate that he already had a model career to follow, and was about three years younger than the average age of the London-bound artists cited in Appendix 2. As such, Cotman's departure for London was comparatively atypical.

Financially speaking, it is unknown how Cotman was able to leave Norwich for London, then accommodating a population just shy of 900,000.[24] Almost twenty-five times smaller, Norwich was distinctively local in its demographic, making it rare for members of the city's homogenous residential community to leave for long periods of time.[25] Three Norwich stagecoaches did, however, depart regularly for London, including the two Mail Carriages which set out daily from the marketplace. Traversing ten miles of agricultural hinterland before reaching the start of a ninety mile stint along highways, the journey terminated the following day at the Golden Cross coaching inn at Charing Cross.

2. Emergence

The first piece of documentary evidence that firmly locates Cotman in London is the RA catalogue for 1800 in which his name appears against the address 28 Gerrard Street, a three-storey house in Soho, not far from Charing Cross. Sprawling north-westerly from the RA and Society of Artists on the Strand, Soho's labyrinth of streets accommodated a number of artistic and literary types, recently having included Thomas Hearne (1744-1817), Henry Edridge, Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827), Michael 'Angelo' Rooker (1746-1801) and Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), as well as a plethora of print shops and publishers. Located at the south of the parish, Gerrard Street had a fifty-year association with London's key cultural figures, many of whom had congregated at the Turks Head Tavern (founded 1754), the pub in which the Society of Artists was publicly launched in 1759, the initial meetings of Dr Johnson's (1709-84) 'Club' had taken place, and the weekly 'Friday Nights Club' of Royal Academicians was held during the Academy Season. Unsurprisingly, a whole host of artists, craftsmen, jewellers, writers, publishers

[24] See the *London Directory* for 1801. In the same year, Norwich had an estimated 37,000 inhabitants.
[25] See Corfield, 'The identity of a regional capital: Norwich since the eighteenth century' in Kooij and Pellenbarg, *Regional Capitals*, 141.

and printers had made Gerrard Street their home and workplace, including George Morland (1763-1804) who lodged at no. 29 with the publisher and dealer, John Harris (1756-1846) during the 1790s, his house being described as 'the rendezvous of many artists of the day'.[26] Other neighbours included the artist Robert Ker Porter (1777-1842) at no. 6 with whom Cotman would attend the Sketching Society (discussed presently) and the miniaturist John Wright (c.1760-1820) who occupied one of the floors of no. 28 itself.[27] Gerrard Street thus formed a nexus where artists and other creative types crossed paths and it helps to demonstrate Cotman's proximity to the everyday life of the London art world – it was all around him.

From 1760, annual contemporary art exhibitions had been staged near Soho with the first organised by the Society of Arts at the Adelphi off the Strand. Founded eight years later, the RA at the Strand's East End soon claimed the limelight, providing a centralised art institution with attached schools and annual contemporary art exhibitions from 1769, one of the main highlights of London's social calendar. Within forty years, the city could boast at least five art 'institutions'.[28] With this radically transforming artistic realm came a swell in London's artist population. As early as 1777, artists were complaining that '[t]he number of Painters at present in London, and of young students who are following that Profession, is indeed, inconceivable.'[29] The RA and its Schools were central to this rise, exercising a virtual monopoly over artistic training and encouraging more and more young artists to try for entry year on year. By the time of Cotman's arrival, 515 artists were represented at the RA's Exhibition, 240 more than the total number showing exactly a decade earlier.[30]

The opening decade of the nineteenth century also saw a burgeoning artistic culture beyond the art establishment. To the west and north of Somerset House, the Strand, the Adelphi, Leicester Square, Soho, Oxford Street and Fitzrovia housed various artist-societies, auction houses, printsellers, dealers, emporiums, bazaars, panoramas and spaces for one-man exhibitions. Concurrently, the bourgeois consumer played a more active role in the art market as s/he became more conversant in the values of cultural

[26] George Dawe, *The Life of George Morland* (London, 1807), 167. Quote in William T. Whitley, *Art in England 1800-1820*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1928), vol. 1, 44.
[27] See RA Catalogues, 1795-1802 and Daphne Foskett, *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (Woodbridge, 1987), 680.
[28] These included the Royal Academy (1768), an engraver's group (1804), the Society of Painters in Watercolours (1804), the Associated Painters in Watercolours (1808) and the British Institution (1805).
[29] George Heriot to Sir James Grant, 14 September 1777, quoted in Myrone, *Body Building*, 194.
[30] Based on a comparative analysis of RA catalogue listings for 1789 and 1799. In the former year, 275 artists exhibited their work in the Summer Exhibition.

accomplishment. Increasingly from the 1790s, hand-coloured prints, illustrated publications and drawing manuals flew off the shelves of specialist shops such as Rudolph Ackermann's (1764-1834) Repository of Arts at the Strand's east end (Fig. 7). Commercial success led such proprietors to increase their intake of employees to produce printed art consumables, further drawing more artists to the capital in search of work.

Modern art-world conditions such as these were analysed by Bourdieu in the development of his theory of the cultural 'field', a physical and metaphorical space characterised by stifling numbers, interminable struggle, a degree of autonomy[31] and perpetual competition, not only for the kind of consecratory titles, prizes and approbation desired as 'symbolic capital', but for press attention, space on the exhibition wall and commissions (already far in deficiency of artists seeking them by the time Cotman arrived in 1799).[32] Furthermore, this world, or field, entailed a number of crosscurrents around the role and training of the artist. While the foundation of the RA and its Schools marked a concerted effort to answer the eighteenth century's demands for a centralised academic system for the arts, it emerged at the very point at which the belief in the formal education of artists was beginning to erode in favour of one which celebrated the British artist as an independently-minded and imaginative genius who made identifiable marks on idiosyncratic artwork, itself indicative of original self. Belief in these personal qualities unsettled the idea that artists could be taught, a point well articulated by Samuel (1802-76) and Richard Redgrave (1804-88) as late as 1866:

> It is a peculiarity in Art that many men enter the profession entirely self-taught; and these men, both within and without the Academy, are largely indebted to their professional brethren for much generous assistance... It is thus alone that true Art should or can progress, every rising genius creating by his own originality a new field for himself...[33]

What it meant to be a British artist was thus the topic of much dispute by the time Cotman entered the field. With little instruction on how to match the theorised ideal of the artist as independent genius, together with the reality of an overcrowded and increasingly institutionalised art world which set the terms for artists' work, the logic of being an artist was overwhelmingly unreasonable.

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[31] Also see Svante Beckman, 'Professionalization: Borderline Authority and Autonomy in Work' in Michael Burrage and Rolf Torstendahl, *Professions in Theory and History: Rethinking the Study of the Professions* (London, Newbury Park and New Delhi, 1990), 115-138 and Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (London and New York, 1994), 174-6.
[32] See Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*.
[33] Richard and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School*, 2 vols (London, 1866), vol. 1, 74.

Where did Cotman fit into this world? The secondary literature on this period of British art is generally lacking in its attempts to address how the art world, in all its depth and breadth, was experienced by its participating subjects.[34] Examination of the training opportunities available to artists who, like Cotman, did not enter the RA Schools or have the means to undertake a traditional apprenticeship is often neglected in favour of analyses that support or render purely positive the system that offered these either/or options. Moreover, the idea that artists who did not train at the RA were outsiders, operating on the periphery of the art world, is one that still prevails, despite studies which have thrown light on the spectrum of other arts organisations that underpinned the cultural field.[35] In order to extend the lines of enquiry away from an analysis that centres on the RA as the key to launching artists' careers, the rest of this chapter examines Cotman's relationship to other artistic vicinities – namely Ackermann's Repository of Arts, Dr Monro's 'academy' and the Sketching Society – and treats them as sites of social, pedagogic and artistic interaction and practice. This will help to unearth the web of art-world connections that Cotman encountered and cultivated, contacts and crosslinks that pointed and positioned him in different directions with their own distinct limits and possibilities.

Yet before considering what he did in London, it is necessary to reiterate the point that Cotman's particular social origins did not enable him to fall back on his 'professional brethren for much generous assistance', as the Redgraves later assumed was generally possible for artists. With no professional model to follow or reliable financial cushioning from a family member, friend or patron, the stakes of entering the art world were raised dramatically for Cotman. Indeed, the paths he took indicate his acute awareness of the need to earn a living and gain experience while pretending to the artist's ideal identity as an ambitious, independent and commercially disinterested genius. In order to grasp the historical realities of how Cotman emerged as a professional artist, I am keen to capture a sense of the demanding nature of his day-to-day life in London. The following discussion is therefore structured around a series of interlocking analyses which consider his

[34] Instead scholarship on this period tends to focus on the art world's apparent institutionalisation (the foundation of the RA, British Institution, and Society of Painters in Watercolours, for example) or its commercialisation. See Allen, *Towards a Modern Art World*, Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London, 1995) and Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven and London, 2000).

[35] Such as Smith on the Society of Painters in Water Colours in *Progress and Professions* and *Emergence*, and Trevor Fawcett on regional arts societies in *The Rise of Provincial Art: Artists, Patrons and Institutions outside London, 1800-1830* (Oxford, 1974).

adjustment to the variegated work patterns, experiences and anxieties at Ackermann's, Monro's and the Sketching Society.[36]

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Recollecting his earliest London experiences in a letter to his future patron, Dawson Turner, in 1841, Cotman identified the stationer Peter Norton (1755-1832) as his 'first acquaintance in London at the age of seventeen' made while he 'dined with a party made at Mr. Norton's, Soho Square' in the summer of 1799.[37] As with Cotman's abovementioned comment about his youthful artistic leanings (page 44), this remark befits the biographical recollections of nascent artistic success and ability to attract attention, which should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, Cotman's identification of Norton as his first London contact might indicate the stationer's early importance in helping him get onto the art-world ladder. It is not therefore unreasonable to propose that Norton may have provided Cotman with an introduction to his first employer, the stationer-turned-printer and entrepreneur, Rudolph Ackermann, who ran the print shop-cum-luxury emporium at 101 Strand.[38] Cotman's untrained but burgeoning artistic ability would have given him something to retail as a hand-colourer of prints, the semi-skilled piecework on which Ackermann built a huge trade. Furthermore, the young artist's upbringing in a shop, had he disclosed it, could make him appear well suited to the art world's commercial sector.

Cotman started work at 101 Strand in the year that Ackermann's multi-floored premises took the grand name 'The Repository of Arts'.[39] Located on one of London's busiest streets, the Repository housed a drawing academy, a 'Gallery of Ancient and Modern Paintings and Drawings' (the first in England to exhibit watercolours), and a luxurious stationers selling an assortment of novelty goods, art treatises, paintings, prints, books, paper and materials. As Pugin and Rowlandson's aquatint shows (Fig. 7), the Repository's deluxe interior attracted a middle-class clientele with the social aspiration,

[36] Here I am influenced by Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford, 1975), Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford, 2000) and John Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure: Politics, Aesthetics, and Utility 1789-1832* (Cambridge, 2000) all of which recover some of the anxiety, competition and disenchantment which characterised professionals' experience in the Romantic period.

[37] JSC to DT, 12 August 1841, MC 2487/54, NRO.

[38] Norton also introduced Cotman to his brother James, a bookseller in Bristol with whom the artist stayed in June 1800 en route to Wales on a sketching tour.

[39] Upon leasing the property in 1797, Ackermann advertised his new location as being 'four doors nearer to Somerset House' than his previous premises at 96 Strand. *Morning Herald*, 27 November 1797.

money and time to peruse prints, leaf through publications and see and be seen by fellow shoppers.

According to the artist's eldest son, Miles Edmund Cotman, writing in 1842, Ackermann did not treat Cotman 'as he fancied he ought' and he soon quit the role, to be 'taken by the late Dr. Monro, with whom he remained some time, studying with Turner and Girtin.'[40] Physician to George III and a specialist in mental disorders, Monro (1759-1833) was also a keen amateur in watercolours and a generous supporter of its practitioners. In 1794, he opened a drawing academy at his house at 8 Adelphi Terrace, 350 metres east of the Repository, where he received a hand-picked selection of young male artists to copy from his collection of prints, drawings and tracings.[41] The diarist and painter Joseph Farington (1747-1821) described Monro's house as 'like an Academy in the evenings. He has young men employed in tracing outlines made by his friends &c.-Henderson, Hearne &c. lend their outlines for this purpose.'[42] Among these were a 'collection of drawings by modern artists' by 'Barrett, Smith, Laporte, Turner, Wheatley, Girtin' and Monro's patient John Robert Cozens (1752-97),[43] with Farington describing the entire collection as being 'larger than any I have before seen'.[44] While domestic in setting, no. 8 was not dissimilar from the hustle and bustle of Ackermann's Repository. Farington provides numerous references to the comings-and-goings of professional artists, amateurs and collectors similar to those we can expect Cotman to have come across at the Repository.[45] But unlike the pupils attending Ackermann's own drawing school (which opened in 1796 with the intention of preparing aspirants for admission to the RA Schools) who were charged a monthly fee of 10*s.* 6*d* for weekly lessons,[46] Monro paid his students 3*s.* 6*d* to

[40] Miles Edmund Cotman (hereafter MEC) to DT, 25 August 1842, MC 2487/61, NRO. However, Andrew Wilton suggests more compellingly that Turner and Girtin begun at Monro's during the winter of 1794-5 and left in 1798, one year before Cotman joined. Wilton, 'Album of Copies of Italian views for Dr Thomas Monro c.1794-8', sketchbook, April 2012 in David Blayney Brown (ed.), *J. M. W. Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours* (December 2012), https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/JMW-turner/album-of-copies-of-italian-views-for-dr-thomas-monro-r1140585, accessed 18 January 2012.

[41] Farington described 210 of these as being 'framed & glazed' and 'hung up' in Monro's Parlour and Drawing Room. FD, 14 April 1797, vol. 3, 822.

[42] FD, 30 December 1794, vol. 1, 283.

[43] FD, 14 April 1797, vol. 3, 822.

[44] FD, 1 December 1795, vol. 2, 420.

[45] Regulars at Monro's included John Hoppner, Henry Edridge, Edward Dayes, Thomas Hearne, John Henderson and Farington himself. Artists who received patronage around 1799 were George Holmes, William Payne, Richard and Maria Cosway, Thomas Rowlandson and Girtin.

[46] These took place between six and eight o'clock on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. See Allen M. Samuels, *Rudolph Ackermann (1764-1834): A study*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 1974), 18.

come between six and ten most winter evenings to copy drawings and eat a light supper.[47] When they did not enter his collection, Monro would sell off his pupils' drawings on the open market, including some of Cotman's own in 1800.[48]

Cotman seems to have come to Monro's notice by December 1799 when Farington recorded that the doctor had mentioned his 'bringing forward another young man who comes from Norwich', undoubtedly the eighteen-year-old Cotman.[49] Precisely how Cotman and Monro initially encountered one another is unknown, though it is possible that it occurred at the nearby Repository. The visual and documentary evidence also suggests that there was some crossover between Cotman's roles at Ackermann's and Monro's, despite Miles Edmund's remark that his father had quit before attending Monro's 'academy'. To reflect the likelihood of such occupational oscillation, I shall consider both roles together.

It is unlikely that Cotman attended Ackermann's drawing school during his employment at the Repository given the admission charge and the fact that he attended Monro's 'academy' where he received cash for drawings. Moreover, he was almost certainly looking for a waged position which combined some kind of artistic training with proximity to art-world culture. Hand colouring aquatints at the Repository, although monotonous, could tick these boxes. The work involved original designs being commissioned from professional artists whose drawings were then engraved in-house and printed in two tints (usually blue for the sky and brown for the ground). The sheets were then packed into units and distributed among the pieceworkers who would complete the hand colouring in the private space of their own homes or at the factory based at the Repository.[50] The hand-coloured aquatint series *In View of London* is typical of the high-quality prints that Ackermann was selling around 1800; the colouring of the third plate (Fig. 8) gives an impression of the kind of work that Cotman produced. At first glance, there appears to have been little room for flaunting individual style: coloured tints follow

[47] See John Pye, MS notes, quoted in John L. Roget *History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, 2 vols, (London, 1891), vol. 1, 82.
[48] These included at least eighteen landscape and picturesque subjects, sold in six lots in May 1800 through Christie's. See *A catalogue of a capital and valuable assemblage of drawings, by the most admired ancient and modern masters...* (20-1 May 1800). Drawings by Cotman that remained in Monro's collection until his death in 1833 included 'A Parcel of very early sketches', 'Old houses at York, castles, &c.' and ' In colours and pencil ditto', *The Very Capital Collection of Drawings of Dr. Thomas Monro* (June-July, 1833). The London dealer, Thomas King, also auctioned off Cotman drawings in 1800. See *A catalogue of the choice collection of prints, drawings, books, books of prints, models, &c.Late the property of W. Gaubert...* (18 March 1800). This demonstrates how quickly Cotman's drawings began to circulate amongst London collectors.
[49] FD, 15 December 1799, vol. 4, 1326.
[50] See Samuels, *Ackermann*, unpublished PhD thesis, 19.

printed outlines to provide the basic form, shape and tone to a few small details, including shadows on trees or the creases in clothes. On closer inspection, however, watercoloured details hold their own in the reserved whites of some of the motifs, notably the blue striations on the dress of the milkmaid (Fig. 9). These tints are as far as any personal mark-making goes, however, and with the names of the artist 'Rowlandson', the engraver 'Schutz' and the publisher 'Ackermann' inscribed within the plate mark, the hand-colourer is hidden from the chain of production, reduced to an anonymous cog in a much larger machine. Upon completing a unit of prints like this, a pieceworker would hand it over to the Repository for a fixed rate. Many of the individual prints were then incorporated into drawing manuals and other published material to be sold at the Repository and other bookshops.

Monro similarly entered into a transaction with his artists who received remuneration in return for their drawings, which would then enter his own collection. Farington's statement that Monro's house was 'like an Academy' should thus not be interpreted as a generous art lover disinterestedly making his collection available to youthful 'geniuses' from which to learn. Indeed, the often-cited remark that former students Turner and Girtin had been 'chiefly employed in copying the outlines of unfinished drawings by Cozens &c &c of which Copies they made finished drawings' for which 'Girtin drew in outlines and Turner washed in the effects', indicates that Monro's pupils were obliged to work within the limits of their employer's wishes.[51]

We can get a sense of the kind of work produced at the 'academy' from Turner and Girtin's *Dover Harbour* scenes made after drawings by Monro's friend and neighbour, the amateur artist John Henderson (1764-1843) (Figs 10-11). The majority were made with light pencil outlines with the more pressured marks emphasising boat masts or figures' heads in the manner of Henderson's originals. Other drawings show the same outlines washed-in with light blue, grey and dark brown watercolour with some areas left untouched to affect a more dramatic tonal contrast. The staccato pencil work and fluid washes of these monochromatic scenes amount to what can be considered a 'house style'. Thus, while there was evidently more room for experimentation at Monro's than at Ackermann's, the tracing, copying and washing at the 'academy' was undoubtedly perfunctory and, at times, artistically frustrating.[52] The pupils also sat opposite one

[51] FD, 12 November 1798, vol. 3, 1090.
[52] Girtin had complained that he lacked 'the same chance of learning to paint' as Turner had. See Roget, *History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, vol. 1, 82.

another at candlelit desks, a physical proximity which may have encouraged conversation but also competition.

These conditions might nonetheless have been alleviated by the pay and the chance to meet like-minded artists of a similar age. In 1800, the artist-brothers John (1778-1842) and Cornelius Varley (1781-1873) joined the 'academy', becoming Cotman's life-long friends. John had begun his career in 1791 as an apprentice to a silversmith, but after the death of his father in the same year he actively sought artistic training. First assisting a portrait painter in Holborn, he soon became a pupil to the painter Joseph Charles Barrow (active 1789-1802) who ran a nearby evening drawing school. Cornelius, three years John's junior, was taken into the care of his late father's brother, Samuel Varley, a well-connected scientific instrument maker and jeweller. After a few years of training with Samuel, Cornelius went to live in Covent Garden with John from whom he took drawing lessons. The Varleys thus shared a similar social profile to most artists who attended Monro's (apart from Cotman) who, by dint of their family trajectory, early training, geographical location and sibling influence, were already connected to the metropolitan art world by the time they entered the 'academy'.

Not entirely unlike Monro's pupils, Ackermann's pieceworkers tended to be young artists at the bottom of the art-world ladder. Their hand colouring of engravings was a repetitive exercise subject to tight time constraints due to the scale of Ackermann's enterprise. The work pattern was thus by necessity fast-paced, but not at the expense of accuracy given the high-end product demanded by Ackermann's well-to-do customers. Yet unlike Monro's 'academy', commercial piecework carried a certain stigma due to its association with the marketplace. Ideologues such as William Blake called those participating in that line of work 'Ignorant Journeymen'[53] whose conformance to a capitalist employer and production of commercialised 'art' negatively impacted upon the progress of British art.[54] By not attending to the 'ideal' artist's identity – one who (in theory) was disinterested in the marketplace and material gain – Cotman risked being reduced to an artisanal wage slave, the ideal *topoi*'s antitype.

[53] William Blake, 'Public Address' in David Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Los Angeles and London, 2008), vol. 2, 571 and 576.

[54] For an illuminating examination of the commercial obstacles to the progress of the arts in Britain as identified by Blake and some of his artist and critic contemporaries, see Morris Eaves, *The Counter-arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake* (Ithaca and New York, 1992), particularly Chapter 4 which deals specifically with the commercial arts and what Blake saw as the repressiveness of part-time piecework on the fine arts.

This is not to say that the Repository denied Cotman entry to the art world; it is clear that his work and the connections we can expect him to have forged there were instrumental in launching his career and shaping his early experiences of the London scene. Yet it is reasonable to suppose that Cotman was aware of the need to square his decision to move to London with a clear sense of himself as an ambitious artist by adopting another, more 'liberal' position. Monro's 'academy' of budding professional artists and visiting art-world figures could match that aim, providing Cotman with the training and kudos with which to advance his artistic identity as well as a sort of redeeming 'alibi'[55] for his commercial piecework at the Repository. In turn, we can expect that such a self-proclaimed connoisseur as Monro encouraged his pupils to aim high, both in their emulation of the master drawings he gave them to copy and for themselves as future names. In a diary entry of November 1795, Farington recorded that Monro had asked him whether he could 'obtain admission to the RA for Girtin, a young man of twenty years.'[56] While Girtin's admission came to nothing, Monro's request reveals his expectations of those pupils who stood out as particularly promising.

Indeed, by 1799, Monro had added drawings by Girtin as well as Turner to his collection for students to copy.[57] These included the light pencil outlines and wash drawings of Dover Harbour after which five pencil copies and variations attributable to Cotman survive (Figs 12-16).[58] The very act of (re)producing drawings made a few years earlier by two of the most talked-about watercolourists of the day, and under the aegis of the same employer, is significant. Securing a place at Monro's thus not only elicited competitiveness between fellow students but with their predecessors. As former pupils turned celebrated artist-geniuses, Turner and Girtin represented the exemplars of what might come to the Monro student. The drawings attributable to Cotman are therefore not only examples of what he produced at the Adelphi, but simultaneously represent his audition pieces.

Competition between students both past and present could be felt elsewhere in Monro's company, notably at his country house in Fetcham, Surrey, where Turner and Girtin had

[55] Kriz, *Idea of the English Landscape Painter*.
[56] FD, 26 November 1795, vol. 2, 414.
[57] See *The Very Capital Collection of Drawings of that well-known and intelligent collector, Dr. Thomas Monro...* (Christie's & Manson, 1833).
[58] It is not certain that these are by Cotman given the 'house style' developed at Monro's. Now in the collection of Leeds City Art Gallery and catalogued as Cotmans, their previous owner Kitson believed them to be by the artist's hand. Indeed, they do bear striking stylistic similarities with other of Cotman's early pencil sketches, including his signed and dated drawings of *Well House* (Figs 17 and 18). At the very least they are examples of what we can expect the Monro student to have produced.

frequently stayed during the mid-1790s and where Cotman visited with Monro in late 1799. Two signed and dated faint sketches from this visit survive (Figs 17 and 18), both representing a well house from two angles in nearby Ashtead Park. This architectural motif was clearly one which Monro found attractive and directed his students to copy; depictions in Monro's own hand as well as a finished watercolour by Girtin still survive (Figs 19 and 20). Working from the same motif as both his teacher and celebrated predecessor no doubt contributed to a sense in Cotman that he was walking in the footsteps of geniuses.

Besides his artistic ambitions, the polite society kept by Monro at the Adelphi, as well as at Fetcham (including collectors, dealers, writers and members of the medical community, besides artists), would have encouraged the young Cotman to think ambitiously in a social sense. Bourdieu's argument that individuals internalise certain perspectives of objective structures to provide them with a modified *habitus* would require Cotman to have deliberated on how to behave in such polite surroundings predicated on his 'practical sense for what is to be done in a certain situation – what is called ... a 'feel' for the game.'[59] Via the aspirational elements which appear to have characterised his upbringing, the sociocultural landscape of his hometown, and his varied experiences of the art world thus far, we might speculate that Cotman had indeed gained (albeit subconsciously) a 'feel for the game' which enabled him to conceive of the role relations necessary to pass himself off as a charming and ambitious artist.

Five months after his visit to Fetcham, Cotman made his exhibition debut at the RA. Six of his seven submissions were Surrey subjects, likely garnered while sketching in and around Monro's estate and which he worked up into finished watercolours.[60] Those that survive, *A Cottage in Guildford Churchyard* and *A Water Mill near Dorking* (Figs 21 and 22), show a mature style compared to his youthful tinted drawing of six years earlier (Fig. 6). *Cottage* and *Water Mill* nevertheless bear the influence of work Cotman had undertaken in London over the previous year: the high-key washes, blue tints of the criss-crossed windows and tonal washes of the sky recall the stylistic qualities of a Repository aquatint, while the emphasis on outline, the dainty Hearnian treatment of the architectural details, indistinct foreground and tonal layering reminiscent of Turner and Girtin recall stylistic qualities prevalent in Monro's range of copy-material. That said, *Cottage* and

[59] Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 25.
[60]The RA catalogue lists: 334* *A Water Mill near Dorking, Surrey*, 342* *A Cottage near Guildford Churchyard*, 343* *Back of an Inn* Guildford, 424* *Leatherhead Church, Surrey*, 550* *Harlech Castle, Merionethshire, Wales*, 596 *Cottage–Dorking, Surrey*.

Water Mill are not mere essays of imitation; they show Cotman working hard to cover the artistic waterfront: the broken outlines, derelict architecture, gravestones, working figures, lake, mid-ground village, distant mountain and bold sky in *Cottage* showcase everything a late Georgian audience could hope for in an exhibition watercolour. Since the 1790s, the appearance of watercolour showstoppers had led to a critical discourse around the medium's emotional effects, in turn giving rise to the idea that watercolour was an arena for genius.[61] Just as the contemporary artist had to be agile and diverse in a art world of high stakes, painting in watercolours was about dexterously playing off two materials against one another; one slip, and all could be ruined. We might then view these two watercolours as Cotman's *public* auditions, the chance for him to pull out all the stops and show off his emerging 'genius' on the walls of the Summer Exhibition.

Cotman had already exhibited *Water Mill* (or a related composition) that year at the Society of Arts (located just down the road from the RA, and next to Monro's house at the Adelphi) in the hope of obtaining one of the premiums that were offered by the Society 'For the best Drawing of a Landscape after nature, by persons of either sex, under twenty-one years of age, to be produced on or before the third Tuesday in February 1800.'[62] Writing to the Polite Arts Committee at the Society who would judge his work, Cotman emphasised the originality of both 'the sketch and finishing' of the work, which were 'entirely my own'.[63] In May, the Society announced that Cotman had been awarded the Larger Silver Pallet 'for a Drawing of a Mill at Dorking', followed by William Westall whose 'Landscape, a View from the Terrace at Richmond' was awarded the Lesser Silver Pallet.[64] The prize – one which J. M. W. Turner himself had won in 1793 – would have likely provided personal vindication to Cotman that his multifarious working situation in London might be starting to pay off.

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In the spring of 1802, Cotman moved from Soho to Mayfair, lodging with the watercolourist Paul Sandby Munn (1773-1845) and his artist-brother William (dates unknown) who he had likely encountered through Monro (the former having been a

[61] See Kriz, *Idea of the English Landscape Painter* and Smith, *Emergence*.
[62] *Transactions of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts Manufacture & Commerce*, vol. 17, 1799, RSA/PR/GE/112/13/27, 76-7, Royal Society of Arts Archives (hereafter RSA).
[63] JSC to Charles Taylor of the Society of Arts, 24 April 1800, RSA/PR/AR/103/10/183, RSA.
[64] *Transactions of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts Manufacture & Commerce, with the Premiums offered in 1800*, vol. 18, 27 May 1800, RSA/PR/GE/112/13/28, RSA.

student of the 'academy' during the 1790s).[65] Like the Varleys, the Munn brothers were already connected to the art world by virtue of their family's occupation and connections, including Paul Sandby who became P. S. Munn's godfather and namesake. The sons of a Greenwich carriage decorator and landscape painter, the Munns were born into a financially comfortable family, granting them sufficient means to establish their own print and stationers shop at 107 New Bond Street. They used their premises to sell their own drawings as copy material for amateurs and take on drawing pupils, something Cotman also seems to have undertaken while resident there. On 5 May 1802, the three artists found themselves at the centre of an important arts event, the inaugural meeting of the reconstituted Sketching Society, and were joined by four other artists, T. R. Underwood (1772-1835), William Fleetwood Varley (1785-1856) and William Alexander (1767-1816), at the latter's home.[66] It is to Cotman's involvement in the Sketching Society that I now want to turn. Whilst unpaid, this new 'position' constituted a game-changing phase in his nascent career, providing him with a greater degree of autonomy, access to a network of watercolourists, and an introduction to a set of artistic techniques.

In its first guise, the Sketching Society was founded in May 1799 at the Great Newport Street studio of Robert Ker Porter (1777-1842), Cotman's old Gerrard Street neighbour, by 'a small select society of Young Painters ... for the purpose of establishing by practice a school of Historical Landscape, the subjects being original designs from poetick passages.'[67] Styling themselves 'The Brothers', the first Society comprised a select mix of professional and amateur artists, including Louis Francia (1772-1839), Girtin, R. K. Porter and T. R. Underwood, almost all of whom had attended Monro's 'academy' in the 1790s.[68] A surviving minute book shows that meetings took place on Monday evenings at the home of each member in turn.[69] After tea and coffee, the group would begin translating onto paper a passage from a poem previously selected by the 'President' (the host) who also provided paper, pencils, brushes, and black and brown colours. Work would cease at ten when the President collected and displayed the drawings. Whilst eating a simple supper accompanied by 'ale and porter', the results of several hours'

[65] Cotman's name is given against Munn's address in the 1802 RA catalogue.
[66] See F. H. H. Guillemard, 'Girtin's Sketching Club', *The Connoisseur*, vol. 63, no. 252 (August 1922), 194.
[67] Louis Francia, inscription on reverse of his drawing, *Landscape composition moonlight*, 20 May 1799 in the Victoria & Albert Museum (hereafter V&A).
[68] Greg Smith has proposed that the formation of the Society represented 'an attempt to recreate the confederate spirit of the gatherings at Monro's without the interference in professional independence.' Smith, *Emergence*, 123.
[69] Now in the Huntington Library & Art Gallery, San Marino.

sketching were discussed until midnight, when the Society dispersed for another week, the drawings remaining permanently in the President's possession.[70] The minute book is discontinued from January 1800 and the Society petered out following the departure of its most active member, Girtin, for Paris in October 1801.[71]

In contrast to the first Society, the second involved a greater number and range of practitioners who met between May 1802 and May 1804.[72] The framework remained much the same, with only the day changed to Wednesday and with 'Bread & cheese & beer' served at ten. Judging by the number of surviving works attributable to Cotman or bearing his name or handwriting, he appears to have been a regular attendee, which contributed to the Society's posthumous tag 'Cotman's Sketching Society'. The lack of Society drawings between July and September in 1802 and 1803 implies that members dispersed during the summer months to travel (possibly taking advantage of the brief outbreak of peace between March 1802 and May 1803 following the signing of the Treaty of Amiens to visit the Continent). Cotman used the hiatus to make sketching trips with P. S. Munn in Wales and Yorkshire during these summers (the latter trip is explored in the next chapter).

The art historical treatment of sketching societies is invariably premised on the positivist claim that such organisations are almost always homosocial, clubby brotherhoods dedicated to sharing knowledge, mutual improvement and a homogenous professional identity.[73] While this may well have been partially the case with the Sketching Society (as the earliest name 'The Brothers' would suggest and the fact that many of the artists comprising the second society already knew one another),[74] the existing scholarship does not adequately take account of the personal impact that these intense evenings of creative

[70] The posthumous 1862 sale of Cotman's collection included lot 158, 'A folio of twenty-seven drawings by various artists, viz: Cotman, Varley, Webster, Haywood, and Munn, members of the Sketching Club, and friends of the late Mr John Sell Cotman. London, 1803'.

[71] After November 1801, no drawings attributable to the Society appear until May 1802, by which time Girtin had died. See Guillemard, Girtin's Sketching Club', *The Connoisseur* (August 1922), 189-95, 191.

[72] The following names appear on the versos of surviving Sketching Society sheets, some more than others as is indicated by the asterisk: W. Alexander*, Augustus Wall Callcott (1779-1844), John Sell Cotman*, Joshua Cristall* (c.1768-1847), James Green (1771-1834), John Samuel Hayward* (1778-1822), William Havell* (1782-1857), Paul Sandby Munn*, William Munn*, John Preston Neale (1780-1847), Joseph Powell* (1780-1834), Thomas Richard Underwood*, John Varley*, Cornelius Varley, Thomas Webster* (dates unknown), and as 'Visitors', John Varley's pupil William Mulready (1786-1863) and his younger brother, William Fleetwood Varley, and Francis Stevens (1781-1823).

[73] See Bermingham, *Learning to Draw* 133 and 'Girtin's Sketching Club (c.1799-1800)' in https://www.oxforddnb.com, accessed 1 March 2012, and Smith, *Emergence*, 178-84 and *Thomas Girtin: The Art of Watercolour*, exh. cat. (London, 2002), 131-35.

[74] For example, the Varleys travelled through Wales in 1802 with Webster and Cristall.

and critical activity might have had on individual participants. Translating a poetical passage into a landscape scene under an imposed time limit, subsequently to be scrutinised and criticised by a 'jury' of fellow members, was potentially arduous, not least because fellow members were not only friends but competitors in an already competitive art world. In analysing Cotman's involvement in the Sketching Society, I propose an alternative reading which allows for a more critical consideration of his experience, and how the pictorial results it produced provide insights into the pressures and positives associated with group arts membership.

On 5 June 1802, exactly one month after joining the Society, Cotman acted as its President for the first time, receiving Underwood, Alexander, John Varley, P. S. Munn and the 'Visitors' Green and Webster at Munn's premises on New Bond Street. As President, Cotman would have been expected to provide the materials, seating, food and drink for his guests which was likely to have been costly. Hosting a meeting also required the President to create a convivial atmosphere, keep the time and tempo of the session, and chair the final discussion, roles at odds with those at the Repository and Monro's 'academy'. While those positions had augmented Cotman's social and organisational skills, they had less likely prepared him with the artistic lexicon necessary to competently critique the drawings of his peers, all of whom were older than him. We might therefore imagine that Cotman, then barely twenty, would have needed to work particularly hard behind the scenes in order to pass himself off as a competent leader. Yet any sense of authority that leading a meeting might personally evoke for its President was already undermined for Cotman given that 107 New Bond Street was the premises of his landlord, P. S. Munn. The following year, Munn affirmed his mark on his territory in a letter to the amateur artist Hayward confirming his election to the Sketching Society, specifying that the next meeting would take place 'at my house – 107 New Bond Street'.[75]

For his first meeting as President, Cotman selected for the group the opening passage from Robert Southey's *Donica*: 'High on a rock, whose castled shade / Darkened the lake below, / In ancient strength majestic stood / The towers of Arlinkow.' His visualisation of Southey's passage (Fig. 23) is relatively literal, showing a diminutive castle 'High on a rock', its diffuse form merging with the broken edges of the cliff. The lake over which the fortification presides is tranquil, a motionlessness mirrored in the steady reflection of the nearby rock which juts diagonally upwards from the calm. Its dark underside is

[75] PS Munn to JS Hayward, 24 February 1803, MS L.1203-1354, V&A.

tonally balanced by the silhouetted bank side articulated with a cluster of inky blots in the manner of Girtin. In fact, the treatment of the entire drawing is remarkably close to Girtin's own rendition of a similar literary motif produced at one of the initial Sketching Society meetings on 28 December 1799, chaired by R. K. Porter (Fig. 24). Cotman takes a more distant viewpoint and perches his castle on a taller cliff edge, yet the basic compositional arrangement, together with the nonspecific quality of the foreground, dark dashes across the sheet and comparable size, suggests that he knew Girtin's drawing which would have been retained by Porter, Cotman's neighbour on Gerrard Street in 1800. Cotman's own drawing, dated 5 June 1802, possibly, therefore, represents a reinterpretation of Girtin's drawing, making a visible connection with, rather than imitation of, the work of this revered near-contemporary.

It is not known how Cotman's guests visually responded to Southey's passage (their contributions have not been located), but some members seem to have recycled the elevated castle motif in drawings at a later meeting, resulting in representations that evoke both Girtin and Cotman's earlier drawings. This set includes three monochrome drawings by Powell, Cristall and P. S. Munn (Figs 25-27). Munn's drawing (Fig. 27) most closely evokes the form and viewpoint of Cotman's 1802 castle and cliff and, like Cristall's drawing (Fig. 26), shows an obscured fortification at the top right side of the sheet. Munn and Cristall's cliffs loom over a central lake with calm yet populated waters and shore, while Powell's castle (Fig. 25), like Cristall's, bears a greater solidity.

Cotman's own drawing (Fig. 28) takes an entirely different approach to his earlier work and that of his peers, the castle positioned prominently on the brow of the hill and at the foot of a mountainous landscape above a slither of lake. Nevertheless, the foreground clumps of scallop-shaped shrubs are picked up by others, notably in Munn's tree, while Cotman's fan-like splay of foliage in Figure 28 and hoop-shaped leaves in other drawings (for example, Figs 29 and 30) echo elements of John Varley's Society sketches (Figs 31 and 32). Similarly, the gnarled branches in Powell's drawing reoccurred in Society drawings, appearing again in the work of Cristall (Fig. 33) and Cotman (Figs 34-38), while the latter's silvery-blue graphite marks resurface in other drawings by Powell (Figs 39 and 40), as well as in Havell's unfinished Society drawing (Fig. 41).

These cursory comparisons reveal members appropriating each others' compositions, motifs and formal handling. This, together with the uniform grey-sepia washes, thick silvery graphite and similarly-sized laid paper, have been interpreted by scholars as

connoting a collaborative atmosphere within the Society.[76] Yet the comparable visual language also indicates the extent to which these meetings made members overly self-conscious of each others' mode of practice, which may have been uncomfortable at times given art theory's emphasis on individualistic artistic productions. Nonetheless, Cotman's Society drawings display an enhanced appreciation of the expressive potential of watercolour and landscape, together with idiosyncratic techniques, such as his scallop-shaped leaves and exposed under and over-drawing, which he employed beyond the meetings. Cotman's participation in the Sketching Society thus assimilated him into a fruitful artistic milieu, which despite its pressures had the potential to lead him to a more artistically autonomous position within the British art world.

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Having examined the eclectic routes that Cotman took up to mid-1804, it is clear that his emergence was characterised by a simultaneous mismatch of fundamentally varied experiences. To an extent, his first five years in London can be considered successful, both symbolically (in terms of connections and membership, as well as his Society of Arts prize) and materially (he got paid for some of his work). Yet on the other, the vicissitudes of the profession and his perpetual job-hopping were likely ambivalent, giving rise to what Bourdieu called a *cleft habitus*, a sort of split self.[77] Moving from the provinces to the capital and between the shop, town, country house and artists' quarters, Cotman was required to switch between his inner self and one more compatible with the different roles and environments in which he found himself.

This chapter has demonstrated that Cotman had to be highly mobile in order to emerge.[78] Such mobility was not unique to Cotman, but characterised the realities of most artists, involving hard graft, diversification and necessary adaption to the unreasonable logic of the profession. By playing with the rules rather than adhering to them closely, the artist

[76] See Jane Hamilton, *The Sketching Society, 1799-1851*, exh. cat. (London, 1971).
[77] See Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (Cambridge, 2008), 100.
[78] See Judith Adler, 'Artists' Job Market Experiences', *The Journal of Arts Management and Law*, 13:1, Spring, 1983, 181. Edward Dayes (1763-1804) provides a tacit example of an artist who could not avoid broadening his working practice and identity. A glance at his surviving work diary for the year 1798 captures a sense of occupational disparity where high-end travails are juggled with their lower opposites, including the production of finished watercolours of elevated subjects for exhibition, private commissions of small-scale 'views' and teaching well-to-do pupils at the same time as finishing-off other artists' backgrounds, painting Thomas Barker's panorama, and, like Cotman, hand-colouring engravings. MS Edward Dayes's work diary, 1798, MSL/1980/190, National Art Library, V&A.

might resemble – rather than match – the 'ideal' artist. By doing just this, Cotman seems to have rapidly made a number of upwardly mobile shifts in the art world. These were not enacted in great leaps and bounds but, like his father's own occupational and geographical shifts, were edged towards carefully, position-takings that were feasible given his limited capital. This analysis departs from the conventional reading of Cotman's early career as being borne of inherent artistic 'genius' instilled at birth and only expressed once he had reached in London. As argued above, Cotman's movements in social time and space was made possible by an accumulation of related connections, positions and experiences, all of which enabled him to emerge as an artist.

3. Positioning artistic identity

The last known Sketching Society meeting took place at Munn's premises on 3 May 1804 with Cotman as President. In attendance were Munn himself along with Havell, Powell, Webster, Hayward, John Varley, Cristall and the 'Visitor' Francis Stevens from Exeter who was then taking drawing lessons from Munn.[79] In the same month as the Society's final meeting, Stevens (1781-1823) debuted at the RA with a watercolour of a mill which hung in the Model Academy nearby Cotman's large watercolour, *Gormire, Yorkshire*, produced following his second trip to Yorkshire in 1804. Aged twenty-two, Stevens was inexperienced compared to his exact contemporary Cotman in terms of artistic training and public exposure. It may thus have come as something of a shock when Cotman failed to be elected to the newly-formed Society of Painters in Water Colours in March 1806 when Stevens had already been admitted as a Fellow-Exhibitor of the Society.[80] This final part demonstrates just how unpredictable the role of an artist could be, particularly one of Cotman's social profile.

As Greg Smith has shown, the RA hung watercolours less favourably to oils, a contrast which threatened to eclipse the former and diminish its recognition and commercial potential.[81] Most of Cotman's own watercolour submissions were exhibited in the Council Room, one of Somerset House's first-floor interiors below the Great Room. Banished to such 'dark Rooms on the Ground Floor', watercolourists found their work hung and lit in ways that compromised their appearance, a humiliating reminder of their

[79] This is the last date recorded on surviving Sketching Society drawings.
[80] Both Stevens and P. S. Munn had been elected as Fellow-Exhibitors on 27 January 1806 (nominated by Cornelius and John Varley respectively).
[81] See Smith, *Emergence*.

subordinate position.[82] Yet as touched on above, the emergence of 'painting in water colours' was matched by a burgeoning market for the watercolour landscape sketch as well as the highly-finished watercolour drawing deemed worthy of competing with oils, developments that proved to stiffen the resolve of watercolourists.

Founded in 1804, the Society of Painters in Water Colours (SPWC) was set up as an alternative exhibiting Society to raise the national status of watercolour. The inaugural meeting was staged in November that year at the Stratford Coffee House on Oxford Street with ten male practitioners in attendance.[83] Ranging in age from mid-fifties to mid-twenties, with the youngest being members of Cotman's own social circle, John (aged twenty-six) and Cornelius Varley (twenty-three), most of the founding-members were professional drawing masters while two had trained at the RA. Almost all were well-known to one another with many living in or nearby the artists' quarter of Fitzrovia or having mixed at Monro's, London sketching societies or on country tours. In theory, the Society's aim was to provide a public platform for watercolour and yet, in practice, it was an exclusive group comprising 'no more than Twenty Members'[84] who were 'Men of fair Moral Character, of high Reputation in their Profession.'[85] A preliminary investigation of the social origins of the members (elected up to March 1806 when Cotman was rejected from joining) reveals that the SPWC was broadly middle class. Well populated by the sons of merchants or artists, drawing masters and others connected in one way or another to the world of art and culture (particularly the younger members), many of them were known to Cotman. Over the next five meetings, a further six artists judged to meet the entrance requirements were elected, including Cotman's friends Havell and Cristall. In April 1805, the sixteen members held their first annual exhibition at 20 Lower Brook Street to critical acclaim**.** A total of 11,542 visitors came to see 275 watercolours on show, resulting in a £270 profit to be shared between the members (approximately £17,000 in today's money).[86]

The SPWC, as we can imagine it appeared to the twenty-three-year-old Cotman, was the prime network to which he should belong and which had the potential for monetary profit, professional collaboration, career streamlining, public exposure and a sense of

[82] *St James's Chronicle*, 24-27 April 1784.
[83] Cotman was on an extended visit to Yorkshire at this time (explored in the next chapter), returning to London two weeks later.
[84] Soon to be twenty-four. SPWC MS, A1, 2 December 1805, RWS Archives, 30.
[85] SPWC MS, M1, RWS Archives, 3.
[86] SPWC MS, A1, 17 June 1805, RWS Archives, 12-19. Throughout this thesis, I have calculated relative monetary values using the online resource Measuring Worth: https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/

belonging. Cotman seemed well placed for membership, having worked for Ackermann (one of the SPWC's most important promoters), trained at Monro's (like many of its founders), exhibited at the RA (he could appear both an acknowledged artist and similarly disgruntled by watercolour's inferior status) and incorporated himself into the heart of the Sketching Society (demonstrating his membership of the watercolour milieu). By 1806, the Sketching Society was no longer a viable or available option; the SPWC, on the other hand, was the logical route. When the members met on 24 February, John Varley proposed Cotman as 'Fellow-Exhibitor',[87] a peripheral position denying him voting rights but nevertheless permitting entry to the SPWC's annual exhibitions and making him electable for full membership. Elections were to take place a month later, allowing Cotman three weeks to prepare and submit 'three or more finishd drawings' for inspection by the Society's Committee.[88]

Yet on 24 March, the SPWC balloted for but did not elect Cotman. Instead Ramsay Richard Reinagle (1777-1861) and Ann Byrne (1775-1837), the first female nominee, were appointed. Both were drawing masters and RA exhibitors from relatively well-established London artist-families. Charles Wild (1781-1835) and Edward Goodwin's (dates unknown) names were 'withdrawn', indicating their unavailability to take up the position. Two months following his rebuff, Cotman exhibited at the RA for the last time before making his annual trip home to Norfolk, the county in which he would remain resident for the next twenty-eight years.

Why Cotman failed to secure SPWC membership and subsequently left London are questions that have stumped his biographers. Yet partial answers can be found in the character of the work and practice he undertook beyond London during the same period when he toured the breadth of England. It is to these tours – namely those he made extensively throughout Yorkshire between 1803 and 1805 – that I will now turn.

[87] SPWC MS, A1, 24 February, RWS Archives, 44.
[88] SPWC MS, A1, 24 March 1806, RWS Archives, 48-50.

Chapter 2
Drawing, Painting and the Question of Patronage: Cotman in Yorkshire 1803-06

How a British artist emerged in the early nineteenth century was closely linked to where their practice was situated geographically. Clearly London provided the most dynamic arena for assertions of artistic authority, yet a different set of skills and subjects were to be found beyond the capital city. British artists' material was primarily garnered from the countryside, with Wales, the West Country, Lincolnshire, East Anglia, Yorkshire and the Scottish Highlands becoming the most popular regions for artists' sketching tours during the period – Cotman visited all but the last during his seven years in London. With the Continent closed to outsiders during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic war years, these regions took on renewed significance, leading more and more artists to undertake tours on home soil. Unsurprisingly, this movement was matched by a swelling of British landscape subjects populating both the art market and the walls of the country's public exhibitions.[1] As the number of artists wishing to tour the same sites and take the same views multiplied, the kind of artwork one produced – its viewpoint, technique, size and palette – became crucial to how they distinguished themselves, and emerged in relation to, their contemporaries.

Another challenge to touring was the expenses involved. Finding patronage in the regions required artists to have a good reputation and social skills as well as access to wealthy local networks, itself made more difficult by the number of touring artists seeking them. Moreover, the commercialisation of the British art world, as discussed in the precious chapter, meant that would-be patrons could purchase art from a local dealer or shop without having to enter into a direct relationship with any artist. Thus, the invitation that Cotman and Paul Sandby Munn received in summer 1803 to stay at Brandsby Hall, the North Yorkshire seat of the landed Cholmeley family, must have come as a highly favourable opportunity.

The invitation from the family seems to have been prompted by Sir Henry Englefield, seventh baronet (c.1752-1822), the brother of the family matriarch, Teresa Cholmeley,

[1] Analysis of the RA catalogues published during wartime attests to the dramatic increase in 'views' from these areas, with Welsh scenes taking the lion's share.

who told her son, Francis, that Cotman and Munn were 'friends of my brother's'.[2] Englefield, a London dilettante, antiquarian, amateur artist and collector, was closely acquainted with Dr Monro and showed commitment to the cause of watercolour painting by patronising its professional practitioners, chiefly John Varley. It is likely that Englefield met Cotman and Munn through Monro's Academy (Munn attending a couple of years before Cotman) and saw in them talent worth recommending to his sister who, as we shall see, had a particular interest in art and artists.

But while Munn stayed at Brandsby for three weeks, Cotman remained for three months, almost double the time usually dedicated to a summer sketching tour.[3] Following Munn's departure, Cotman was quickly assimilated into daily family life, invited to the Cholmeleys' social engagements (at the York Assembly Rooms and the races as well as going shooting with friends, for example), introduced to their prestigious friends, and even likened by the family's grandmother to 'the Child of the Parents & the Brother of their Children.'[4] Cotman made two more extended visits to Yorkshire in 1804 and 1805, which meant that he spent a total of thirty-two weeks largely in the company of the Cholmeleys.

It is these tours rather than any others that he made in Britain during the same period (including Wales in 1800 and 1802 as well as various short tours through Norfolk and Lincolnshire) to which this chapter will give special focus. This is because the Yorkshire tours cast particular light on the relationship between Cotman's location, identity and practice away from the London art world at a significant moment in his emergence as a professional artist. This chapter argues that Cotman's experiences of the social scenarios that attended his time with the Cholmeleys and their milieu gave rise to an ambivalence which threw into question the character of their patronage and, in turn, the status of his professional and personal identity. It reveals how this uncertainty contributed to a noticeable shift in the character of Cotman's artwork, which became increasingly more

[2] TC to FC, 10 July 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/313 NYRO. This remark should, however, be considered as a statement based on fact rather than a fact, which can help ascertain the origins of the initial meeting.
[3] See the Cholmeley Family commonplace book (1798-1854), MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, North Yorkshire Records Office (hereafter NYRO), 3 August 1803 'Mr Munn went away'. See also Katherine Cholmeley (hereafter KC) to Francis Cholmeley (hereafter FC), 16 August 1803, ZQG, XII 12/1/319, NYRO: 'Mr Munn and Mr Cotman return[e]d here. Mr Munn went to London the next day.' The Cholmeley commonplace book provides a microscopic record of the family's daily movements as well as those of their friends or friends-of-friends. It therefore helps to construct a fuller picture of Cotman's movements, including the dates of his arrivals, departures and temporary trips from the house as well as the people with whom he came in to contact.
[4] Teresa Cholmeley (hereafter TC) quoting Lady Englefield to FC, 23 October 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/326, NYRO.

painterly in its treatment and personally-inflected in its subject matter after 1803. To what extent the personal is borne out in Cotman's Yorkshire landscape drawings and watercolours is one of this chapter's key questions.

1. Draughtsman or painter?: Cotman and the Cholmeleys in 1803

Cotman's first trip to Yorkshire in 1803 got off to a flying start. After Munn's departure in early August, the Cholmeleys introduced Cotman to their neighbours, the major Yorkshire landowners, Thomas Wynn-Belasyse (dates unknown) and his wife, the daughter of the second earl Fauconberg, Lady Charlotte (1767-1825), whose country seat, Newburgh Priory, was situated within huge parklands beyond the market town of Coxwold.[5] The meeting resulted in a commission for Cotman, an estate portrait pendant of the Newburgh estate (Figs 42 and 43).[6] The results were ambitious: two large-scale exhibition watercolours which show Cotman drawing on classic formal codes of viewing. The distant prospect (Fig. 42) offers a classic topographical viewpoint which bears a clear relationship between composition and narration. With unambiguous fore-, middle- and backgrounds, the eye follows the curvature of the grazing land from a fecundate foreground to the town and spire which point to the Wynn-Belasyses' township of Coxwold. These elements are highlighted with pencil outlines and specks of reserved whites, themselves echoed in the luminous entirety of Newburgh Priory at the centre of the composition. A faint pathway to the right is trodden by two tiny rural figures and serves to connect the foreground pastureland with the town, one inhabited and provided for by the lush terrain which, in turn, is accounted for by the developing weather system at the top right.[7] The sightline to the town is taken up at the left of the middleground field which leads the eye towards the Wynn-Belasyses' country house, the landscape's semantic resolution.

Cotman's pendants call to mind recent landscapes by the art world's two 'geniuses', Turner and Girtin. For example, the distant view invokes Girtin's *Kirkstall Abbey* from 1800 (Fig. 44) where broad muted washes of the storm-darkened sky are echoed in

[5] See commonplace book, 9 and 10 August 1803, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, NYRO.
[6] Comprehensive accounts for household and personal expenditure do not survive in the archival records relating to the Belasyse's estate at NYRO.
[7] Such devices were recommended by the Revd. William Gilpin (1724-1804) in his popular writings on picturesque representation: 'break the edges of the walk: give it the rudeness of a road; mark it with wheel-tracks; and scatter around a few stones, and brushwood... in a word, instead of making the whole smooth, make it rough; and you make it also picturesque.' William Gilpin, *Essays on Picturesque Beauty*... (London, 1794), Essay 1, 7.

Cotman's encroaching storm cloud. Instead of a picturesquely-delineated ecclesiastical building (which one might find in the work of Munn such as Fig. 45), Cotman, like Girtin, de-emphasises architectural detail in favour of fluid washes. Cotman's broad handling serves to integrate both Newburgh and Coxwold within the landscape, a classic rhetorical statement of harmony realised here as the products of nature. In turn, Cotman's near view of Newburgh (Fig. 43) draws on the low views of country estate portraits produced by the likes of Turner. The oblique viewpoint and compositional arrangement of the latter's 1797 watercolour of Harewood House (Fig. 46), the country seat of the Yorkshire aristocrat Edward Lascelles, strikes a chord with Cotman's watercolour, as do the painterly textures, colours and abundant vegetation included in Turner's foreground. The visual connections with Turner and Girtin suggest that Cotman was sensitive to the need to show self-conscious artistry and commensurability in a commission for his new patrons. He nevertheless took care to foreground his own recognisable motifs, including his trademark scallop-shaped grassy clumps, staccato graphite flecks for brambles, repeated dashes for leaves and heart-shaped butterburs and weeds.

That the Wynn-Belasyses were happy with the results is indicated by their willingness to have the two watercolours exhibited by Cotman at the RA in 1804.[8] Given the success of the commission and his introduction to an important patronage connection, Cotman could be forgiven for thinking that he had struck gold with the Cholmeleys. Cotman's biographers might also be forgiven for interpreting his association with the family as providing a positive patronage setup which encompassed a friendly, supportive environment.[9] Yet while the family's inherited status, apparent wealth and advocacy of Cotman might initially have appeared to him as an ideal source of patronage come true, all was not as it seemed.

Indeed, the four years that Cotman spent in close contact with the Cholmeleys witnessed a noticeable stylistic shift in his output. After the Newburgh pendants, he began to produce landscape watercolours that were almost their exact opposites. Large dimensions, high degrees of stylistic finish, topographical viewpoints and obedience to the motif were

[8] According to Mrs Cholmeley, Cotman had 'written to Mr Belasyse requesting leave to frame and exhibit his two drawgs of Newburgh. I think the little Dribble cannot fail & consent!' TC to FC, 22 January 1804, ZQG XII 12/1/348, NYRO. At the 1804 RA exhibition, Cotman's seven submissions (six of which were Yorkshire subjects) included two catalogued exhibits under the title: 'Newburgh Park, Yorkshire – the seat of T.W. Belayse, Esq.' Both hung in the Council Room in which three other estate portraits and only four other Yorkshire subjects hung.

[9] See Rajnai, *Cotman*, 10. For more recent examples of this position, see Hemingway in Rosenthal et al, *Prospects for the Nation*, 183-204, and Hill, *Cotman in the North*.

replaced by small-scale, close-up compositional structures, a lack of draughtsmanship and painterly *un*finish. Moreover, it is questionable whether the Cholmeleys can accurately be called Cotman's 'patrons' (etymologically: *pattern*, something shaped or designed; in other words, steady).[10] They commissioned next to nothing from him – no archival or visual evidence exists for estate portraiture of Brandsby Hall, nor is there anything to suggest that Cotman was paid for his services as the family's part-time drawing master, a position they informally gave to him after Munn's departure. In addition, several references in the family archive indicate that the Cholmeleys were relative paupers. They regularly had to make do and mend rather than replace and buy anew. While they owned a chaise, for example, it had 'got so bad as to be unsafe', forcing them to 'do something to it, as we really cannot afford a new one.'[11] And on at least one occasion Cotman even lent them money – a note in the personal account book of the family heir, Francis, shows that he borrowed £5 from the artist in 1804 (a sum amounting to about £340 in today's money) which was not repaid until six months later; all this, surely not the kind of patronage set-up we, or indeed Cotman himself, might expect from a landed family. As it would happen, then, the Cholmeleys' financial and social status was on rather shaky ground. With this, Cotman's social and personal status became increasingly ambiguous and the character of his artwork shifted. His association with Yorkshire is thus ripe for review.

This chapter is organised into three parts which focus on Cotman's experience of his relationship with the Cholmeleys in 1803, 1805 and, finally, 1806 after he had returned to London after his final visit to Yorkshire. Throughout, I do not propose to portray Cotman, as Andrew Hemingway has done, as a certain kind of artist who produced work that conformed to a particular aesthetic paradigm or influence of a patron, an argument which

[10] 'patron *n.*', *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (1989), https://www.oed.com, accessed 16 August 2012.

[11] TC to FC, 17 November 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/332, NYRO: 'Your father calculates that after paying for manners[?] & c.you will have 30 for present pocket money—if this is wrong, say, and he will send you more. But God knows we must be careful & Economical as we can—Our carriage is got so bad as to be unsafe. We must do something to it, as we really cannot afford a new one.' Surviving receipts from 1803-6 show payments for carriage, driver and horse hire. Only in June 1806, were the Cholmeleys able to purchase a galloway carriage which, along with their 'unsafe' gig, 'must suffice us I believe this summer.' TC to FC, 9 June 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/454, NYRO. In the same letter to Francis, Mrs Cholmeley mentioned that they were having to make cuts to their family consumption so they might meet 'heavy' tax payments and staff wages: 'James [their servant] is as usual overcome with work & fewer hands than ever to do it. We have literally now but two labourers who are worthy of their hire & the stout young ones are 3/6 per day here—the sunk fence is therefore unavoidably postponed til the Turnips are soured & the farm properly attended to.' By 1806, Brandsby Hall also needed repairs: 'Our roof is found to be in so bad a Condition that it absolutely must be slated, & is partly to be begun...'. TC to FC, 23 March 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/443, NYRO.

fails to take account of the vagaries of his relationship with the Cholmeleys.[12] Instead, by looking critically at a range of material produced during the period 1803-6, I offer a re-reading of some familiar pictures and some less familiar archival materials (including a collection of surviving letters, some of which were published in 1980 but remain critically under-interpreted[13]), in order to elucidate the clash that occurred between ideals of patronage and practice and the realities and experiences of Yorkshire. My central aim is to give an alternative perspective on the conventional reading of Cotman in Yorkshire to show that he pursued a different kind of personal and professional survival to that enacted in London during the same period.

Given this chapter's emphasis on a family, personal relationships and experiences, my methodological approach draws on the terms offered by psychoanalysis. With its emphasis on interiority and subjectivity, a psychoanalytically-inflected approach allows one to think about historical subjectivities in a manner that gets beyond, but nevertheless remains in touch with, the social. Specifically, it permits a reading of the connections between Cotman's social situation, his experiences and his pictorial mark-making**.** We must, however, admit the provisionality of an account that gets beyond the social: indeed, psychoanalytic art history is necessarily speculative, not least because the theory relies on certain essential concepts which purport to transcend historical change. We must beware not to seek within the image 'the hidden meaning, the screen memory, the clue that will confirm some correspondence with a pre-given scenario', as Nancy Locke has cautioned.[14] Nevertheless, careful symptomatic readings of artworks have produced some illuminating results in the field of art history and have revealed the traces of their makers' personal responses to lived experience, a key preoccupation of this chapter.[15]

[12] Andrew Hemingway has argued that Cotman's 1805 watercolours were borne of his friendship with Francis Cholmeley who apparently had strong inclinations towards Associationist theory, a branch of aesthetic philosophy championed by the Revd. Archibald Alison. See Hemingway, 'The Constituents of Romantic Genius: John Sell Cotman's Greta Drawings' in Rosenthal et al, *Prospects for the Nation*, 183-203.

[13] The Cholmeley archive includes over 2,000 letters as well as family accounts, receipts, pocket books and personal and estate papers. Most of the correspondence was from the Cholmeley female members to the eldest and only son, Francis, who was frequently away from Brandsby and retained the letters. Those letters relating to Cotman have been published by Adele Holcombe and M. Y. Ashcroft (eds), *Cotman in the Cholmeley Archive* (NYRO, 1980). My own examination of the correspondence has revealed that a substantial number of references to Cotman are missing from this publication, however.

[14] Nancy Locke, *Manet and the Family Romance* (Princeton & Oxford, 2001), 2.

[15] See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Columbia, 1980), Locke, *Manet* (2001) and Anne Wagner, 'Why Monet Gave Up Figure Painting', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 76, no. 4 (December 1994) are exemplary – though not unproblematic – models in this regard.

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In the first week of July 1803, Munn and Cotman arrived in York where extant dated drawings place them for a couple of days.[16] The next date securing their whereabouts emerges on 7 July when a note in the Cholmeleys' commonplace book records that 'Mr. Munn & Mr. Cotman came'.[17] Besides the introduction to the family from Henry Englefield, the precise terms of the artists' stay at Brandsby Hall are unknown. However, the interest that Mrs Cholmeley appeared to show in art and artists (expanded upon below) implies that she welcomed the idea of hosting two London-based artists while they toured the region. On 17 July, Mrs Cholmeley wrote to her eldest and only son Francis: 'Messers Munn & Cotman staid with us a week & left us only last Thursday. It was quite a pleasant visit to us, & to them I hope more than equally so, as the use of my little chaise was a real comfort to them in the hot weather of the week they spent here.' The following week, she wrote again to Francis that the arrangement was working out: 'We have heard from our 2 artists from Ripon. They are delighted beyond measure wth Fountain's Abbey & have seated themselves there a week to draw at their leisure.'[18] Yet, despite the pleasure that Mrs Cholmeley seems to have derived from facilitating their tour, Munn and Cotman's stay did involve some quid-pro-quo. On 9 August she wrote to Francis: 'I am quite sorry you miss our artists & their delightful sketches besides the advantage of taking some lessons fm them had you been here.'[19] Easy access to the region, association with a landed family and free board at a country house did not, therefore, come entirely free.

Brandsby Hall was a large Georgian house built within the walls of large private parkland.[20] Its 3,000-plus acres incorporated the small parish of Brandsby-cum-Stearsby, approximately twelve miles north of York. The Cholmeleys, whose roots in the area dated back to 1558, were a long-established family of Catholic landowners who lived off the parish rents and modest farming. Yet by 1803, their annual income does not appear to have been particularly high, the rents collected from their tenants having dwindled

[16] *The Ouse Bridge, York*, 4 July 1803, pencil on paper, 12.7 x 22.8 cm, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery (hereafter NCMAG) and Paul Sandby Munn, *Lendal Water Tower, York*, 5 July 1803, pencil on paper, 12.7 x 22.2 cm, V&A.
[17] Commonplace book, 7 July 1803, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, NYRO.
[18] TC to FC, 23 July 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/315, NYRO.
[19] TC to FC, 9 August 1803, ZQGXII 12/1/318, NYRO.
[20] Between 1767 and 1770, substantial construction projects were initiated by Francis Cholmeley (1706-80), Mrs Cholmeley's father-in-law. The 1745 house and old Norman church were pulled down and in their place were erected the Hall and, to the north-east, a small Roman Catholic church emblazoned with the family's coat of arms.

dramatically over the previous decades.[21] The sole heir to the estate, Francis Cholmeley the elder (1750-1808) inherited Brandsby following the death of his father in 1780. Besides sitting on various committees in the North Riding, little else is known of him. The majority of the letters in the family archive are written by his wife, Teresa Ann Cholmeley (1755-1810). References to her husband, or 'Doddy' as he was nicknamed, are comparatively few. Born in Berkshire, Teresa was also from an established Catholic family of landowners. Her father was Sir Henry Englefield, sixth baronet (1715-1780), her mother, Lady Catharine Buck (1725-1805), and her older brother, the aforementioned Henry Englefield (or 'Bob' as she called him).[22] Having married in 1782, Francis and Teresa's union joined one Catholic family of the provincial gentry with another.

In 1780, Mrs Cholmeley's father died and her older brother took over the Englefield estates. Henry Englefield, now seventh baronet, immediately abandoned the family home at Whiteknights, Berkshire for central London, where he lived with their widowed mother in a Mayfair townhouse. Several times a year, Mrs Cholmeley would stay with them at the Tilney Street house,[23] her brother 'kind & open in his Manner' and someone who 'really takes pains to shew me Pictures & Sights.'[24] During her visit to the capital in the early summer of 1803, Teresa paid two visits to the RA where 'some of the portraits, particularly Lady Ch. Campbell, a whole length by Lawrence, and all Turner's, struck me more than ever.'[25] She also noted 'the fashionable play of John Bull' in Covent Garden, Henry Aston Barker's Panorama of Paris in Leicester Square and the private exhibits on Pall Mall, including the paintings by Claude belonging to John Julius Angerstein who, she marvelled, 'has given 8000 gs for them.'[26] Through her well-connected brother, Mrs Cholmeley also befriended artistic types such as the Yorkshire-born sculptor Mary Berry (1763-1852).[27] In short, she had (or at least aspired to) cultural capital but seems to have lacked equivalent financial assets.

Mrs Cholmeley encouraged her own five children along similar lines. Francis (1783-1854, aged twenty in 1803) had been educated at Oscott, a distinguished boarding school

[21] See Cholmeley Rentals & Valuations, ZQG IV 2/17, NYRO.
[22] See William Betham, *The Baronetage of England or the History of the English Baronets...*, vol.1 (Ipswich and London, 1801), 150.
[23] Unlike other landed gentry, the Cholmeleys did not have their own metropolitan townhouse and, aside from an itinerary of active touring, seem to have spent the whole year at Brandsby.
[24] TC to FC, 30 May 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/309, NYRO.
[25] TC to FC, 6 June 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/310, NYRO
[26] TC to FC, 30 May 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/309, NYRO
[27] It may well have been during this 1803 visit that Englefield first brought Munn and Cotman to Teresa Cholmeley's attention.

in Warwickshire. Between 1800 and 1804, he majored in Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University where he mixed in the cultured and intellectual circles of the likes of Francis Jeffray, the founder of the *Edinburgh Review*, the poet Walter Scott, and the future Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston. Mrs Cholmeley's letters show her delight in these social connections and she encouraged Francis to ask his friends back to Brandsby. Francis also showed an interest in art. On his 1803 tour of the Highlands with Palmerston, Francis wrote to his mother about sketches he had made from nature.[28] And during a visit to London in spring 1805, he spent over 10 shillings (now the equivalent of about £35) viewing art, including two visits to an exhibition of drawings (no doubt that of the SPWC from which Cotman would soon be rejected).[29] Francis kept the letters sent to him which form the most valuable sources in the Cholmeley archive.

Francis's four younger sisters Anne, Mary, Katherine and Harriet,[30] nearly all teenagers during Cotman's first Yorkshire visit, were educated at home and actively encouraged by their mother in the polite arts of poetry, drawing and dancing. The Brandsby commonplace book records the comings-and-goings of drawing and dancing masters, while their letters to Francis often include extracts of their own poems or their mother's transcriptions of them. However, their written correspondence also indicates that the family matriarch could be an overbearing character who dominated family life. Not only did she open her children's' post in their absence,[31] but she proof-read their letters before they were sent. Certain words are often crossed through and amended, and for those letters received, she sometimes admitted to retrospectively correcting spelling mistakes.[32] Mrs Cholmeley also often offered apologies for her daughters' handwriting, warning that it showed the signs of 'Mediocrité'.[33] While the tenor of such comments is often sarcastic (the daughters also sometimes light-heartedly poking fun at their mother and all of them using each others' nicknames), we might view Mrs Cholmeley's edits as an extension of her own apparent self-consciousness about appearances.[34] Furthermore, and despite

[28] FC to TC, 14 May 1803, ZQG XII 12/2, NYRO.
[29] Francis Cholmeley's account book, 1804-5, ZQG XII 12/1/4.1, NYRO.
[30] A sixth daughter, Teresa (1784-1794), died aged ten. She is never referred to in the Cholmeley letters.
[31] As a letter from Cotman to Francis indicates: ''if you have written to me at Greta Bridge , it will be sent to Brandsby, the hand known of course, opened. Therefore hope there's nothing bad with', JSC to FC, 6 September 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/336, NYRO.
[32] See TC to FC, 4 December 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/336, NYRO: 'Cotman had written an acrostic on Tippo wch set us going—the lines underneath (wh a slight correction by the Correcting Peshy) he sent to Harriet in compt to her Birthday...'
[33] TC to FC, 21 August 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/320, NYRO. Here, she was primarily referring to Anne Cholmeley who seems to have borne the brunt of her mother's criticisms.
[34] Mrs Cholmeley remarked upon her ability to 'keep up appearances ... & be cheerful & lively in company for the sake of my family', which she noted in relation to her mother's death in 1805. TC to

appearances, the volume of correspondence also implies that she was a rather neurotic character, a woman apparently buzzing with thought and feeling. Her syntax frequently lacks cohesion and oscillates between positive and negative statements. And when writing to family and friends, she was often insistent upon her correspondent's more frequent contact, while her persistent concern to know of their whereabouts, wellbeing or productivity could easily verge on stifling.

A letter to Francis in Edinburgh co-written by Mrs Cholmeley and Harriet is worth quoting at some length as it illustrates the significance of the former's edits, deletions and language when employed in terms of art and artists. Harriet began the letter:

> We have now at Brandsby two ~~young Painters~~ draughtsmen [Mrs Cholmeley's substitution] from London Mr Munn & Mr Cotman—they went the day before yesterday to Castle Howard & today are at Rivaulx Abbey, Helmsley Castle &c—they will return, we believe, this evening—Pesh [Mrs Cholmeley] was afraid that they would be <u>mobbed</u> for taking Views of a Sunday as you know there is a Village at Rivaulx & at Byland Abbey... PS. Excuse the faults &c &c &c...

Mrs Cholmeley continued:

> Mr Munn & Mr Cottman are two Artists of great merit indeed & both friends of my Brother's. I think their sketches superior to any I have ever seen. Cottman is very young. Munn between 30 & 40 & a well establishd Artist. He draws with a rapidity & command of his pencil that is quite wonderful. They were delighted with Kirkham & have made exquisite drawings of it. I wish you could see them. Munn is a rough, peculiar mannerd Man but very shrewd & clever & of course very entertaining. Cottman ~~a~~ much more <u>mannier'd</u> & gentle manlike.[35]

The statements made in this letter are telling in a number of ways. Firstly, Harriet's mention of her mother's concern at the apparent threat of a mobbing and her fleeting apology for any faults or, indeed, anything that may be faulted ('&c &c &c'), is suggestive of Mrs Cholmeley's ostensibly anxious and mollycoddling nature as perceived by her daughter. Secondly, Mrs Cholmeley's substitution of Harriet's 'Painters' for 'draughtsmen' provides a fine yet significant distinction. This intentional edit shows how

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JSC, 14 July 1806, Reeve Collection, volume of letters between Cotman and Dawson Turner, and from the Cholmeley family and others, shelf 167, C7, Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum (herafter referred to as Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM).

[35] Harriet Cholmeley (hereafter HC) and TC to FC, 10 July 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/313, NYRO.

she characterised the profession of her visitors and how the epithets, 'painters' and 'draughtsmen', were related to the visual character of their artistic output. Why not 'Painters'? Why 'draughtsmen'? 'One whose profession is to make drawings, plans, or sketches; a man employed or skilled in drawing or designing'; by dictionary definition, 'draughtsman' signifies crafting, planning, drawing. 'A person who paints pictures; an artist who works with paint'; 'painter', by contrast, was synonymous with 'artist', pictures, colour and paint. Munn is then singled out as the 'well establishd Artist' of the two and who possesses a particular 'command of his pencil'.[36] Accordingly, Mrs Cholmeley guesses he must be 'between 30 and 40' (he had only just turned thirty) due to his 'very shrewd & clever' character. 'Cottman' (twice spelt incorrectly) is, conversely, 'very young' and 'much more mannier'd & gentlemanlike' than his colleague. However, no specific comment is made about his draughtsmanship.

On the same day as this letter was sent to Francis, Munn and Cotman returned to Brandsby from a local sketching trip.[37] For the following four days they remained in the family's presence during which Mrs Cholmeley observed that

> Munn opend up more when we knew him & entertaind us two evenings with repeating admirably some stories of Colman's[38] in doggrel verse & a longer one by some other hand of "Monsr Tomson", also with capital imitations of several of our actors. He is one of the best mimics I ever saw in my life.[39]

Munn, the recently 'rough, peculiar mannerd Man' was now a polished reciter of poetical verse. Yet there is perhaps more to Mrs Cholmeley's praise of Munn's mimicry than his apparent talent for amateur dramatics: her admiration of 'his shrewd & clever' character and the 'capital imitations' of his evening performance could also be extended to her appreciation of his art.

A comparison of two light pencil drawings of a cottage in Bolton by Cotman and Munn helps to illustrate the point (Figs 47 and 48). Munn's sketch accords with standard picturesque representations of such frequently deployed subjects: the humble rural cottage as codified by Thomas Gainsborough in the 1780s and since popularised in print,

[36] Andrew Hemingway has misread this remark as pertaining to Cotman rather than Munn, which alters the emphasis. It is Munn's name, not Cotman's, which follows Mrs Cholmeley's observation. See Hemingway, 'The Constituents of Romantic Genius: John Sell Cotman's Greta Drawings' in Rosenthal et al, *Prospects for the Nation*, 185.
[37] See commonplace book, 10 July 1803, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, NYRO.
[38] This was probably George Colman (1762-1836), theatre actor and song writer.
[39] TC to FC, 17 July 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/314, NYRO.

pattern books and drawing manuals. The cottage scenes of Henry Edridge and Thomas Hearne made an important contribution to this genre, the latter's drawings providing the source of the illustrations to Richard Payne Knight's well-known poem, *The Landscape* (1794). In almost 'capital imitation' of Hearne's cottage scenes, such as that illustrated in Figure 49, Munn adopts a low viewpoint set back from the motif to simultaneously admit its compact form, defined foreground and framing tree. Precise yet broken outlines delineate the cottage's main structure, with shorter marks for wall joins, roof tiles and other details. On his own tour of Yorkshire in summer 1803, John Varley had made a slight pencil sketch of the same cottage (Fig. 50) and it is likely that all three men met up and sketched together at Bolton. Even though Varley includes more surrounding details, his cottage has more in common with Munn's than Cotman's, with descriptive outlines and clarity of parts privileged over texture and technique.

Indeed, while Cotman takes the same oblique view to Munn's (and Varley's), he lowers the perspective to narrow its distance from the picture plane. The gradations of graphite vary across the sheet. The hard shading of the gatepost draws the eye up the path (absent from Munn's scene as his framing tree is from Cotman's) which is then met by dark hatching barring us from further entry. To the left, pressured pencil marks emphasise the windows suggesting Cotman's own interest in what lies beyond the pane and its relationship to the exterior world. The same encroaching tree growing at the foot of Munn's cottage would be barely detectable in Cotman's drawing were it not for the scalloped clumps of foliage which faintly bisect the building, while the lean-to structure at the far end – so clearly delineated by Munn – seems to disintegrate in monochromatic aerial perspective. Overall, the experience of viewing Cotman's image is fragmented, even chaotic, the building seemingly bleeding out beyond the boundaries of its own description to dramatise the process of drawing itself.

Such contrasts of graphic behaviour (Munn) and misbehaviour (Cotman) might explain Mrs Cholmeley's commendation of Munn's personal shrewdness and 'command of his pencil'. Indeed, the imitative qualities of the artist's graphic style – comprehensible, compact, conventional – were precisely those to which Mrs Cholmeley's taste defaulted; imitative, that is, of those stylistic qualities employed in more conventional picturesque scenes with which she was familiar and comfortable in her communicated appraisal.[40] Yet

[40] Henry Englefield, himself a keen amateur artist, had produced a drawing of the west front of Byland Abbey, which was subsequently engraved by William Byrne for Thomas Hearne's volume, *The Antiquities of Great Britain* (1786). The Cholmeleys knew of this drawing and the engraving: 'We last week all but Papa accompanied him to Byland ... He took a sketch from the spot of my uncle's drawing

Cotman's drawing, with its patchy tonality and sketchy complexion, was the exact opposite, the technique (possibly purposefully) noncompliant with Mrs Cholmeley's comparatively conservative artistic tastes.

On 3 August, Munn went back home to London. Cotman, still Munn's tenant at 107 New Bond Street, remained at Brandsby. Gone now was the opportunity for the family to compare and contrast the two artists and their work. Yet they continued to refer to Cotman as a 'draughtsman' who produced 'delightful sketches' rather than 'Pictures'.[41] Such terms ran the risk of being (pejoratively) associated with pencil, pen and a dependency on outline, something which could cause unease amongst artists and compel some to alter their technique. In 1797, for example, Farington noted that Francis Wheatley no longer employed 'outline with a Pen as the Collectors call all such *Sketches* and will not pay so much for them.'[42] The SPWC deliberated time and again over words employed to distinguish their practice in watercolour. Their rule book from 1804 shows a routine crossing-out of 'Drawings' for 'Pictures', only then to bear a further (and more highly regarded) substitution, 'Paintings'.[43] Likewise, the formal implications of the labels 'draughtsman' and 'sketches' as employed by Mrs Cholmeley were increasingly resisted by Cotman. In what follows, I propose that what we might call Cotman's graphic misbehaviour, as exhibited in *Cottage at Bolton*, soon became more apparent in his artwork, and to the Cholmeleys who were looking at it.

Indeed, a tension or splitting between drawing and painting, as if the artist was attempting to have it both ways by trying out two modes of artistic behaviour, is evident from a comparison of two images of ruined Yorkshire abbeys, Rievaulx and Byland (Figs 51 and 52), which Cotman made on his first trip. *Rievaulx Abbey* represents the kind of delicate worked-up and signed pencil drawing in which Cotman employed an idiosyncratic visual language for expressing certain motifs: his scalloped grassy clumps, a tumble-down depository of heart-shaped leaves and jagged pencil lines legible as brambles. Most of the graphic detail (*ergon*) is contained within a kind of vignette (*parergon*) comprised of

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from which the engraving is taken...' Anne Cholmeley (hereafter AC) to FC, 21 August 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/320, NYRO. Mrs Cholmeley was also aware of Henry Edridge (see page 86 in main body of the text) and through her friend, the amateur artist Edward Swinburne, she was introduced to Girtin, Havell and Varley's work, see TC to FC, 7 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/410, NYRO.

[41] As demonstrated in the female members' letters to Francis such as: TC to FC, 12 November 1803, 26 November 1803, KC to FC, 4 December 1803 and 15 January 1804, ZQG XII 12/1/ 330, 334, 336, 347, NYRO.

[42] FD, 9 Oct 1797, vol. 3, 904.

[43] SPWC MS, M1, RWS Archives, 16. The substitution of 'Drawing' for 'Picture' for 'Painting' continues throughout this volume.

similar scallop-shaped foliage. This mimics the curve and linear structure of the nearest arch and melts away in the foreground to open up a pathway for the eye to enter. Soft and sparing in application, the suggestion of foliage around the sheet's perimeter acts like '[t]he frame of the analytical of the beautiful' which 'melt[s] away at the moment it deploys the greatest energy'; that is, to concentrate, focus and contain the 'interior' details of ruined architectural structures, the drawing's main subject.[44] Yet in Cotman's watercolour *Byland Abbey*, pencil marks, lines and structures give way to broad washes and a middleground profusion of colourful stains which are closer to what they are made from – watercolour paint – than the stones or foliage they are supposed to represent.

A couple of days following Cotman's execution of *Byland Abbey*, four of the five Cholmeley sisters collaborated on two poems which were copied into the eldest daughter Anne's personal commonplace book (due to space I shall quote sparingly from these, although a full transcription of each poem is given in Appendix 3).[45] The first is a couplet sonnet by Anne which she 'addressed to J. S. Cotman by a warm Admirer & sincere Friend'. The second is a poem by her three younger sisters and intended as an 'Antidote to the foregoing flattery, by 3 sincere friends', evidently judging Anne's sonnet gushing and over-familiar. These poems provide a tacit indication of how two different modes of drawing by Cotman quickly came to be associated with inventive artistic genius, but only so long as his technique and representation was kept comprehensible.

Anne's opening double couplet captures her perception of how Cotman's personal 'genius' was linked to his use of the pencil:

> Whene'er thy Genius Cotman dares to stray
> Beyond precision's bounds, in wanton play;
> Strong, bold & rapid, as thy pencil flies
> Apparent errors into beauties rise—

Her sisters' poem takes an alternate rhyming scheme played out over five stanzas, and begins:

> Thy pencil Cotman, like thy pen
> Is oft sublime & bold
> For to the eyes of common Men
> The meaning is untold.—

[44] Jacques Derrida, 'The Parergon' in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago, 1987), 71 and 61.
[45] The drawing is dated 7 September on the recto, and the poems are dated 8 and 9 September respectively.

Theirs concludes, however, with a 'Moral', which changes the meter to mimic Anne's opening couplets while providing an 'Antidote' to her ostensibly over-encouraging lines:

Moral
Whene'er thy 'folly' Cotman dares to stray
From 'Comprehension's' bounds in wanton play
Dashing & splashing all thy paper o'er
The beauties of the *Sketch* are seen no more–
For in thy lamp-black foregrounds one but sees
Blotches for *stones* and *flourishes* for *trees*!—

According to the Cholmeley sisters, genius can emanate from the 'apparent errors' Cotman makes when he 'stray[s] / Beyond precision's bounds, in wanton play'; that is, making artistic claims with 'Strong & bold' pencil beyond the norm (perhaps represented by Munn's drawings). Playing with and personalising familiar motifs – as Cotman does in *Rievaulx Abbey* – is perceived to produce a powerful beauty precisely because it offers a unique viewing experience. Such poetic statements (including others, see Appendix 3) imply that the sisters were aware of current nationalistic discourses surrounding imaginative artistic genius. The idea of the English landscape painter, personified by the 'geniuses' J. M. W. Turner and recently deceased Girtin (both of whose work was known to Mrs Cholmeley), was that his art was motivated by an inner, almost chemical relationship with the natural world.[46] With such emphasis placed on an artist's interior vision, it followed that aspirant artist-geniuses were urged to develop an individualistic style that could visualise that vision, transmuting it into material form by playing with iconographic meaning for subliminal effect.

Yet while such effects might be thrilling (as they certainly seem to have been for the Cholmeley sisters), a picture nevertheless had to be intelligible. In other words, a genius who played with precision in representation could not go too far in his obtrusive 'Dashing & splashing', and risk diminishing the 'beauties of the *Sketch*' altogether. It is thus significant that the Cholmeleys sisters' poetical praise of Cotman is in relation to his pencil (or pen) rather than his (implied) brush, suggesting a comparatively negative perception of his watercolour technique. For example, the younger sisters' modifications to Anne's opening couplets indicate that Cotman's painterly handling of watercolour could corrupt the entire image if he allowed the wet and diaphanous properties of the medium to leak beyond the bounds of comprehension. Moreover, the coupling of

[46] See Kriz, *Idea of the English Landscape Painter*.

'Dashing' and 'splashing' with 'Blotches' and 'flourishes' imply that Cotman had treated the scene performatively and in haste rather than with considered restraint which might have been attained had he used his pencil rather than his brush. Unlike *Rievaulx Abbey*, pencil does not function to frame or structure in *Byland Abbey*, and while they are evident – notably on the roofs of two mid-ground houses, the west front of the abbey and the characteristic scalloped foliage throughout – they remain auxiliary to the painterly blotches. These seep upwards from the foreground of 'lamp-black' splodges and squiggles into other regions of the sheet, itself appearing as more of a testing ground for painterly experimentation than the surface for representation. Once the descriptive sign of the motif is lost 'from 'Comprehension's' bounds', the delicate relationship between art and nature is seen to break down, the artist exposed as mischievously disobedient and resistant to the conventional rules of art. Expressed by the Cholmeley sisters in terms of morality, that resistance is Cotman's 'folly'.

The date inscribed on the recto of *Byland Abbey* corresponds with a commonplace book record for 7 September and shows that Cotman had been accompanied to the ruin by Francis, then just returned home to Brandsby from Scotland. After Munn's departure on 3 August, all but one of Cotman's local sketching excursions were made in the company of the Cholmeleys who became 'seriously engaged in sketching from nature wth Mr Cotman.'[47] Clearly, if Cotman was going to stay at Brandsby he was expected to give something back. In the weeks that followed, he effectively replaced the family's previous drawing masters, George Pearson and Henry Cave (whose services were no longer required after June 1803)[48], requiring him to juggle the demands of teaching amateurs with the collection of material for his own professional practice.

We might thus interpret the drawings of *Rievaulx* and *Byland* in terms of a stylistic predicament on Cotman's part, as if he were being pulled in two directions at once: the one, accessible to his patrons/pupils with its pencil structure, clear motifs and architectural linearity; the other, bordering on what those patrons/pupils seem to have considered lawless to the rules of conventional codes of picturesque representation. While for Cotman the production of a loose and colourful composition like *Byland Abbey* could make claims to artistic genius, this quality was hard to square with his role as Brandsby's *de facto* drawing master where he was expected to produce intelligible artwork to be

[47] Cotman made a solo trip to nearby Helmsley after Munn's departure, returning on 9 August, see commonplace book, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1. AC to FC, 21 August 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/320, NYRO.
[48] References to these Yorkshire drawing masters appear in the Cholmeley's commonplace book.

admired for its professional expertise at the same time as being straightforward enough for his pupils to copy. If, moreover, Cotman was hoping to gain commissions from this family (or anybody else for that matter), he would need to show artistic promise rather than the capacity for stylistic incomprehensibility. Having it both ways by trying to negotiate drawing with painting, stylistic obedience with wilfulness, and teaching with genius was thus a tightrope act, and one which became increasingly problematic for Cotman as his experience of Yorkshire wore on.

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The site of such negotiation was not solely located in the artwork, however. As Martin Myrone has observed of the early nineteenth-century art world, 'the logic of artistic identity that was emerging was decidedly *unreasonable*' because 'the *best* artist was not necessarily the *good* artist'.[49] Artistic skill mattered but personal character (or, more accurately, the performance of it) also played a crucial role. Munn's 'command of his pencil', for example, seems to have been just as noteworthy for Mrs Cholmeley as her first impression of his age and manner (deemed 'rough & peculiar'). While Cotman's command of his pencil did not initially warrant a mention from the family matriarch, his 'much more mannier'd & gentlemanlike' character did. From what can be gauged from the letters, it is plausible that Cotman's skills of artistry and sociability were of almost equal importance for the Cholmeleys as his youth and gender. Writing to Francis on 16 August, Mrs Cholmeley described Cotman as 'quite a treasure—only 21 years old & such a draughtsman!!' and predicted that she 'shall heartily grieve whenever he leaves us, & sadly do now that you miss him.'[50] Subsequent letters also urged Francis to return home so that he might 'find Cotman still here.'[51] Following a family daytrip, again to Byland, Katherine wrote provocatively to her brother: 'Mama has just been commissioning me to make you as unhappy as I can (out of envy, you know) by telling you that you have certainly lost a most pleasant opportunity of enjoying & profiting of Mr Cotman's drawings, who is still staying with us.'[52]

[49] Martin Myrone, '"Something too Academical": The Problem with Etty' in Burnage and Hallet (eds), *William Etty*, 57.
[50] TC to FC, 16 August 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/319, NYRO
[51] TC to FC, 17 July 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/314, NYRO.
[52] KC to FC, 16 August 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/319, NYRO.

Such comments suggest that Cotman was aware of the need to appear socially affable in order to court patronage. In 1806, Mrs Cholmeley described a letter from Cotman as 'apparently cheerful & warmhearted *as ever*' (my emphasis).[53] And when back in 1803 she called off a planned trip to Lake Gormire due to bad weather, Cotman did not venture there alone (as he would have been accustomed to, given his solo travelling experiences to date). Instead, he waited until she was happy to try again a few days later, the weather still 'cold tho' fine, the best weather possible for travelling.'[54]

That such genial behaviour might have started to pay off is suggested by a set of family portraits which Cotman scholars have deemed to be his first commission from the family (Figs 53-59). Writing of the portraits executed in the few weeks following Munn's departure, Katherine informed the still-absent Francis: 'They are all very like & very cleverly done altho' he has never at all applied himself to figures or portraits'.[55] Appropriate to his status within the family as 'such a draughtsman!!', Cotman's portraits were executed in pencil. Their graphic medium, head and shoulder profile format and modest dimensions (all at approximately 26 x 20 cm) indicate the influence of the delicate portrait sketch that had been spearheaded in the 1780s by artists such as Thomas Lawrence, George Dance and John Downman (see, for example, Figs 60 and 61). This format had remained a popular portrait type due to its associations with intimacy, friendship and some kind of social equivalence between artist and sitter.[56] It was thus a fitting mode for representing a family who purported to have adopted Cotman as their 'sincere Friend.'

Intimate associations are evoked in the attention that Cotman gives to the eyes and lips of Anne, Mary, Harriet and Francis's portraits, the latter having arrived back at Brandsby on 3 September following repeated calls from his mother to return. Yet Cotman's portraits of Mr and Mrs Cholmeley (Figs 53 and 54) and their daughter Katherine (Fig. 58) (who, going by Mrs Cholmeley's letters, seems to have been favoured as the most able and bright of her daughters) do not convey the same personal proximity to the picture plane and therefore lack some of the informality of the intimate portrait type. Unlike the other portraits where Cotman provides the sitters with a sketched-out indication of their upper

[53] TC to FC, 30 April 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/447, NYRO.
[54] AC to FC, 21 August 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/320 and commonplace book, 22 August 1803, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, NYRO, 'Mrs Cholmeley & Mr Cotman went to Gormire & returned in the evening'..
[55] KC to FC, 16 August 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/319, NYRO. Whether this was Katherine's misunderstanding, intentional distortion of the truth or an honest impartation of what Cotman had told them, these were not in fact his first portraits.
[56] See Stephen Lloyd and Kim Sloan, *Intimate Portrait: Drawings, Miniatures an Pastels from Ramsay to Lawrence*, exh. cat., (London, 2008).

bodies, those of Katherine and her parents are comparatively unresolved. Mr Cholmeley's form seems to taper-off into hatching. His head, with its faint facial features, appears rigidly propped-up by his stiff shirt collar, while his slight frame, enclosed in an ill-fitting and crumpled-looking jacket, looks both slumped and held in place as if stuffed into the chair's backrest.[57]

Unlike her deflated-looking husband (who has notably little presence in Mrs Cholmeley's letters), the family matriarch holds herself upright in a grander chair with rococo frame, its cabriole shape giving way to the fringe and patterns of her embroidered shawl. The shawl's own curve around her left shoulder mirrors the faint indication of her ample breast, over which a protrusion of material is gathered by a brooch. Other than Anne, Mrs Cholmeley is the only sitter wearing a hair accessory. Yet rather than a fantastical garland as that which ornaments Anne's short tresses (Fig. 56), Mrs Cholmeley's head is topped by a fashionable boater with a ribbon and two bows. These decorative elements are emphasised by dark marks, yet the rest of her is indicated by light touches, her vacant face and faint form having almost dissolved into material excess. Both Mr and Mrs Cholmeley's figures would thus seem to lack a certain substance, something that Cotman appears to have picked up on and which bears a graphic symptom in his treatment of their profiles.

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After two-and-a-half months at Brandsby, Cotman returned to London. At Mrs Cholmeley's behest, he took the family portraits with him to show Englefield and their mother, Lady Englefield. Paraphrasing a letter received from Cotman in October, Mrs Cholmeley wrote to tell Francis (now back in Edinburgh) that the artist had 'spent so happy a day at Tilney St shewing them our pictures & his Yorkshire sketches that "for a short time" [apparently quoting Cotman] he "forgot Brandsby, <u>for the very first time</u>!''' 'The portraits were much approved & warmly admired', she continued, 'My mother knew all the girls, my br did not, but thinks Doddy's [Mr Cholmeley], mine & yours excessively like. Mr Munn thinks Tippo's [Harriet's] the least like, & <u>mine</u> the most, of

[57] Cotman posthumously referred to Mr Cholmeley as 'kind' with none of the reverence that one might expect appropriate to his class (appellations such as 'respectable man' or 'gentleman of industry', for example). Cotman's unembellished appraisal might imply how, in hindsight, he viewed the paternal presence at Brandsby Hall. This may, in turn, partially account for why Mr Cholmeley looks more like an old retainer in the portrait rather than a commanding patriarch of a landed family. JSC to FC, 23 July 1822, ZQG XII 12/1/2038, NYRO.

all the set.'[58] By imparting such favourable verdicts, Cotman could recommend himself as a proficient artist who could create artwork which personally resonated with the whole family. Mrs Cholmeley's communication of them to Francis, moreover, indicates that she was pleased with Cotman's work and its reception. And yet the fate of the portraits is ambiguous. In fact, whether they can be considered commissions at all is questionable.

After Cotman showed them to the Englefields in October 1803, the set remained at the Tilney Street house, Mrs Cholmeley revealing to Francis that she had 'generously given' them to her mother to be 'framed and glazed & hung up in her sitting room.'[59] Nothing in the Cholmeley or the Englefield archive suggests that Cotman received payment for these portraits, though it is of course possible that he gave them to his hosts as gifts, a common practice in 'intimate portrait' production.[60] Certainly, he could afford to produce such small-scale drawings for no charge as a one-off, his generosity calculated to court their affections in the hope that patronage might emerge, whilst also providing a recompense for the free board and upkeep he had received at their estate.[61] He could not make a habit of this in case his generosity be misinterpreted as aspiring purely to the Cholmeleys' friendship.

The reality, however, was a dearth of payments to Cotman, the family's account books showing no reference to him.[62] In contrast, the account books show that Mrs Cholmeley gave a number of small commissions to Henry Cave, a York-based artist who had acted as the family's drawing master in 1803 before Cotman arrived on the scene.[63] Earlier that year, she had also commissioned the local painter, Charles Bell, to take her portrait. Writing to Francis, she praised it as 'a beautiful Picture ... in Edridge's stile but the face

[58] TC to FC, 23 October 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/326, NYRO.
[59] TC to FC, 22 January 1804, ZQG XII 12/1/326, NYRO. Cotman drew Henry Englefield's profile twice. One drawing is now in York City Art Gallery, signed and dated 'July 6th 1804', while the other in the British Museum and bears the inscription 'To Francis Cholmeley, with J S. Cotman's Compliments July 5th. 1804' (see BM1902,0514.72).
[60] Lloyd and Sloan, *Intimate Portrait*, 232-3. Thomas Lawrence's pencil profile of Emma, Lady Hamilton of 1791 was presented to his sitter as a gift, which she then gave to her friend Richard Payne Knight (see BMOo,5.22). Cotman appears to have left behind a self-portrait (unidentified) at Brandsby, perhaps as a keepsake for the family. Mrs Cholmeley showed it to her guests, remarking that Cotman's picture of himself Mr Green is in raptures wh he says tis an Exquisite Drawing and his stile in his well etc delights him.' TC to FC, 30 October 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/327, NYRO.
[61] From London, Cotman also sent the Cholmeley girls 'some sketches and drawing paper, a present of two nice little sketchbooks like his own.' See Henry Englefield (hereafter HE) to FC, 6 November 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/328, NYRO.
[62] At least not until later: in one of Mrs Cholmeley's cheque books for 1808 held at NYRO, a note on the back of a cheque stub for £100.0.0 and paid to Francis reads 'Oct 24 1808 Sent to Cotman by the bank – £10.10.0'. Then, in 1810, Cotman received £100.0.0 from the executors of Mrs Cholmeley will, ZQG II 85, 86, NYRO.
[63] These were for two copies of engravings at £2.2.0. TC account book, 1810, lacking reference number, NYRO.

highly finished'[64] and declared, 'I never bore a painting with you so well as this'.[65] Having commissioned at least two other artists in 1803, what, then, did Cotman mean to the Cholmeleys? Conversely, given the lack of commissions, what did they represent to him?

In the months that followed Cotman's completion of the portraits and return to London, Lady Englefield saw the artist on various occasions, something which Mrs Cholmeley relayed to Francis in a paraphrased letter which she had received from her mother: '"Cotman is as one of you, the Child of the Parents & the Brother of their Children; When he first spoke of you the Tears gushd into his eyes."' 'Poor fellow!', Mrs Cholmeley continued to Francis, 'I have seldom felt any one so nearly a Child to my Heart & I hope he will never fail to deserve my affection.'[66] This remark is striking for the way that Cotman is regarded in a familial sense over and above his status as an artist/'draughtsman', and for the way that Mrs Cholmeley places him on a par with her own son to whom her remark is directed. Moreover, the vocabulary apparently employed by Lady Englefield (and which is actually employed by Mrs Cholmeley) serves to infantilise Cotman, the needy child who expresses visible emotion when uttering his 'surrogate' family's name. For both women, then, Cotman was just as affectionate towards their family as they were toward him – an affection which, going by Mrs Cholmeley's closing remark, had come to be expected of him. As Freud would tell us, once a child reaches the social stage,

> [his] imagination is occupied with the task of ridding himself of his parents, of whom he now has a low opinion, and replacing them with others, usually of superior social standing. In this connection he makes use of the chance concurrence of these aims with actual experiences, such as acquaintanceship with the lord of the manor or some landowner in the country, or with some aristocrat in the city. Such fortuitous experiences arouse the child's envy, which finds expression in a fantasy that replaces both parents by others who are grander.[67]

It is certainly possible that Cotman was genuinely fond of the Cholmeleys, but this fondness may simultaneously have given way to a desire to substitute his own socially inferior background for a more elevated environment, one that offered him kinship,

[64] TC to FC, 8 May 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/306, NYRO.
[65] TC to FC, 23 October 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/326, NYRO.
[66] TC to FC, 23 October 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/326, NYRO.
[67] Sigmund Freud, 'Family Romances' in *The Uncanny*, trans.. David McLintock (London, 2003), 38-9.

aggrandisement and the experience of superior social standing. Of course, any sense that Cotman might have had of a family tie with the Cholmeleys was a fantasy, but it was one that was bolstered by Lady Englefield and Mrs Cholmeley as their remarks 'as one of you' and 'nearly a Child' convey.

In turn, Mrs Cholmeley seems to have formed an unusually strong attraction to Cotman, welcoming his company as a London artist and a drawing master but also as a surrogate-son for herself and a quasi-sibling/friend for her own children (particularly during Francis's regular absences in Scotland). After Cotman left Brandsby in autumn 1803, socks were knitted and sent to him in London,[68] Mrs Cholmeley worried about his artistic productivity, health and wellbeing, and encouraged the family to refer to him as 'Cotty'. From 'Mr. Cottman' to 'Cotman' to 'Cotty', the increasing informalisation of the artist's name could help to make him 'as one of you' (even though Cotman consistently signed off his letters to the Cholmeleys as 'J S Cotman'), given the fact that each Cholmeley had a nickname. While the nickname was undoubtedly a display of the family's affection, it also underlined the social realities of Cotman's position at Brandsby. By the late eighteenth century, the word 'Cotman' was widely understood to mean 'tenant of a cot or cottage; a cottager.' Similarly, 'Cotty' signified something eternally humble: 'matted together in its fibres, that no art can separate them.'[69] Like the fibres of 'cot-wool', 'Cotty' could not be separated from his true social origins: the pathetic, provincial tenant, forever belonging to the unprepossessing cot(tage) of his own parents (Fig. 3), not the country house of the Cholmeleys. And while he could purport to be 'mannierd & gentlemanlike', ultimately he was not a gentleman but a 'cotman'.

That said, it may have been Cotman's comparatively lowly social origins and the Cholmeley's perception of him as 'poor Cotty' (an affectionate but essentially patronising nickname, amongst others, including 'Pretty Poll' and 'Rosy Cupid') that actually made him seem more attractive to the family and their possible claims to benevolence. Moreover, we might see Cotman and Mrs Cholmeley in particular, as sharing some kind of personal synchronicity, both characters magnetising each other. As already noted, Cotman seems to have been straining after some kind of social security, much like Mrs Cholmeley, whose letters point to an acute interest in appearances and what people thought of her. Cotman was no doubt aware of the need to impress, appear outwardly

[68] TC to FC, 18 December 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/338, NYRO.
[69] 'cotman, *n*.' and 'cotty, *adj*.', *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (1989), https://www.oed.com, accessed 1 September 2012.

affable and socially mannered; she was careful in her language, qualified in her praise and, to judge by Cotman's portrait of her, was self-conscious in her outward semblance. Indeed, both Cotman and Mrs Cholmeley seem to have been on the edge of apparently opposing social personae: he, like a servant and a son, a resident draughtsman/tutor and a professional artist-genius;[70] she, poised between landedness and financial decline, assertive matriarchy and fastidious motherliness. These apparent resemblances, and the fact that Cotman appears to have initially consented to his inclusion in the Cholmeleys' family dynamic, made him akin to an attractive charity case, as Mrs Cholmeley's remark 'Poor Fellow!' suggests.[71] Despite the uneasy confluence of such identities, then, perhaps Cotman had found the ideal kind of patron.

However, compatibility between Cotman and Mrs Cholmeley came at a price. Rather than commissions for art or payment for his tutoring services, Mrs Cholmeley's charity came in the form of personal affection, sympathy and introductions to other potential patrons. Cotman's introduction to the Wynn-Belasyes was one such example, resulting in a commission which Mrs Cholmeley could 'feel quite interested and pleased wh his success.'[72] But while she might legitimately take the credit for the route to this 'success', she could not lay claim to the commission itself, nor had she commissioned Cotman for an estate portrait of Brandsby.[73]

In fact, the only known representation that can be securely identified as the Brandsby estate is a pencil sketch of the north-west gateway (Fig. 62) from Cotman's own portfolio.[74] Dated 1803, the drawing sneaks a peak of the cupola crowning the family's parish church between the pillars.[75] The wooden gate, over which the faint impression of a man stoops, appears in stark contrast to these structures, as if an elaborate iron gate

[70] Mrs Cholmeley referred to both 'Cotman's genius' and 'the simplicity of his character' in a letter during this time. TC to FC, 30 October 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/327, NYRO.
[71] That Cotman himself played to such a relationship dynamic is suggested in letter to Francis almost two decades later when he purported to recollect 'the sweetest piece of flattery that ever an artist drank. For on my leaving Brandsby for the first time, your father said Cotman "We took you in as the fried of Sr H. Engd, but we shall now be ever happy to see you as our own". Artists and poets are but sickly things for without praise they droop and die.' JSC to FC, 23 July 1822, ZQG XII 12/1/2038, NYRO.
[72] TC to FC, 12 November 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/330, NYRO. In the same letter, she reported to Francis that Cotman had started work on the 'near view' of Newburgh Priory, which Henry Englefield had seen in London and had informed her that it 'will be a very beautiful drawing, and that he has managed the great tree in the foreground vastly well indeed.'
[73] In contrast, extant watercolours and related account records for somebody like Edward Lascelles (1764-1814) show frequent sums for estate portraits paid to the likes of Turner, Girtin, Varley and Paul Sandby, amongst others. See David Hill, *Harewood Masterpieces: English Watercolours and Drawings* (Leeds, 1995), 11-13.
[74] Although a very faint sketch of the gate pillars exists in a private collection and is reproduced in Hill, *Cotman in the North*, 53.
[75] Erected by Francis Cholmeley the Elder (1706-80) in 1767-70.

appropriate to their height had not yet been installed. Cotman's vantage point is sufficiently distant and low to admit both pillars, cupola and side-screen tree, yet it also hangs back from the implied action around the gate. Here, Cotman is positioned outside the boundaries of the estate looking in, a harbinger of things to come.

2. Abandonment, resistance, painting: Cotman's final visit in 1805

Cotman returned to Yorkshire in September 1804, meeting the Cholmeleys half-way through their holiday in Scarborough before returning with them to Brandsby. Here he remained for a further seven weeks, the standard length of an artist's summer sketching excursion. However, Cotman had already undertaken a tour of East Anglia and Lincolnshire that summer, which suggests that his second trip to Yorkshire was driven by social impetuses as well as artistic ones.[76] The Cholmeley commonplace book shows that he spent most of his visit socialising with various members of the Brandsby milieu, going shooting, visiting their well-to-do friends (including the Wynn-Belasyses who did not provide him with another commission) and attending the races and York Assembly Rooms. Notably, the trip was made in the autumn, when most artists were returning to the metropolis after their summer tours, and lasted until winter with few surviving works to show for it. This dearth of material bolsters an understanding of Cotman's 1804 visit as being significantly socially-driven, yet it also means that there is little with which to reconstruct its artistic and social events. As such, I shall turn to his third and final trip to Yorkshire he made the following summer for which there is a wealth of artistic and archival material.[77] This was his most sustained period that Cotman spent in the region, remaining for four whole months.

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Cotman had already seen Mrs Cholmeley and Francis in London during 1805. Both had paid an extended visit to Henry and Lady Engelfield from February to March when they stayed at Tilney Street. When Francis had to return to Yorkshire temporarily in March, Mrs Cholmeley hooked herself onto Cotman. Writing to Francis during his absence, she told him that the artist had:

[76] See commonplace book, 25 September 1804, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, NYRO, 'Mr. & Mrs. Cholmeley, Francis, the four girls & Mr. Cotman returnd from Scarbro' to a late dinner'.
[77] Additionally, Francis had finished his studies at Edinburgh meaning that few letters exist in the archive for this period.

> dined & staid here Friday, Saty and Sunday, tho' I gave him a ticket for the Opera on Saty. Pretty Poll pines for his mate, & has never been in spirits since you went. Poor fellow! He often gives me heartfelt concern.[78]

Perhaps in a bid to alleviate some of the more testing realities of the artist's life in London, Mrs Cholmeley showed Cotman charity, including the offer of accommodation at Tilney Street (even though he had lodgings on Woodstock Street in the artists' quarter of Fitzrovia) and a ticket for the opera. She also made sure she frequently saw 'Pretty Poll' because of his apparently low spirits after the departure of his 'mate' Francis. Such motherly remarks concerning Cotman's apparent wellbeing demonstrate just how closely Mrs Cholmeley was getting involved in the life of the artist, another example of which appears in the same letter where she described how she had tried unsuccessfully to 'seduce him' away from his work for a walk in the park. Cotman's resistance to the invitation provides a stark contrast to his previous acquiescence to Mrs Cholmeley's preferences, such as her wish to cancel a sketching trip Cotman had planned to Gormire in 1803 (see page 84). This kind of resistance would continue during Cotman's third trip to Yorkshire, suggesting that he was now beginning to insulate himself against the pressures and ambiguities of his patronage situation as represented by the character of Mrs Cholmeley. In the ensuing discussion, I argue that symptoms of Cotman's resistance are detectable in the artwork he produced during and directly following his final trip, which show a striking movement away from the use of clear compositional structures and the use of the pencil (and therefore draughtsmanship) towards watercolour, surface textures and the experience of painting itself.

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Cotman returned to Brandsby on 13 July 1805. Within a couple of weeks, Francis received a letter from the major landowner and classical scholar, John Bacon Sawrey Morritt (1771-1843), inviting him and Cotman to stay at his Yorkshire seat, Rokeby Hall, about fifty miles north of Brandsby on the County Durham borders:

> Your letter & proposed visit gives Mrs Morritt & myself the greatest pleasure, we shall also be very happy to see Mr Cotman & to shew him a little of the Banks of the Tees. You will I hope

[78] TC to FC, 12 March 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/399, NYRO.

> contrive to stay with us as long as possible ... Pray make our best respects to Mr Cotman & say we shall be very glad to see him.'[79]

Morritt and his wife, Katharine, were well known to the Cholmeleys and their immediate family. Henry Englefield had met him through their membership of the Society of the Dilettante while Mrs Cholmeley was acquainted with Katharine. The following week, on 30 July, Francis and Cotman set off for Rokeby Park, a large Palladian villa situated within extensive private parklands near the confluence of the Rivers Tees and Greta.[80] The natural beauty of Teesdale was widely acknowledged during the period, the area extolled in a letter from Francis's friend, William Charlton, as 'one of the finest places Yorkshire can boast of' and later by Morritt and Francis's friend, Walter Scott, in his poem 'Rokeby' which was dedicated to its landlord.'[81] Francis and Cotman explored the immediate area around Rokeby over the next two weeks.[82] This was the longest period of time they had spent in each other's company away from Brandsby and its immediate vicinity, and yet the absent Mrs Cholmeley still made her presence felt. Writing five letters to her son and at least two to Cotman, she pressed to know whether 'Cotty' had caught cold in the torrential rain in which they had set off from Brandsby. She even sent spare 'Boots, shoes & Pantaloons ... by special messenger' to the two men at Greta Bridge and fussed over the 'frame and Portfolio' that Cotman had left at Brandsby.[83]

These letters coincided with Mrs Cholmeley's own departure with her daughters for Capheaton, the home of the family's friend, the amateur artist and gentleman collector, Edward Swinburne. During the visit she wrote again to Francis expressing her delight at being in the company of another artist and his work, which in turn appears to implicitly patronise Cotman and his artistic style:

> ... no house can be fuller of varied amusements such as a suit & delight me. The books, drawings and prints are endless & admirable. Oh, I wish Cotty could see all Edwd S's drawings. Most of them are excellent indeed & I hardly know what he

[79] John B. S. Morritt to FC, 22 July 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/404, NYRO.
[80] See commonplace book, 30 July 1805, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, NYRO.
[81] William Charlton (hereafter WC) to FC, 2 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/409, NYRO. Picturesque tour guides to the area were also published in this period, including Arthur Young's *A Six Months Tour through the North of England...* (1770) and Richard Garland's *A Tour of Teesdale* (1803-4). See Michael D. C.Rudd, *The Discovery of Teesdale* (Chichester, 2007), 71-6.
[82] JSC to FC, 29 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/414, NYRO. It is often assumed that Cotman's 1805 visit to the Barnard Castle area was his first, but extant sketchbook drawings (including *Barnard Castle*, 1803, NCMAG) secure an earlier excursion with Munn.
[82] It does seem, however, that this was Cotman's first time at Rokeby Park and his first meeting with Morritt.
[83] TC to FC, 2 August 1805 (misdated in FC's hand as 'July 28th 1805'), ZQG XII 12/1/407, NYRO.

> succeeds in the best ... I often wish we were all here together, for the pleasure & improvement of all parties, but I do anxiously hope Cotty will not relax of his industry & draw & tint perseveringly from nature. I do so wish he could see Swinburne's Trees, & was acquainted with Swinburne himself, whose taste & knowledge & experience are certainly all of the highest class with the gentlest & most pleasing manners. He has one glorious drawing of Girton's, another very bad, the single castle & heron skimming the lake of Havel's & a fine one of Varley's ... Give this letter to Cotty who will probably value it more than yourself.'[84]

This extract, particularly the closing request, suggests that Mrs Cholmeley wrote her letter with Cotman in mind. Her expressions of admiration for another (amateur gentleman) artist as well as the works of his contemporaries, and her hope for 'Cotty' to work hard in her absence, serves to remind the artist (via Francis) of the kinds of things he should be doing in his own work to deserve the respect she held for Swinburne's practice; if he was to 'improve' himself and produce similarly 'excellent' and 'admirable' drawings, he would do well to work hard at Rokeby and 'not relax'. Sent to Francis, Mrs Cholmeley's letter further implies that her son was to keep an eye on his artist-friend.[85]

Quite suddenly, however, Francis left Rokeby Hall on 15 August, choosing instead to spend the rest of the summer not in Cotman's company but at his friend Charlton's country house at Hesleyside in Northumberland.[86] By departing the house of the Cholmeley's family friend, the eldest son effectively deserted the artist – he had better places to be or, perhaps, better people to be with.[87]

Given the social distance between Francis and Cotman, and the possibility that their travelling companionship may have been proposed – even forced – upon them by Mrs Cholmeley, it is not entirely impossible that Francis felt obliged to be Cotman's 'mate' or

[84] TC to FC, 7 August, ZQG XII 12/1/410, NYRO.
[85] In a subsequent letter to Francis she remarked 'I fear he [Cotman] has not done much.' TC to FC, 13 September 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/420, NYRO.
[86] Only a few weeks prior to Morritt's abovequoted reply to Francis, Lord Palmerston informed the latter that his own 'plans for the Summer are as unformed as yours appear to be.' Lord Palmerston to FC, 4 July 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/403, NYRO. And around the same time that Francis would have proposed the visit to Morritt, he also appears to have written to Charlton suggesting he come to Hesleyside, even proposing 20 August as an estimated date of arrival. Charlton forwarded a reply to Rokeby and, like Morritt, hoped that Francis would 'make a considerable stay with me' even though 'I do not know what your plan may be'. WC to FC, 23 June 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/401, NYRO.
[87] Back in 1803, when on a tour of the Scottish Highlands with Lord Palmerston, his wife and sisters, Francis had written to his mother to say that he did not warm to just any travelling companion: 'I am much pleased with my party ... Lady P's manner to me is the kindest possible, so that I very soon felt myself perfectly at my ease with them all, which is not often the case with me.' FC to TC, 28 July 1803, ZQG XII 12/1/407, NYRO.

sibling-surrogate, the analogy proposed by his maternal grandmother, Lady Englefield, two years previously, and actively encouraged by his mother.[88] In proposing that we problematise the relationship between Francis and Cotman, I am not suggesting that the former's abandonment of the latter was an intentional act of open symbolic violence towards him. Nor do I mean to imply that Cotman having the Morritts all to himself was not necessarily unfavourable. Indeed, his letters from Rokeby to Francis at Hesleyside told of joint breakfasts and excursions to the river with his hosts. Yet the conventional interpretation in the secondary literature of Cotman and Francis's relationship as being chummy and close,[89] has been based on the artist's letters in which his characteristically courteous and jovial style has been extracted from its context within the conventions of early nineteenth-century prose. One therefore has to read between the lines for a fuller interpretation of Cotman and Francis' relationship. The following extract from a letter which Cotman wrote to Francis after his departure is a case in point:

> What, my dear Francis, are you so happy as not to have a leisure word to throw at one from all your cast stock? Well be it so, I am glad it goes merrily with you. Thus far be it from me to ask so great a boon amidst your revelry, but only when you have a leisure hour I shall be always happy to hear from you.[90]

Perhaps what we are looking at here is the author of a letter whose previously unuttered ambivalences about a personal relationship are starting to be externalised. While the comment begins in a sarcastic tenor, it carries hostile undertones suggesting that Cotman had noted a recent absence of correspondence – whether real or imagined – from Francis, that absence overtly or subliminally connected to the fact that his travelling companion had left him for another friend. The third sentence slips into a different register, one which is comparatively polite and indulgent, a kind of backpedal to his bold opening lines.

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[88] Here I am influenced by Juliet Mitchell's theory of the 'sibling complex' which explores the effects of psychic annihilation of the subject through the sibling or sibling-surrogate (as in a foster child or close family friend) who is seen to replace it. The ego shattered, the subject has to rebuild itself as 'other' to its new sibling, which can involve defence mechanisms: unconscious denials, distortions or repressions to protect the ego from excessive anxieties. According to Mitchell, sibling or sibling-surrogate relationships are based upon the trauma of introduction (occasionally exacerbated if the new sibling is of the same gender), which the parents tend to deny. While Mitchell locates the sibling trauma of displacement at the birth of a new sibling during childhood, her model lends itself to analysis of the relations between a subject and the sibling-surrogate who enters the former's life at an older age. Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge, 2004).

[89] Most recently postulated by Hemingway, 'The Constituents of Romantic Genius: John Sell Cotman's Greta Drawings' in Rosenthal et al, *Prospects for the Nation*, 183-203, and Hill, *Cotman in the North*.

[90] JSC to FC, 29 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/416, NYRO.

Following Francis's departure, Cotman stayed at Rokeby Hall for about a week before he also left.[91] Yet unlike Francis, Cotman's departure was not made of his own accord. On 23 August, the Morritts left Rokeby Hall for a visit to Lancashire, despite their open invitation to Francis a month earlier. Rather than remaining in the house with the servants,[92] Cotman was given a 'parting breakfast', wished 'good weather, good success and all good things' (which, he noted, he 'returnd in my first and best manner'),[93] and was sent to stay at The Morritt Arms.[94] Owned by Morritt, this was a coaching inn and posting house on Greta Bridge situated less than one hundred meters from the park gates on the south-east side of the estate's perimeter and in clear sight of Rokeby Hall. Figure 63 maps key locations referred to in the following discussion.

To be removed from the elevated social setting of the country house to an inn – a hospitable place but one which was filled with the comings-and-goings of temporary tenants ('cotmen') – was a potentially crushing experience for Cotman.[95] Now doubly deserted, he wrote his second letter to Francis on 29 August, a week into his fortnight stay on Greta Bridge. An early section of this is worth quoting at some length and picks up from the last sentence of the above letter:

> The weather has not been extraordinarily fine, but just so fine as to be able to do something. I have not been far from the inn but once & then, what an unhappy day, & I took but two sketches. 'Twas our ride up the Greta to the ford mill. All my studies have been in the wood above the bridge, which you perceive I stuck too. I think it grows on me in my regard every day, it really is a delicious spot. & much should I like to have a house near it that I might have a Study of artists down to see me & to do it justice. We might then talk & draw it over in a high style. But notwithstanding all this fine sceny I am plaguedly dull. To be cut off from such a party & to remain on the spot in front of the gates & when I pass the house I really am quite wrechd. But now

[91] Cotman scholars hold that he taught drawing to Mrs Morritt at the house. While we can expect that this may have occurred, I can find no evidence to suggest that tutoring took place.
[92] As it appears he had been allowed to do when the Morritts went to York for the night to see a play. JSC to FC, 20 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/413, NYRO.
[93] JSC to FC, 29 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/414, NYRO.
[94] Now a guest house in The Square, not the current Morritt Arms pub and hotel on the other side of Greta Bridge.
[95] After severe floods in the area in 1771, a new bridge was commissioned from York architect, John Carr at the behest of Morritt's father, and erected in 1789. This constituted a key link in the route for the London to Edinburgh 'Sixty-Hour Coach', with regular stops made at Great Bridge Post Office (as well as The George Inn, also owned by Morritt, and now a hotel called The Morritt Arms, see Michael Rudd, *The Discovery of Teesdale* (Phillimore, 2007), 79, 161, 169, f.n. 3 and 2). This was therefore an area of the countryside that was frequently travelled through. See Stella Margetson, *Journey by Stages: Some Account of the People who Travelled by Stage-Coach and Main in the Years between 1660 and 1840* (London, 1967), 140.

> I do not pass it. I always avoid it systematically as I should a serpent. Whether my time here has been happierly employed I can't say, but certainly this week has been a very short one to me. Industriously employed upon a subject that call[s] forth all my powers certainly goes no little way towards filling up all my idle thoughts. I hope you won't say I have been idle when you see my productions.[96]

It is passages like this that have led Cotman scholars to identify in him some kind of manic depressive tendency. Yet rather than use such letters to romantically diagnose Cotman's mental health – a diagnosis for which there is no historical medical proof – we might read such utterances as providing a meaningful symptom of his subjectivity. First to note is the emphasis on language evoking personally experienced (and notably negative) emotion over relayed information. Even when Cotman does inform Francis about what he has done since his departure, this, too, bears negative undertones. Apart from a comparatively bold penultimate sentence, the more positive remarks are rooted in either memory (of being with Francis) or fantasy (of being with his Sketching Society colleagues, who in any case had now moved on to other things). Given what we know about the peculiar social context in which Cotman was annually situated in Yorkshire, we might expect the recent events of Francis leaving, followed by the Morritts, and then his removal to the inn, to have constituted the social ruptures that conditioned the character of this letter. I contend that it was the symptoms of these personal experiences of Yorkshire that were now beginning to be externalised in Cotman's artwork.[97]

In the same letter, Cotman informed Francis that at some point between the latter's departure and his own from Rokeby Hall (between 19 and 23 August), Mr Morritt had given him a commission for 'a large draw of my favourite view from the hill looking down on the bridge.'[98] Like the portraits of the Cholmeleys which were transferred to Englefield's London house (though returned to Brandsby at some point after Lady Englefield's death that summer), this work was to be a gift for a friend of the Morritts and Cholmeleys, Elizabeth Weddell;[99] a drawing to thus be given away rather than kept by Cotman's prestigious short-term host. It was, nevertheless, a commission which we can expect Cotman to have welcomed given their deficiency at Brandsby. Moreover, it seems

[96] JSC to FC, 29 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/414, NYRO.
[97] Cotman purported to have 'written so many letters lately [at the inn] that I forget when it was I sent yours, before or after I left Rokeby.' JSC to FC, 29 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/414 NYRO.
[98] JSC to FC, 29 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/414, NYRO.
[99] Elizabeth Weddell, *née* Ramsden, was the widow of the celebrated antiquities collector, William Weddell of Newby Hall in North Yorkshire. A collector of Girtin, she purchased four of his watercolours following his death in 1802.

to have been a subject which Cotman stipulated ('my favourite view'); the artist, according to himself, given a degree of autonomy in this rare instance of patronage.

The commission likely relates to the watercolour, *Distant View of Greta Bridge from Mortham Wood*, now at Tate (Fig. 64), and may be a preparatory work for the now un-located final watercolour which Cotman exhibited at the RA in 1806. Tate's identification of the watercolour's viewpoint as being from Mortham Wood is unconvincing. Cotman remarked that he had taken 'All my studies ... in the wood above the bridge' for which there are two likely candidates: Mortham Wood itself, spanning the east side of the estate, and Mill Wood, about a mile and a half upstream to the south-west (again see Fig. 63 for an annotated map of some of the locations mentioned here). The positioning of the artist within the landscape is important here, not so that we can link his watercolour to the sites he visited as if they were a visual documentation of his travels (such work has already been done and characterises the conventional approach to these images),[100] but because they bear witness to the destabilising effect that Cotman's enforced departure from Rokeby Hall had on his experience of and movement within the area, as his comment indicates: 'But now I do not pass it. I always avoid it systematically as I should a serpent.' Many of Cotman's so-called Greta watercolours and related pencil sketches have been convincingly identified as depicting or having taken their viewpoints from high up on or below Mill Wood – and thus, significantly away from Morritt's estate (and thus Mortham Wood).[101]

Moreover, had Cotman taken the view from Mortham Wood, as Tate's title would claim, the inn perceptible in the composition's central upper third would need to appear on the left side of the bridge. Accordingly, it seems that Cotman did indeed avoid the house, crossing the bridge before immediately turning south-west, channelling the Greta along its north bank until he reached the highland of Mill Wood. The view from this point matches that of Tate's watercolour and the direction of the inn as seen on the right side of Greta Bridge. And yet, the inn from this vantage point still appears erroneously situated, as if set behind the right side of the bridge rather than before it, as it does in reality.

[100] See Kitson, *Life*, chapters 4-7, Rajnai, unpublished exhibition catalogue text on Cotman in Wales, MS, NCMAG archives, Hill, *Cotman in the North* and David Stacey, 'Cotman's aqueduct', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 154, no. 1310 (May 2012), 316-21.
[101] David Hill has retraced some of Cotman's positions for a number of the viewpoints of his Greta watercolours. See his *Cotman in the North*, 106-29.

Whichever way one looks at it, Cotman has played with the positioning of and relationship between the inn and the bridge within the landscape.[102]

This fabrication is significant given the stylistic shift this watercolour makes in Cotman's early oeuvre. *Distant View of Greta Bridge* does not present the topographical prospect of an architectural motif as he had given in his Newburgh pendants of 1803-4, nor does it chime stylistically with the landscapes of his contemporaries such as Varley's sizable watercolours, *Bodenham and the Malvern Hills* or *Harewood House from the South East* (Figs 65 and 66). Both of these draw on a Sandbyesque mode of finished watercolour landscape representation. Crisp sight lines, low horizon lines and clear underdrawing give meaning to Varley's prospects. Cotman's *Distant View*, on the other hand, makes a transition from the estate *prospect* towards a *view* of a landscape which tells the viewer nothing about its meaning beyond natural forms.[103] Clear hierarchical grounds, compositional pathways or semantic resolution (i.e. the country house) have been subverted and replaced by fields of pure watercolour. These fields run into each other so as to defy a clear structural arrangement, while the watercolour medium is thin and immediate as if applied to the sheet's surface all at once. In other words, this work ceases to be graphic; rather than the conspicuous graphite marks of the Newburgh pendants, the pencil makes seemingly rapid, cursory notations as seen in the loose articulation of sprawling foliage or apparently hasty, unstructured marks on top of the watercolour (also seen in Figs 67 and 69).[104] Otherwise, contours are delineated by paint; it collects at the

[102] Nevertheless, employing artistic licence to represent a given place is not surprising and there are references by Cotman himself in taking accurate and non-accurate views: 'After I left you [Francis] I paced my way back to the Castle but was not pleased to draw it, as I found it would be too tiresome a job unless I meant to make it an accurate view.' JSC to FC, 20 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/413, NYRO.

[103] The etymology of 'prospect' and 'view' is worth pointing out given that I employ them discriminatively in the above discussion. The 'action of looking out, outlook, view', 'to look forward, to see in the future': 'prospect' signifies a positive state of openness, of elevation and of future prospects. Simply 'to see', 'view' is a comparatively personal to the individual self: 'An act of looking or beholding; a sight, look, or glance', 'an extent or area covered by the eye from one point.' 'prospect, *n., a., v.*[1] and *v.*[2]' and *'view, n.* and *v.*', *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (1989), https://www.oed.com, accessed 17 November 2012.

[104] The central place that the Greta watercolours have been allotted in Cotman's oeuvre have led them to have been frequently displayed and hence over-exposed to light. Any visual analysis of Cotman's watercolours must therefore be mindful of the extent to which the colours have faded over time, which can make pencil markings appear anachronistically prominent. Nevertheless, as graphite is more resistant to light and yet appears comparatively faint and sparse in Cotman's Greta watercolours, exercising such caution actually serves to buttress the point that pencil was unprecedentedly absent at their conception. Mrs Cholmeley also expressed worry that his watercolours were comparatively muted in tone: 'He certainly has not the art of rich Colouring as some of the others possess.' TC to FC, 24 May 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/450, NYRO.

edges of now-faded tonal areas to produce linear stains with only the slightest trace of light, sketchy underdrawing.[105]

Moreover, while *Distant View of Greta Bridge* is produced within sight of prospect art (it bears a similarly high viewpoint to *Distant View of Newburgh Priory*), the viewer encounters a number of obstacles to visual entry. The first is immediate with a cliff drop, the foreground confusingly giving way to the trees beyond.[106] Cotman recycled this element in other landscape-format Greta watercolours, including *Barnard Castle from Hill* and *Brignall Banks on the Greta* (Figs 67 and 68). In others, he blocks the viewer's entry not by a sudden drop but by positioning us right up in front of nature. In Figures 69-72, for example, we are given little sense of our orientation within an expansive landscape but are instead confronted by the minutiae of nature – leaves, branches, twigs, undergrowth, rocks, water – and the medium of watercolour paint itself. In only in a few of the Greta watercolours, such as Figures 73 and 74, does Cotman give us a sense of our surroundings by admitting sky. At the foot of the drop in *Distant View of Greta Bridge* is a plainer indication of the river bank, but it disappears almost instantaneously into tonal variations of green. Ahead and below a high horizon line sits the faintly delineated motif. Yet it is not Morritt's country house but the inn on Greta Bridge, the place where Cotman was forced to go, outside of the estate looking in, and now apparently avoided. This is Cotman's own view, his 'favourite view', but one which was undoubtedly loaded with problematic associations to do with his own material, professional and personal position in Yorkshire.[107]

Given the close visual analysis here, it is worth noting that I do not intend to supplement the conventional anachronistic reading of the Greta watercolours where their visual properties are likened to Modern artists' work over and above those of Cotman's

[105] Even in Cotman's graphite sketches of the Greta from this time (see, for example, *On the Greta*, 1805, pencil on paper, 15.4 x 116 cm, NCMAG), the emphasis on shading, tonal variation and soft application echoes the fluid washes of watercolour paint of his Greta watercolours. This effect can be compared to Cotman's drawing of *Riveaulx Abbey* (Fig. 51) where the emphasis is on pencil lines and structures and which contain graphic variations and details.

[106] Such inconsistencies in spatial recession are intensified in a drawing like Figure 68 where the notational marks sprawled across the lower area of the composition cannot satisfactorily be read as a mass of foliage or as the river bank receding to create the space in which a diminutive figure (a subtle yet exceptional inclusion) is located.

[107] Cotman's situation on the bridge and its positioning outside the park gates was undoubtedly ambivalent for him. Juliet Mitchell has claimed that once ambivalence is recognised by the subject experiencing it (as the extract from Cotman's letter on pages 95-6 suggests was the case for him), 'one experiences two completely contrary emotions simultaneously – and the sensation is unliveable'. Mitchell, *Siblings*, 37-8. Psychoanalysis would tell us that both overcompensation (calling it his 'favourite view', for example) and avoidance ('avoid[ing] it like a serpent') are defence mechanisms to repress traumatic and unliveable sensations.

contemporaries.[108] Cotman's trip to the River Greta has also been credited with pushing him 'from good, conventional artistry into unforeseen brilliance and individuality', the pictorial results of which have been hailed as the premature apogee of his career. These often-repeated lines continue to represent a boulder to how these artworks are interpreted.[109] I do not deny that the Greta watercolours look different from Cotman's previous works and make stylistic departures from the landscape prospects of his contemporaries – indeed, I deem this to be significant. Similarly, I do not doubt that changes in Cotman's location significantly impacted upon his art. However, the prevailing reading is idealistic in its assumption that Cotman was a free agent in Yorkshire with none of the vicissitudes of his profession or attendant experiences conditioning his artistic identity, practice and output.[110] Instead, I want to propose that the compositional arrangements, technical qualities and iconographical character of the Greta watercolours represent a response, or resistance,[111] to a problem between Cotman and patronage in Yorkshire, which is both social and psychological in its potential explanation.

Isolated and without some clear assurance to what he was doing in this landscape (apart from, perhaps, the order for his 'favourite view'), Cotman could not afford to produce works like the Newburgh pendants. These took time because of their size, material investment, conventional codes and draughtsmanship; time which, back in 1803, he was more able to dedicate to a prestigious commission given the need to exhibit artistic

[108] Cotman's emphasis on forms, shapes and fields of pure watercolour paint have led scholars to speak of the Greta watercolours in terms of flatness, abstraction, even *cloisonnism*. See, most recently, Hill, *Cotman in the North*, 17, 47, 58. In the 1982 bicentenary exhibition catalogue, David Thompson claimed that Cotman's Greta watercolours had more in common with the a Beggarstaff Brothers poster or the work of Gustave Klimt or Egon Schiele than with 'any other nineteenth-century painter.' See Thompson, 'Cotman: romantic classicist', in Rajnai, *Cotman*, 18.

[109] See Rajnai, *Cotman*, 11.

[110] Hemingway has gone critically further than the conventional argument, making a case for an artist who was profoundly influenced by the Associationist landscape theories to which Francis Cholmeley was apparently allied and which ultimately conditioned the visual character of the watercolours that Cotman produced on the River Greta. Yet in making such claims, Hemingway problematically sets Cotman up as a receptor of other peoples' aesthetics, an artist who spontaneously knew how to translate someone else's ideas into representation. Hemingway's position is undermined by the lack of hard evidence for Francis's philosophical leanings and the fact that he himself was not an artist. This, together with the fact that Hemingway gives little in the way of close visual analysis, makes for an argument that is unconvincingly borne out in the stylistic and compositional qualities of the watercolours in question. See Hemingway, 'The Constituents of Romantic Genius: John Sell Cotman's Greta Drawings' in Rosenthal et al, *Prospects for the Nation*, 183-203.

[111] Freud argued that certain unpleasant mental impulses or repressed urges can transfer from the unconscious into the preconscious, and which can periodically 'catch the eye of consciousness'. This jostling of unconscious and conscious drives can provide the precondition for visible symptoms of resistance, a substitute for the internal conflicts and unpleasant drives which are held back by repression. Freud, 'Lecture 19: Resistance and Repression', *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London, 1933 [1963]), 286-302, 296.

promise. Without the time, the promise of financial return or steady patronage, Cotman now had to find another way of working. The disappearance of the pencil is key here. As we saw in relation to the Cholmeley sisters' poems earlier, the pencil had associations with deliberation and command, providing the comprehensive infrastructure of a work of art. Its disappearance in Cotman's Greta watercolours, together with the economy of detail, sidelining of the motif, thin washes, comparatively small dimensions and unfinished appearance, gives rise to a materialist reading of these works as ones which indicate expeditious practice on the part of the artist.

However, there are also clear social instances in Cotman's experience of Yorkshire – Mrs Cholmeley's ambiguous treatment and perception of the artist's profession, person and practice, Cotman's position as the family's drawing master as well as their pseudo son/sibling/friend, his blatant hopes for, and absence of, commissions, and finally his double abandonment at Rokeby and removal to the inn – which might plausibly have produced psychological effects. Whilst I do not want to claim that the Greta watercolours are peculiarly personal inventions, I do want to propose that their particular visual and technical properties are the pictorial symptoms of Cotman's personal ambivalence with his social situation. Given the emphasis on interiority here, it is necessary to shift the methodological focus towards a more speculative approach in which psychological effects are considered as borne of their social conditions, and which find their trace on the object itself.[112]

The role of the pencil continues to be a significant symptom in this regard. As we saw, the Cholmeleys referred to Cotman as a 'draughtsman' who produced 'drawings' not 'Pictures', his set of Cholmeley family portraits were executed in pencil not watercolour, pen or ink, and he was (poetically) warned of the risks run by his 'Dashing & splashing' when eliminating the 'Strong' and 'bold' pencil from his works. Yet in experiencing a degree of isolation on and around the Greta in the late summer of 1805, and being distanced from the exacting Mrs Cholmeley and his pupils (the Cholmeley sisters) for an extended period of time, we might speculate that Cotman could now respond more freely to his own artistic preferences. In and around Brandsby, he had given the Cholmeley

[112] My attempt here to conjure the social and the personal is influenced by George Cavalletto's *Crossing the Psycho-Social Divide: Freud, Weber, Adorno and Elias* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2007). Also see Clark, *Image of the People*, 12-13 which aids critical thinking about the relationship between social conditions, individual experience and artistic practice.

sisters lessons in (pencil) drawing, as their surviving work suggests (Figs 75-77);[113] the subject matter was predominantly architectural rather than landscape-focused and bore a prominent use of outline. Given the pejorative associations of line within contemporary art discourse,[114] we might consider Cotman's apparent resistance to pencil and outline in favour of self-effacing contours and paint as a testament to the kind of identity anxieties attending his role as the Cholmeley's drawing master. Furthermore, any stylistic disobedience that can be identified in Cotman's early Yorkshire work (such as his 1803 watercolour *Byland Abbey*) is here ramped up by the emphasis on paint, tone and proximity to natural forms over pencil, line and practical information derived from the landscape.

All these technical properties point to an artist who was not regulating himself. It is as if the Greta watercolours were executed in defiance of the kinds of pressures placed upon him, not just by the Cholmeleys but by the culture they inhabited, which evidently expected art to conform to some kind of comprehensible viewing code. Thus, besides having to work expediently because of the economic implications of his opaque working structure, these watercolours might also be understood in terms of a resistant practice in which Cotman was no longer *their* 'draughtsman', but an individual artist making original artwork which was entirely to do with himself. And yet, for all their apparent unrestraint and painterly evanescence (we might even say unabashed confidence), it is feasible to argue that these watercolours are simultaneously legible as the pictorial symptoms of a growing personal recognition on Cotman's part of a clash between ideals and realities. This clash seems to have prompted Cotman to negotiate the terms of his situation in Yorkshire in 1805 and come to terms with the fact that it was not great big prospects that he was going to be producing. Instead, it was these close, seemingly unfinished, apparently quick, total views, properties capable of forming a landscape art that was much more experiential in its language.

In light of these visual characteristics, Andrew Hemingway has addressed the extent to which Cotman's Greta watercolours were made outdoors. His conclusion that many of them were made *en plein-air* is qualified by his argument that Cotman was directly influenced by the emergent European practice of outdoor sketching and contemporary codes of looking at nature, the latter forming a 'mode of consciousness that both artist

[113] Four more pencil drawings are reproduced in Hill, *Cotman in the North*, 54-5. These are the only other known drawings by the Cholmeleys produced under Cotman's tutelage.
[114] See Smith, *Progress and Profession*, 95-110.

and patron (despite differences in social position) could in some degree share and recognise as represented therein.'[115] The Cholmeley family letters as well as the artist's own do indeed reveal that Cotman worked outdoors,[116] but I would argue that this is not the point. The signifying potential of these works instead resides in how they *claim* to have been produced then and there, as if immediately responsive to the artist's experience of what it was like to get up close and personal with nature, which the proximity to natural forms and close-up viewpoints give us. Moreover, I want to claim that the Greta watercolours are less about the length of time in which they actually took to make, than the time during which they *appear* to have been made. This is evoked by the apparent immediacy of Cotman's treatment, the disappearance of the pencil and the emphasis on thin washes.[117] As proposed above, the Greta watercolours' ostensible claims to rapidity were likely to have been personally significant for Cotman given his ambiguous social situation. Thus, rather than see these watercolours (as Hemingway does) as having been made to share conceptually with his 'patrons' or as derived solely from thematic influences from elsewhere, I contend that they register Cotman's own position, itself arising from a complex set of personal tensions experienced in Yorkshire.

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A couple of days before Francis left Rokeby Hall back on 19 August, a letter arrived from his mother in which she signed off: 'My love to Cotty and hope he likes my plan for him. Oh! Castle Eden Dean he must see, as well as Durham before he comes back to his home at Brandsby.'[118] The letter that Cotman wrote to Francis two weeks later (which mentions his avoidance of Morritt's estate following his removal to the inn) told of his attempts to resist Mrs Cholmeley's 'plan for him':

> I have heard twice from Pesh; in both letters she insists on my storming Durham, & I as strongly blockade her measures. But

[115] Hemingway, 'The Constituents of Romantic Genius: John Sell Cotman's Greta Drawings' in Rosenthal et al, *Prospects for the Nation*, 199.
[116] 'My tour this Summer has been confined to York and Durham ... My chief study has been colouring from Nature many of which are close copies of that fickle Dame consequently valuable on that account. I shall be at all times happy to show them to you.' JSC to DT, November 30 1805, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.
[117] Influencing me here is Greg Smith's account of the discourses around early nineteenth-century watercolour's relationship to labour and value. A professional watercolourist could attempt to offset the labour involved in producing a watercolour of apparently spontaneous appearance because of his or her dexterous skill and experience. Smith, *Emergence*, 122.
[118] TC to FC, 15 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/412, NYRO.

> you will see who conquers. But seriously, what do I have to do with Durham? Am I to place it on my studies of trees like a rookery? No, & besides I have no time for Durham. I want to get to Ray Wood.[119]

As he had anticipated, however, Cotman did end up conceding and departed Greta Bridge on 4 September. While he did manage to fit in Ray Wood (as a sketch and watercolour of an urn outside in the grounds of Castle Howard indicate, Figs. 78 and 79), he hurried to Durham to meet the Cholmeleys who had told him they would be stopping off in the city on their way back to Brandsby from Capheaton and would expect to see him there. Yet upon arriving in Durham, Cotman found that they had already left. From an inn, he wrote a disgruntled letter to Francis as Hesleyside:

> The weather at last became so bad that I thought I might as well amuse myself while it lasted in the society of your family. They said they should arrive here on Tuesday night, which they did, & see the beauties of the place, which I thought of course would retain them one day. But no, they left it next morn at nine, not expecting me though they so much pressed my comig...[120]

Cotman goes on to say that he found Durham to be a 'delightfully situated city' and hoped that his plans might sync with Francis's own.[121] Yet he was clearly disgruntled only then to be abandoned (for the third time) in a place he had been harried to visit.[122]

Cotman finally returned to his so-called 'home' at Brandsby on 14 September. Here he remained for over two more months. After 21 September, when Francis arrived back from Hesleyside, there are no more 1805 letters concerning Cotman, while the Cholmeley commonplace book has little to report other than the local visits they accompanied him on. On 19 November, the book notes that they saw Cotman off to London from Yorkshire. This would be for the last time.

3. Painterly (un)finish and the question of patronage: Cotman and the Cholmeleys in 1806

[119] JSC to FC, 29 August 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/414, NYRO.
[120] JSC to FC, 6 September 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/418, NYRO.
[121] This never occurred, Francis returning home from Hesleyside a week after Cotman. Commonplace book, 21 September 1805, MIC 626 ZQG XII 23/1, NYRO.
[122] Francis also heard from Harriet about this episode, she calling it 'unlucky' for Cotman who 'is now at Durham and we don't know when he will be here poor dear Cotty!' HC to FC, 8 September 1805, ZQG XII 12/1/419, NYRO.

After what would turn out to be his final departure from Brandsby in winter 1805, Cotman began to distance himself from the Cholmeley family. In early 1806, Francis moved to London to study law and the regular correspondence with his mother recommenced. A number of extracts from Mrs Cholmeley's letters reveal that she had quickly begun to notice Cotman's detachment:

> We expected to have heard today from Cotty, but are disappointed. Why does he not write? I fear somehow you have not found him in good spirits; do not neglect him when 'tis in yr power to see him, & pray tell us whether he has any orders from Bob [Henry Englefield], & how you like his drawing of Durham. I do not think you seem~~d~~ to speak in raptures of ~~any of~~ his drawings in general. Pray tell me also if he is to be of the Brook St. Society...[123]

> We have not heard from Cotty for a long time! I suppose he thinks that your correspondence with us will do as well as his. Give him our love as usual & tell him notwithstanding we are highly indignant at his laziness in writing.[124]

> We have heard nothing from Cotty this Age & you say nothing of him ... He has] disappointed & make me uneasy...[125]

> Cotty is as lazy in his letters as you; We have not heard from him for a fortnight ... You say nothing of poor Cotty, who may smother his feelings but I think must be a good deal mortified at being excluded by the Brook St Society...[126]

No doubt Cotman was preoccupied during this time reintegrating himself into the London scene and preparing for SPWC nomination in April, which involved the submission of drawings for inspection by the Committee. Nevertheless, Mrs Cholmeley's frustrated tone in these remarks indicates that she perceived his silence to be personal. In a number of her letters, she urged Francis to give time and sympathy to 'poor Cotty' and frequently referred to both men as if they were – or, more likely, she wanted them to be – inseparable friends/sibling-surrogates, her own son perhaps a safer retainer for her displaced, and now distanced, affection for her artist:

> I was very glad to find you had it in yr power to give poor Cotty a ticket for the opera concert. He must sometimes feel the loss of a

[123] TC to FC, 24 February 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/437, NYRO.
[124] HC to FC, 8 March 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/440, NYRO.
[125] TC to FC, 14 March 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/441, NYRO.
[126] TC to FC, 13 April 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/445, NYRO.

> certain Peshy who thought more of you both than any other friends you will probably meet with.[127]

It was not only Cotman's lack of communication from the family that disappointed Mrs Cholmeley; his artwork also gave her cause for concern. The sense of urgency with which she questioned Francis about Cotman's drawing of Durham Cathedral, promptly followed by the assumption that her son no longer spoke 'in raptures of ~~any of~~ his drawings in general', suggests that she was troubled by Cotman's critical reception. Together, the above extracts indicate that she regarded the visual character of Cotman's recent drawings and his personal laziness to write as being linked. These negative qualities, she told Francis, could have serious consequences for his professional success, namely his election to the SPWC:

> ... Pray tell me also if he is to be of the Brook St. Society [aka the SPWC], & if he is, for goodness sake persuade him to work away & get a good many to make a figure with these. Why does he finish none? Surely this is not a wise plan, for he can have none to shew to those who call on him.[128]

To 'finish none' resonates with Mrs Cholmeley's perception of Cotman's 'laziness' to write and apparent apathy to finish work for his SPWC election, both of which she seemingly puts down to 'the loss of a certain Peshy' who was not there to monitor or advise him. To 'finish none' might also be interpreted in visual terms, as if Mrs Cholmeley (and her son) detected in Cotman's watercolours an absence of stylistic finish, itself related to his perceived 'laziness' and Francis's disenchantment with 'his drawings in general.' As Sam Smiles has shown, early nineteenth-century reactions to varying degrees of painterly finish could invoke a set of assumptions that were related to an artist's own personality and morality.[129] In some circles, evanescent, vigorous and apparently carefree execution was prized as displaying original artistic genius,[130] yet in most others 'unfinish' was seen to signify an artist's cavalier attitude not only to art, but to life itself.[131] Given what we know about the Cholmeleys' artistic preferences for clearly-defined draughtsmanship and pictures that were readily readable, together with their reactions to Cotman's art (such as the Cholmeley sisters' 1803 poems), it would not be farfetched to propose that their tastes tended towards finished picture surfaces.

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[127] TC to FC, 30 April 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/447, NYRO.
[128] TC to FC, 24 February 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/437, NYRO.
[129] Sam Smiles, ''Splashers', 'Scrawlers' and 'Plasterers': British Landscape Painting and the Language of Criticism, 1800-40', *Turner Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Summer, 1990), 5-11.
[130] See Smith, *Emergence*, 217-20.
[131] See Smiles, 'Scrawlers' and 'Plasterers', *Turner Studies* (1990), 5.

Cotman's watercolour of *Durham Cathedral* (Fig. 80), the drawing Mrs Cholmeley singled out in her letter as disappointing, appears to capture a sense of the unease felt about the artist's displays of unfinish. Executed in a portrait format, the west front of the Cathedral rises above the banks of the River Wear. This is an image which, at first glance, is stylistically well-behaved: the main subject is framed by the dark gothic tower and Galilee Chapel, and is drawn with technical precision in which dainty pencil marks are clearly visible through the thin light wash. The result is an emphasis on tidy, clear architectural draughtsmanship. Yet if we cast our eyes downwards to the lower regions, we are met by a comparatively unkempt image. The tonal register changes abruptly at the point at which the city walls reach the woodland, the emphasis being instead on darker paint and loose handling as opposed to pencil details and light washes. A crudely-delineated mill perches precariously on the river's edge. Nearby, a weir bears rigorous scratching-out giving the impression of rapid water flow. Here, exposed white paper contrasts with what is otherwise a tonally rather drab area, while the scumbling, scratching-out and dryly-applied pigment creates a coarse surface facture. Encroaching onto the river and blending with the woodland on either side is Cotman's characteristically bold foliage, marked-out with graphite loops and rims of colour which recall the cursory notations of his Greta watercolours.

The south-west view of Durham Cathedral was a popular subject in early nineteenth-century picturesque representation and was depicted by Girtin and William Daniell (among many others) whose own watercolours (Figs 82 and 83) make for an interesting comparison with Cotman's. In terms of its size, viewpoint, format and palette, Girtin's image bears closest relation to Cotman's. It had been purchased by Dr Monro in the late 1790s and copied by his friend John Henderson meaning that Cotman may have seen it during his time at Monro's 'academy' just a few years earlier. Yet despite these salient characteristics, Girtin's watercolour differs markedly to Cotman's in its comparatively unified composition and formal handling. Rather than the hard-edged lines and abrupt tonal switch that we find in Cotman's watercolour, Girtin's contours are softer while varying gradations of colour model the architectural structure in light and shade. Absent from the river is the weir which sits at a stark oblique in Cotman's image, while the size and presence of the mill is reduced. All this makes for an altogether gentler scene in which the cathedral appears firmly incorporated into its surroundings. Daniell's watercolour similarly demonstrates controlled handling, a smooth surface texture and a

fuller view of the cathedral which also appears integrated within an expansive sunlit prospect. The word we might use to sum up Girtin and Daniell's images is 'finished'.

In contrast, there is an acute compositional disparity in Cotman's *Durham* where the image appears divisible, as if it might be split into two individual landscape-format works of art (Fig. 81). It is as if two artists are at work here: one, constructing an architectural drawing; the other, producing something which resembles the rudimentary elements of an unfinished landscape painting. When reassembled (Fig. 80), the formal tension between drawing and painting, structures and non-structures, finishing and 'unfinishing' returns. Rather than committing to one mode or the other, Cotman appears to have sought out some kind of middleground between the expectation of structure and authority, and those of play and originality. These different forms of practice combined on the picture surface were unlikely to have been easily accommodated by the Cholmeleys or, indeed, by the Committee of the SPWC.

'I am much grieved to find by Cotman's letter this morn[in]g that he is blackballd by the Brook St Society' wrote Mrs Cholmeley to Francis on 31 March, a week after the SPWC Committee rejected Cotman's nomination. 'I hope he feels less vexed & mortified at it than I do' she continued, implying that she had invested more emotion in his election than he had. Two later letters expressed similar dismay at Cotman's exclusion: the first blaming 'the cautious policy of Mr Munn', one of the members, who, she supposed, had 'influenced Cotman not to join them', the next, suspecting that Cotman 'must have some personal enemies among' the members.[132] As discussed in Chapter 1, John Varley had proposed Cotman as a Fellow-Exhibitor to the SPWC on 24 February 1806, affording him three weeks to prepare and submit 'Three or more of his ∧finished Drawings to be examined by the Society' a week before elections.[133] The word appearing again here is 'finished', its meaning made all the more significant by its addition to the sentence in the Society's *Laws and Rules* book. The Society's minute book gives nothing away as to how and what was judged at elections, and so any investigation into why Cotman was excluded from the SPWC is speculative. Nevertheless, had Cotman submitted the three or more watercolours to the Society by 17 March (recall that Mrs Cholmeley had expressed anxiety at his ability to meet the deadline), then we might suppose that any he did present were similarly regarded as lacking finish and judged too 'different' by watercolour standards as upheld by the SPWC. Indeed, while the SPWC has been regarded as a

[132] TC to FC, 13 and 30 April 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/445 and 447, NYRO.
[133] SPWC MS, M1, RWS Archives, 16.

progressive body, most compellingly by Greg Smith, its foundation in 1804 might be understood in terms of a retrenchment of watercolour practice in opposition to artists like Turner who stood for a bold, bravura approach to the medium. Despite the claims made to raise the status of watercolour, the SPWC was also a commercial venture which did its fair share of pandering to the market. This meant that the watercolours displayed at its annual exhibitions were calculated to attract buyers – they could not appear overtly 'different'.

With the hopes for Cotman's election now dashed, the tone of Mrs Cholmeley's letters changed. She expressed to Francis her hope that Cotman would now 'get forwd by his own merits and industry', as if his failure to secure membership had 'fail[ed] to deserve [her] affection'.[134] These two individuals, once drawn to each other, now seemed to repel one another, as if forced apart by a relationship which had run its course.

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That July, Mrs Cholmeley wrote to Cotman at his parents' house in Norwich where he was spending some time. The letter is a startling admission of her anxious thoughts about Cotman's present state and his future as an artist, and culminates in a final farewell:

> How much so, time alone can prove for, God knows, but experience ever day shows us how uncertain is Protection of any kind, & that Patronage of the most rich & powerful is very rarely so advantageous as it ought to be. Francis has not raised my spirits by telling us how unsuccessful a winter you have had, but your own self accusation of Extravagance he sees not to believe, at least he says he knows none you were guilty of. He seems very anxious for your prosecuting your scheme of painting in oils, & I believe no Artist that once begins, that ever wishes to relinquish it. I am grieved & surprised at your want of success for more than I can express, & can only anxiously hope that if any defects in your Stile of drawing have a share in causing it, you will have Will & Perseverance, as you certainly have power to correct those faults.

Mrs Cholmeley follows her tips on artistic practice with a moral lecture concerning Cotman's personality and attitude, urging him to knuckle down and sober up:

[134] TC to FC, 31 March 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/444, NYRO.

> You are come my dr friend to an important time in yr life when your own future fame & success must much depend on yourself. For Gods sake, for the sake of those you most love do not any longer be negligent or any way blameable but apply steadily & vigorously & profit to the utmost of the advantages ... You ought to know by my example, that yr best friends criticise you the most severely. Tis your good only I have uniformly sought in saying these things to you I know & give you offence but you have too often found I was right in my advice when believe me I had rather have been wrong than you should! You will now perhaps dear Cotty be angry when I tell you I wish your last letter had been a little more quiet & sober. Your joy seems to me foolishly extravagant for a very precarious advantage! It will give me real joy indeed to find everything answers yr Expectations there, but alas! how few events in life ever do this, & therefore we shd always be armed agst disappointment, which yr ardent, sanguine spirit I fear rarely is.

The letter ends with advice for Cotman's immediate future, rather richly urging him to seek patronage from Dawson Turner's family in Yarmouth, before signing off from her 'Cotty' for good:

> I am very impatient to hear from you from Norwich & I know that you find the Turners are kind & generous friends to you as ever. I hope you will cultivate their friendship diligently & never by any indiscretion forfeit it ... this will find you safely & happy at Norwich you will write me immedy & tell me all your plans of every kind ... Farewell, & Heaven bless & direct you my dear Cotty. Whether prosperous or unlucky signifies nothing in my regard for you. Be virtuous, be steady, & nothing can influence the friendship & the affection of your friends here towards you. God bless you, dear Cotty, & 'forget me not.'[135]

Mrs Cholmeley never wrote to Cotman again. Three years later she was dead, leaving him £100 in her will, the greatest, and possibly only, sum of money he had ever received from her.[136] As we have seen, the split between Cotman and Mrs Cholmeley was a long time coming. Yet despite Cotman's resistances to her and her family's various stipulations, expectations and tastes, he seems to have taken something of Mrs Cholmeley's letter on board. Within a few months of its receipt, Cotman again returned to Norwich from London, but this time with the intention of remaining in his hometown and using it as a longer-term base. From here, he would relaunch his career as an individual, one taking control of his artistic identity and patronage-base rather than as the aspirant

[135] TC to JSC, 14 July 1806, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.
[136] TC's will, ZQG II 85, 86, NYRO.

artist exclusively dependent on the patronage of one patron. How Cotman attempted to achieve this is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3
Managing a Regional Art World:
Cotman in Norwich
1806-1812

Two weeks before Christmas 1806, Cotman wrote to the Great Yarmouth banker and antiquary, Dawson Turner, from his hometown:

> In consequence of advice from several of my friends in Norwich.—I have taken a House in Wymer Street, for the purpose of opening a school for Drawing & Design. It will give me an opportunity of turning myself about during my stay & studying painting of which of late I have done little having been so much engaged in other things.[1]

The phrase 'turning myself about' is worth staying with for a moment. By dictionary definition, 'turning' signifies a 'movement about an axis or centre; rotation, revolution'; 'an act of changing posture or direction by moving as on a pivot'; 'the action of shaping or working something, like a turner'.[2] Via such a movement, this *something* – 'myself' – is shaped or turned; it is a process enabling the possibility of different perspectives and personas. Turning is also a temporary manoeuvre (as 'my stay' suggests) designed to get the self to a different place – geographically, vocationally, mentally – because something in the present needs to change. This chapter is about that process of taking stock, changing course and re-emerging in another place, namely early nineteenth-century Norwich following Cotman's departure from London in late 1806. But while Cotman clearly recognised the possibilities that Norwich could offer him, he nevertheless confronted the complexities of being an artist in that city. Taking as its framework the years that he spent in Norwich – late 1806 to early 1812 – this chapter argues that Cotman had to manage both the possibilities and the limits of the city by continually reassessing and turning about his artistic identity and output.

The ensuing discussion unfolds in four parts. The first considers Cotman's return to Norwich and the factors that made his hometown a viable place in which to operate as an

[1] JSC to DT, 8 December 1806, MC 2487/3, NRO.
[2] 'Turning', n. and a. from the verb 'Turn', *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (1989), https://www.oed.com, accessed 18 February 2013.

artist. The second examines his attempt to stage his re-entry into Norwich by mounting a huge one-man exhibition at his house, also the venue of his new drawing school. Neither venture appears to have been a success and instead served to highlight the limitations of Norwich. The ways in which Cotman negotiated these limitations form the focus of the next two parts where I argue that his strategies for doing so involved appropriating elements from his previous output and experience for enterprises more suited to the city. These included the launch of a Circulating Portfolio of Drawings in 1809, from which he lent out his own material to local subscribers for copying, and his first print project, the *Miscellaneous Etchings*, published in 1811.

1. 'turning myself about': Cotman returns to Norwich

Before considering those strategies, it is worth addressing what it was that Cotman was turning himself about from. Why did he leave London in 1806, the indisputable centre of Britain's art world, and go home?

There are various possible explanations. As discussed in Chapter 1, Cotman lacked the financial capital to sustain a long-term career in London, unlike many of his peers. Havell, Cristall, Munn and the Varleys, for example, all shared well-connected lineages in the world of visual and literary culture. If we recall Bourdieu's argument that an individual's social origins tend to determine the largely predicable landing of a career, then Cotman's move back to Norwich in 1806 appears more comprehensible. Evidence also exists to suggest that Cotman had experienced poor sales of his work since the end of 1805, a situation exacerbated by the lack of sustainable patronage from the Cholmeleys.[3] His rejection from the SPWC – or 'blackball[ing]' to paraphrase Mrs Cholmeley – was undoubtedly another motivating factor for his return home.[4] Non-

[3] Lack of picture sales is suggested in letters from Mrs Cholmeley to Francis: 'Francis has not raised my spirits by telling me how unsuccessful a winter you have had', TC to JSC, 14 July 1806, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM. 'I fear by what you say he has sold very few drawings this spring', TC to FC, 22 June 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/456, NYRO. 'I am very sorry Cotty's drawings shd [still] have deserved so much Criticism', TC to FC, 24 May 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/450, NYRO. Instances of patronage besides the Cholmeleys were short-lived, including from Lord Aberdeen, the Earl of Carlisle, the Marquess of Stafford and Lord Palmerston (for reference to the latter's patronage, see TC to FC, 30 April 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/447, NYRO).

[4] 'Blackballd' comes from a remark made by Mrs Cholmeley to describe Cotman's non-election to the SPWC, TC to FC, 31 March 1806, ZQG XII 12/1/444, NYRO. Cotman's biographers have largely accepted her remark as a truth. However, blackballing – simply meaning more black balls having been drawn than white – was not unusual at SPWC nominations. Within a year of Cotman's rejection, fourteen out of the twenty-six artists proposed for Fellow-Exhibitor status had been balloted for but not elected, while eleven of this twenty-six had received nominations but were then withdrawn prior to election, see SPWC MS, M1, RWS Archives, 16.

election did not necessarily stop previously unsuccessful applicants from subsequent nomination to the Society. However, unlike other nominees, including Thomas Heaphy, Augustus Pugin and Charles Wild, who failed to gain membership at first but retried and subsequently succeeded, Cotman made no further attempts towards re-nomination. This suggests that he experienced professional and personal humiliation at the rejection which subsequent disassociation from the SPWC might have alleviated,[5] a point buttressed by the cessation of his exhibiting activities at the RA after 1806. By this date, it appears there was no clear route for Cotman to pursue in London.

That said, we should entertain the possibility that Cotman was uncertain about the benefits of SPWC membership. Fellow-Exhibitor was a comparatively modest position and despite the fact that it offered a public platform for display and financial gain, this only came once a year at the Society's springtime exhibition. Membership also branded the artist a watercolourist, which Cotman may have anticipated to be restrictive. Indeed, shortly after his rejection, he began painting in oils (as referenced in the above-quoted letter to Dawson Turner), the medium denoting a more liberal, academic studio practice than watercolour. Soon he was proclaiming that 'more must be done in this branch of Art than in Water Colours, or nothing is done.'[6] The need to diversify his media is indicated again in a letter to Francis Cholmeley in 1811 when Cotman noted the poor sales being experienced by many of his fellow watercolourists and 'bless[ed] my lucky stars at having another source [at that point, etching] to support my family, save painting and drawing'.[7]

The lack of financial means, patronage and certainty about his career path, together with his SPWC rejection, were exacerbated by Cotman's age. As Mrs Cholmeley had warned in June 1806, 'You are come my dr friend to an important time in yr life when your own future fame & success must much depend on yourself.'[8] At twenty-four, Cotman could not simply backtrack to the art-world entry points that were discussed in Chapter 1. Moreover, with many of his peers elected to the SPWC and with no patronage or

[5] 'Positive or negative sanctions, success or failure, encouragements or warnings, consecration or exclusion, all indicating to each writer (etc.) – and the ensemble of rivals – the objective truth of the position he occupies and his probable future, are effectively one set of the major mediations through which the incessant redefinition of the 'creative project' is shaped, with failure encouraging reconversion or retreat from the field, and consecration reinforcing and liberating initial ambitions.' Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 60.
[6] JSC to DT, 15 October 1806, MC 2487/2, NRO.
[7] JSC to FC, 5 June 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1063, NYRO.
[8] TC to JSC, 14 July 1806, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.

positions lined up in the capital, the most logical option must have seemed to set up elsewhere.

Cotman appear to have anticipated the fragility of a London-based career long before 1806, however. Since 1799 he had returned to Norwich at least once almost every year.[9] These were not purely social visits: advertisements posted in the city's two newspapers, the *Norwich Mercury* and *Norfolk Chronicle*, show that he consistently promoted his teaching services from his parents' Cockey Lane house, always for a limited time only and with lessons priced on his 'Terms as usual' (rather pricey at a half-guinea an hour).[10] The continued visits, presence in the local press and his preservation of links with Norwich reveal an artist who was preparing the ground for himself in his hometown while trying to emerge in London. Cotman was not alone in using his hometown as a place in which to re-emerge. In 1802 the twenty-five-year-old Scottish miniaturist, Andrew Robertson, revealed to his brother that 'if all fails [in London], I have Aberdeen and Edinburgh in reserve.'[11] Cotman's own 'reserve' came into effect in December 1806 when he wrote to Dawson Turner claiming to have taken 'advice from several of my friends in Norwich' who had apparently recommended his return.[12] With seven years' experience of studying, exhibiting and teaching art, Cotman could be confident in his ability to remain a liberal artist while teaching Norwich's healthy population of amateur artists in order to generate income, a common occupational mix for most British artists.[13] Accordingly, he rented 'a House in Wymer Street, for the purpose of opening a school for Drawing & Design'.

The secondary literature has regarded Cotman's removal to Norwich as being tantamount to 'professional suicide'.[14] However, this perspective fails to take account of the material, professional and personal determinations of his departure as outlined above, while

[9] Documented visits to Norwich referenced in Cotman's own letters date from April 1800, January 1801, September 1802, July 1804 and July 1806. Dated and undated artworks of Norwich sites by Cotman also survive from 1799, 1800 and 1801.
[10] NM and NC 4 September 1802, NC, 14 July 1804 and NM and NC, 5 July 1804.
[11] Andrew to Sandy Robertson, 29 November 1802, quoted in Emily Robertson (ed.), *Letters and Papers of Andrew Robertson* (London, 1895), 89.
[12] JSC to DT, 8 December 1806, MC 2487/3, NRO.
[13] This phenomenon has been well documented by Bermingham, 'An Exquisite Practice: The Institution of Drawing as a Polite Art in Britain' in Allen et al, *Towards a Modern Art World*, 47-66, and *Learning to Draw*; Michael Clarke, *The Tempting Prospect: A Social History of English Watercolours* (London, 1981), Martin Hardie, *Water-Colour Painting in Britain: The Victorian Period*, vol. 3 (New York, 1966-8), 245-64, Kim Sloan, 'Drawing: A Polite Recreation in Eighteenth-Century England', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 2* (1982), 217-40; and Smith, *Emergence*, 108-15.
[14] David Blayney-Brown, Andrew Hemingway and Anne Lyles, *Romantic Landscape, The Norwich School of Painters*, exh. cat. (London, 2000), 28.

neglecting to consider the possibilities that Norwich offered him. The prevailing view also encapsulates the art-historical tendency to read artistic success in relation to geographical centrality. Since its genesis at the end of the eighteenth century, this bias has stressed the importance of a London address to an artist as opposed to a regional residence, with the latter's intimations of marginalisation, provincialism and failure to have succeeded in a 'competitive' art world. This chapter seeks to avoid this Londoncentric outlook while still acknowledging the historical power of that myth to shape individuals' actions, experiences and decisions.

Indeed, the perception of a relationship between artistic practice and geographical centrality held much currency during the period, as the example of Francis Towne shows. In the mid-1760s, Towne moved from London to Exeter where he became a drawing master, yet continued to visit London to exhibit his works and maintain his contacts. In 1803, he wrote to his friend and fellow artist, Ozias Humphry, following the RA's tenth rejection of his application to become an Associate Royal Academician. In the letter, Towne emphasised his 'serious' artistic credentials – notably omitting all teaching references – and told Humphry that:

> I had yearly Lodgings in London, Piccadilly and in St James' Street for six or seven years & London was then my home, After that I rented by the year, apartments in Leicester Square for near seven years, at both of these I lived from the month of February, to August, and sometimes to the end of October before I went out of Town (I hope you will allow a Landscape painter to see nature sometime in the year) London is now my only home, I have only a Lodging by the Week in Exeter ... you must give up calling me a provincial Drawing Master. I never meant nor intended to go through life but professing myself a Landscape Painter... [15]

This extract encapsulates the paradoxical nature of the prevailing prejudice experienced by many artists who situated themselves beyond the centre – as Towne stressed, how else was 'a Landscape painter' meant to gather his material? The aim was to avoid being branded a 'provincial Drawing Master', an identity tantamount to an art-world dirty secret.

The stakes were even higher for Cotman who not only left London for the provinces but went home, making him prey to the appearance of professional failure more so than an

[15] Francis Towne to Ozias Humphry, 23 November 1803 in Richard Stephens, *A Catalogue of the works of Francis Towne*, unpublished PhD thesis (Birkbeck, 2006), 1333-6.

artist who moved to a *different* provincial city from their birthplace. Besides Towne, who originally from Middlesex, Edward Bird was another example of an regionally-born artist who made his career in another city. Bird began as a Japanner in his native Wolverhampton before moving to Bristol, aged twenty-two, in 1794. Continuing his trade as a Japanner of tea trays, he soon shifted role to drawing master while simultaneously styling himself a historical, landscape and portrait painter. Yet other than Towne and Bird, there are very few examples of artists who emerged in London or elsewhere and subsequently returned to their hometown – that is, all apart from Norwich-born artists. Edward Miles, James Sillett, Robert Dixon, William Stevenson and the framemaker, Jeremiah Freeman, all from Norwich, returned to their hometown after training in London. This is not to suggest that 'going home' characterised all departed Norwich artists' careers, as the sample in Appendix 2 showed. However, the multiple instances of Norwich-born artists returning to the city suggests that there was something about Norwich which made it an appealing place to pursue a profession. This is supported by the number of London-based artists who temporarily took up residence there, including William Beechey, John Opie, Philip Reinagle and Giovanni Battista Cipriani.

As a final caveat, my account does not intend to take a wholly Norwich perspective either. Doing so would run the risk of reproducing another myth, one propagated by the 'proud' provincial art projects of the nineteenth century which alleged that they could rival or resist London's cultural pull in one way or another.[16] Instead, I adopt a relational model which sees London's art world as a centripetal reference point for Cotman's artistic activity in Norwich, but one which was not always explicit or wholly positive.

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What kind of a city was Cotman re-entering in late 1806? What could it offer him and how could he expect to be received? Norwich had long been Eastern England's dominant urban and commercial hub. For a resident with something to sell, their most lucrative clientele were the country gentry and merchants who paid visits to the city's specialist shops and partook of its polite entertainments. By the mid-eighteenth century, Norwich boasted Britain's second purpose-built theatre, an Assembly Rooms, public baths, and a 'Vauxhall' and 'Ranelagh' in imitation of London's own pleasure gardens. Social,

[16] See Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760-1840* (Oxford, 2003), 81.

economic and political life was dominated by a wealthy urban patriciate composed of local landowners and the major merchant-manufacturer and banking families, whilst a large mixture of professional men populated the city's public sphere. This encompassed civic ceremonies, private schools, lecture and exhibition rooms, a lively local press, a public library together with a large number of circulating libraries, hundreds of taverns and coffee houses, and a variety of clubs and societies.

Cotman was already associated with one of these societies, having been elected an Honorary Member of the pseudo-masonic Society of United Friars in January 1801. His nomination had come from William Stevenson, the proprietor of the *Norfolk Chronicle*, and seconded by the Norwich-born architect, Arthur Browne. Despite his youth in 1801 and recent departure from Norwich, Cotman was evidently held in high esteem by local public figures.[17] In August 1806, about four months before Cotman's return to Norwich, Stevenson published a review of the second exhibition of the newly-founded Norwich Society of Artists (of which Browne was a member). Cotman had not yet exhibited with the Society, but the review positioned him alongside 'several celebrated artists' who were born of or said to have been encouraged by Norwich culture.[18] These included art-world greats like William Beechey and John Opie, as well as Edward Miles, Joseph Clover, Humphry Repton, William Wilkins and Richard Westall, further demonstrating Cotman's pre-existing recognition in Norwich – something he was keen to take further advantage of.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Norwich of Cotman's youth was populated by an increasing number of artists-cum-drawing masters, a rise that dovetailed with the growing demand for drawing instruction among Britain's aspirant classes. This, together with the relative growth of dealers, framemakers, gilders, stationers, engravers and printers, formed a burgeoning artistic community. This was given both shape and status in 1803 with the foundation of the Norwich Society of Artists (hereafter NSA) composed of local artists, designers and amateurs who staged their first formal exhibition in August 1805. As the *Chronicle* touted, the NSA was at that point 'the only institution of the kind in England, out of the metropolis'.[19] The Society took care to emulate London's RA through

[17] The Society's minutes describe Cotman as 'an ingenious Artist & native of this City', 20 January 1801, Col/9/2, NRO. At this point, the Society included a surgeon, writing master, corn merchant, publisher, two attorneys and an architect.
[18] NC, August 16 1806.
[19] NC, August 16 1806. The NSA can be considered Britain's first formalised arts and exhibiting society outside of London. While there had been a number of attempts in various urban centres to

form and format, similarly describing itself as an 'Academy', appointing a President, Vice-President, members and honorary members, and modelling their exhibition catalogues (including the mottoes) on those accompanying London's Great Exhibition.[20]

Such association with London's art establishment was facilitated by Norwich's well-connected transport system. Despite its twenty-five-mile radius of agricultural hinterland and relative isolation from other urban centres, the city was only one hundred miles from London, with direct roads along which several stagecoaches made the journey in a day.[21] The return journey enabled the regular traffic of people, news and goods, including artists, panoramas and prints from London.[22] The two daily mail coaches also allowed the weekly Norwich papers to reprint metropolitan and foreign news (including RA reviews) from London periodicals. This flow was occasionally reciprocated with partial reprintings of Norwich news by London papers, including exhibition reviews of the NSA.[23]

Besides an exhibiting society, Norwich offered some opportunities for artistic patronage; Cotman, we remember, had a pre-existing patronage connection in Dawson Turner since 1804.[24] A Cambridge-educated banker, botanist, antiquary and collector, Turner's antiquarian and artistic interests were aided by an ample inheritance and a successful business at his Great Yarmouth bank. His varied interests were widely recognised and gained him prestigious elections to the Linnean Society and Royal Society in London, as

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establish arts bodies in the last decades of the eighteenth century, such as in Liverpool, they had come to nothing. See f.n. 2 on page 17 for a list of provincial institutions established after 1803. `

[20] The NSA's other objectives were artistic improvement and cultivation through their 'Enquiry into the Rise, Progress, and Present State of Painting, Architecture, and Sculpture with a View to Discover and Point out the Best Methods of Study and to Attain to Greater Perfection in these Arts', *Articles of the Norwich Society of Artists*, reproduced in Rajnai and Mary Stevens, *The Norwich Society of Artists 1805-1833, A Dictionary of Contributors and their Work* (Norwich, 1976), 6-12.

[21] Eighteenth-century Norwich citizens considered their city to be 'next to London ... the most rich and potent in England', 'The Humble Petition of the Mayor, Sheriffs, Citizens and Commonality of the City of Norwich', quoted in Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, 1998), 303.

[22] Plenty of examples pepper the Norwich newspapers such as Harper's Pantheon, 'one of the most splendid spectacles that has ever been exhibited out of the Metropolis' (NM, 7 March 1807) and printsellers selling prints from 'the House of principle London Publishers; all of which are sold at the London Prices' (NC, 20 June 1801).

[23] The same review of the Society that had appeared in the *Norfolk Chronicle* in August 1806 (and which included a reference to Cotman) appeared under 'Provincial Occurrences' in *The Universal Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 36 (November 1806), 472.

[24] Prior association between Turner and Cotman is confirmed by signed and dated correspondence from 1804: JSC to DT, 9 July 1804, RP H507, BL and 18-21 August 1804, MC 2487/1, NRO. A pencil portrait of Turner, comparable in format and technique to Cotman's Cholmeley profiles also survives from this date, BM, 1902,0514.215, albeit posthumously dated on the recto. It was around this time that Turner wrote to some of his contacts about Cotman, describing him as an 'eminent artist' and attempting to procure patronage on his behalf. See, for instance, DT to Nathaniel John Winch, 6 August 1804, quoted in Kitson, *Life*, 68.

well as various academies abroad. Unlike the Cholmeleys, Turner's money, international contacts and track record as an active patron of the arts made him a much better bet.

As such (and contrary to the conventional account), Cotman's return to Norwich was as much about moving to a genuinely viable place as it was about 'going home'. It could offer him a culturally-aware and networked population centre with the social, artistic, communication and potential material structures to enable the relaunch of his career beyond, though within sight of, London. Given the art-world prejudices associated with place, however, it was nevertheless important that Cotman stage his re-entry effectively.

2. Staging his return: the one-man exhibition

Cotman's December 1806 letter to Dawson Turner continued:

> ...for the first fortnight after Xmas I shall open my Rooms for an Exhibition for about a fortnight,—I am aware of the daring of such a scheme and I hope the public will consider it with Candor, & that it is the efforts of but an individual.[25]

Less than two weeks later, an advertisement appeared in the *Mercury* and *Chronicle*:

> SCHOOL.,
>
> *For Painting in Water Colours & for Design.*
>
> J.S. COTMAN
>
> RESPECTFULLY informs his Friends, and the Inhabitants of Norwich in general that he has taken a HOUSE in WYMER-STREET, near the Public Library, for the accommodation of those Ladies and Gentlemen who may favour him by becoming his pupils.
>
> That the public may be enabled to form an accurate estimate of his merit, and of his claim to their patronage, he has been advised to open an EXHIBITION of his Works; a scheme almost too daring for an individual, did not he flatter himself that the labours of Seven Years might justify him in the attempt.

[25] JSC to DT, 8 December 1806, MC 2487/3, NRO.

> The Exhibition, which opens Monday, the 29th of December, will consist of his *Coloured Sketches, Sketches in Light and Shade, and in Pencil, and a few Finished Drawings,* which are to be on sale.
>
> Admittance, by Catalogue, One Shilling.[26]

The one-man exhibition that Cotman staged in Norwich for eight weeks after Christmas 1806 has been overlooked in the secondary account.[27] This is not surprising owing to a basic lack of evidence: the catalogue that Cotman claimed to have accompanied the event has not survived and no exhibition reviews appeared in the press. Cotman nevertheless posted a number of press adverts, thirteen in total, which show that his exhibition was not simply a display of a select few pieces, nor that it was filled with recent works to demonstrate teaching material for his new 'SCHOOL., *For Painting in Water Colours & for Design*'. In fact, it contained 500 artworks[28] drawn from his career to date, the largest number of works known to have been included in a British artist's solo show at the beginning of the modern period. Cotman's one-man exhibition was thus a bold statement to launch his re-entry into Norwich, and it raises important questions concerning the complex nature of artistic ambition, strategy, reception, success and failure, and how our understanding of those notions might be affected when we shift the focus away from the London art world towards another place. By examining the language and tone employed in his promotional material and what this can tell us about the show's composition and visual appearance, this part explores the kind of persona Cotman attempted to project through his exhibition. How effective was he in using it to relaunch his career in a regional art world, one with its own demands, etiquette, possibilities and limits?

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Cotman's letter to Turner continued:

> To add to my Collection I should with gratitude reserve the favour of the loan of your Drawing of Fountain's Abbey. If you could so far oblige me I will thank you to favour me with the <u>size</u>

[26] NM and NC, 20 December 1806.
[27] Not the fortnight he initially mooted to Dawson Turner in his letter of 8 December 1806.
[28] As noted in later adverts, NM and NC, 10 January 1807.

> <u>of Framee</u> that I may have a suitable place for it & that I may keep it as little time as possible, when you do favour me.[29]

Given that no catalogues have come to light, this quote helpfully reveals an artwork almost certainly included in the show. Signed and dated 1804, *Fountains Abbey* (Fig. 84) was one of six watercolours exhibited by Cotman at the RA in 1806. Turner bought it directly from him and hung it in his Great Yarmouth house, thus making it straightforward for Cotman to borrow back.[30] What was particularly special about *Fountains Abbey* to request it as a loan? And what message can we expect it to have been intended to communicate to Cotman's putative audience?

Immediately striking is the watercolour's ambitious size. At 85.9 x 60.6 cm, *Fountains Abbey* rivalled some of the largest exhibition watercolours displayed in contemporary London shows, and it departs from the small-scale works that Cotman generally produced.[31] It is also characterised by a high degree of surface finish. Now extremely faded, the reddish tones would have once appeared deep green, blue and indigo. The fading nevertheless helps to reveal the watercolour's detailed underdrawing which, together with the dark patina of the purely-applied specks of gum arabic, would have provided definition and structure to the various colourful details. In its exceptional size and high finish, it is probable that Cotman considered *Fountains Abbey* as one of his most ambitious works from his 'labours of Seven Years'. His adverts' references to time, moreover, were undoubtedly included for their signifying potential, particularly given that Norwich was a historic guild city and continued to accommodate many trade guilds and their apprentices. The standard length of an apprenticeship was seven years, after which a promising novice would be expected to become a master of his trade. Cotman likely intended the phrase to be interpreted along similar lines – *Fountains Abbey* was his masterpiece.

The watercolour's subject matter would also hold particular interest for Cotman's audience. With its low and close viewpoint, emphasis on natural motifs and architectural ruination, *Fountains Abbey* could demonstrate Cotman's knowledge and skilful

[29] JSC to DT, 8 December 1806, MC 2487/3, NRO.
[30] An inventory of Turner's picture collection (c.1819), recently located by David McKitterick at Trinity College Library, Cambridge, shows that *Fountains Abbey* was bought directly from Cotman.
[31] Scale was used by some artists to catch the eye of the Hanging Committee when submitting their works for exhibition at the RA. For example, Andrew Robertson revealed to his brother that 'a little stage effect [is] useful, even Academicians gulled, for it was the size of my pictures made them notice.' Andrew to Sandy Robertson, 29 November 1802, quoted in Robertson (ed.), *Letters and Papers*, 89.

deployment of the picturesque aesthetic. The ruin's truncation by the edge of the picture plane, the vaulting rib which conversely seems to extend beyond its bounds, and the contrast in scale between the small reclining man and the expanse of masonry above, evokes contemporary images of ruined abbeys, particularly those by J. M. W. Turner and Girtin (Figs 85 and 86). Cotman's treatment might also strike a chord with those local citizens who exercised polite antiquarian enquiry in an area of the country which brimmed with medieval churches and antiquities. Hanging his 'masterpiece' in a 'suitable place', Cotman could hope to communicate his artistic skill, knowledge and ability to produce original art for the people of Norwich, whilst also hoping to attract Dawson Turner's attention to the exhibition and its contents.

A one-man exhibition was novel for Norwich. James Sillett's 'Exhibition Room' of 1801 was probably the closest in terms of a precedent, his artworks (mostly still-lives) having been displayed in a room at his lodgings for 'the inspection of all who may be inclined to patronise him'.[32] Otherwise, one-man exhibitions were a London phenomenon, and despite Cotman's assertion of its 'individual' and 'daring' nature, his can be situated within a thirty-year history of solo shows in the capital. The first was Nathaniel Hone's 1775 retrospective, held in rented rooms in St Martin's Lane, and was followed by an increasing number, some of which Cotman would have seen or at least known about while resident in London.[33] In 1803, for example, J. M. W. Turner staged an exhibition of his works at his new Harley Street premises; in February 1805, Towne had a one-man show in Lower Brook Street; and in 1806 Benjamin West exhibited his *Death of Nelson* at his house near Cotman's last London residence in Fitzrovia. Almost all the London solo shows contained under one hundred artworks, with Towne's proving exceptional with a hang of 191. However, Cotman's 400 exhibits, rising to 500 within three weeks of the opening, was unprecedented.[34] One-man exhibitions also usually comprised works spanning an artist's entire career or were marketing ventures showcasing hand-picked selections or a couple of knock-out paintings.[35] In addition, the solo exhibitors tended to

[32] NC, 10 July 1802 and 24 September 1803 and 14 July 1804. It is possible that Cotman saw Sillett's 'Exhibition Room' when he returned temporarily to Norwich in July 1804.
[33] See Konstantinos Stefanis, 'Reasoned Exhibitions: Blake in 1809 and Reynolds in 1813', *Tate Papers*, Issue 14 (Autumn 2009), https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/reasoned-exhibitions-blake-in-1809-and-reynolds-in-1813. Hone's exhibition comprised sixty-six works. Others included Thomas Gainsborough's annual solo-show at his London home from 1784, and Joseph Wright of Derby's exhibition of twenty-five pictures at a Covent Garden auction room in 1785.
[34] In his second advertisement of 27 December 1806, Cotman specified the number of exhibits as 400, amounting to 'upwards of Four Hundred Drawings' in the next advert posted on 3 January 1807, and rising to 500 by his third advert of 10 January.
[35] For example, John Singleton Copley's 1781 display of his paintings, *Death of Major Pearson* and *Collapse of the Earl of Chatham* in hired rooms.

be over fifty years old with only the twenty-eight-year-old Turner substantially younger when he opened his Harley Street gallery in 1803. At only twenty-four and staging his exhibition as if a monographic retrospective ('the labours of Seven Years'), Cotman's exhibition appears all the more ambitious – and no less precocious – with the key motivation being to turn heads upon his re-entry into Norwich, procure business and (re)establish his reputation.

Cotman's exploitation of Norwich's local press was one way in which he sought to accomplish these aims. No other Norwich artist advertised as frequently or at such length in the eight weeks following Christmas 1806. The adverts are therefore useful indicators as to whom Cotman identified as his ideal audience and what his exhibition might have looked like.[36]

The first advertisement appeared on 20 December and informed readers that the exhibition would open in 'the first fortnight after Xmas'.[37] The timing is important. Just as the NSA exhibitions were scheduled to overlap with the August Assizes when Norwich's population expanded, Cotman's exhibition coincided with the city's winter season during which plays were staged at the Theatre Royal, and popular balls and concerts were held for an increased populace.[38] This populace is actively invoked in the familiar tenor of Cotman's advertisements in which he addressed them as 'his Friends' and 'the Inhabitants of Norwich in general'. This open invitation was reiterated by the information supplied about the exhibition's location. Wymer Street (now St Andrew's Street) was one of the main thoroughfares in central Norwich and was therefore well-known and accessible. Cotman's mention of the venue's proximity to the public library – established in 1608, it was the first in provincial England of which Norwich citizens were particularly proud – provided another bearing, while also linking the event with a public institution associated with polite learning and accomplishment. The advertisements thus show Cotman making efforts to ensconce his exhibition firmly within the public realm.

[36] The curation of the exhibition ''*Almost too daring for an individual':* John Sell Cotman's one-man exhibition 1806-7' at NCMAG (27 March 2015-16 March 2016), which formed a component of the Collaborative Doctorate Award of which this thesis is a part, reimagined one of the schemes from the Wymer Street show. It included the loan of *Fountains Abbey* from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, itself originally lent to the exhibition by Dawson Turner in 1806.
[37] NM and NC, 20 December 1806.
[38] On the winter 'season' in provincial towns, see Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, 126 and Corfield, 'The identity of a regional capital: Norwich since the eighteenth century' in Kooij and Pellenbarg, *Regional Capitals*, 138.

The wording of the adverts is also indicative of the ways in which Cotman promoted himself. The second paragraph, for example, refers to some external advice which purportedly recommended that Cotman stage a one-man exhibition so that the Norwich public could judge 'with Candor' his artistic merits. Such advice may never have been offered, yet the reference complies with early nineteenth-century protocols of self-promotion. It also suggests that Cotman was aware of the need to soften the presumption of staging a huge solo-exhibition. Beginning in a gracious (if not obsequious) manner, the tone soon becomes bolder, the exhibition lauded as 'a scheme almost too daring for an individual'. Initially a line employed by Cotman in his letter to Turner, its repetition here suggests a careful deliberation over the show's description and how best to promote his artistic talent and originality as qualities worthy of the public's time and attention. This split in the language indicates that Cotman was attempting to occupy several stools simultaneously: being both genteel and protocol abiding while boldly presenting himself as an experienced master and daring genius.

Without a surviving exhibition catalogue (which, given the sheer number of items, was probably in list rather than descriptive form) we can only speculate what the exhibition might have looked like. The visualisation is nevertheless aided significantly by Cotman's advert descriptions. First listed are '*Coloured Sketches*', which were likely to have been his looser watercolours such as *Byland Abbey* (Fig. 52) or *Bolton Abbey* (Fig. 87), while '*Sketches in Light and Shade*' and '*in Pencil*' were probably his monochrome wash and graphite drawings like *Cottage at Bolton* (Fig. 47), *Castle Acre Priory* (Fig. 88) and *Urn on a Pedestal, at Castle Howard* (Fig. 79).[39] These '*Sketches*' might also have included comparatively worked-up graphite drawings such as *Fountains Abbey* (Fig. 89), the small preparatory work for the watercolour 'masterpiece' loaned from Turner, itself the kind of work described in the adverts as '*Finished Drawings*' (meaning watercolours). Only '*a few*' of these, apparently, 'were to be on sale.' There were almost certainly more than just '*a few Finished Drawings*' on display; Cotman's Wymer Street house was a large seventeenth-century building with an undercroft, enabling the expansion of his exhibition from the 400 items specified in the advert of 27 December to 500 by 10 January.[40]

[39] By citing particular titles here I do not mean to propose that they specifically were included in the exhibition; rather, I use them as examples of the kind of works we can expect to have matched the adverts' descriptions.

[40] See 'The Crypt under Cotman's House', *The Daily Packet*, 9 June 1890. Cotman seems to have rented half the house, the other half remaining 'Empty' until January 1808 when it became occupied by a commercial school. Poor rate books, St John Maddermarket MF/X 265/8, 1791-1810, PD 461/58, NRO, and NC, 8 January 1808. The advertisement reveals that this commercial school was due to open on 19 January 1808, exactly a year after Cotman opened his school in the same building.

Cotman's promotion of a small number of '*Finished Drawings*' for sale may thus have been another way to downplay his show's audacious and commercial character.

De-emphasising the finished works also served to accentuate the presence of 'Sketches', which framed the exhibition as one largely about artistic process, a significant point given its advertised connection with the opening of Cotman's 'SCHOOL *for Watercolour and for Design'*. While 'Watercolour' was synonymous with 'Art', 'Design' signified the artistic process towards creating a finished piece. The progressive programmes for drawing and their accompanying manuals were more popular than ever at this stage and urged the art student to copy simple pencil designs before gradually building up to more complex compositions.[41] Finally, 'design' was the buzzword for a national discourse on the commercial benefits of drawing in relation to improvements in British manufacture.[42] The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce played a key part in the national effort to stimulate industry by offering premiums to young artists and artisans who pursued innovative designs for British manufactures, such as ornaments, upholstery and weaving.[43] Norwich itself was an old weaving city but one which, from 1790, had been in decline due to both the mechanisation of the worsted industry in Yorkshire and the rise of competing markets for textiles from Asia.[44] With no substantial replacement industry, Norwich's economy eroded, matched by a population decrease as native weavers uprooted to find work elsewhere. Efforts were nevertheless made to introduce new varieties of stuffs into the local market. The Norwich shawl – a mix of worsted and silk, and sold either plain or in elaborate designs – was one example which was continually revamped.[45] In this context, the 'Design' in Cotman's advertised title could appeal to the city's manufacturers, offering them an opportunity to enhance their school.

Finally, on 31 January 1807, the adverts introduced '*Paintings*' into the equation. A little less than two months before his exhibition was mooted, Cotman had told Turner that 'I have almost finished my first Picture, the subject of it Shipping, Sea Shore, & Figures –

[41] On progressive methods, see Bermingham, *Learning to Draw*, 165-74 and Smith, *Emergence*, 122-4.
[42] Some drawing schools in other manufacturing towns aimed to stimulate local design. Like Cotman, the proprietors of these schools employed the word 'design' in their titles and promotional material, such as the short-lived 'Manchester Academy for Drawing and Designing' which was founded in 1804. See Hoock, *King's Artists*, 91-2.
[43] See Celina Fox, *The Arts of Industry in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven and London, 2009).
[44] See J. K. Edwards, 'The Decline of the Norwich Textiles Industry', *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, vol. 16, no. 1 (May 1964), 31-41.
[45] In 1802, for example, the worsted merchant-manufacturer, John Harvey, introduced the pure silk 'Fillover' shawl which had luxurious flowered designs.

but I have much to learn this great field of Study to become tolerably good...'[46] Marine subject matter was new to Cotman's repertoire, and while this 'first Picture' is unidentified, a similar subject is represented in his painting, *Yarmouth Beach with Figures* (Fig. 90). Painted in 1808, and possibly the work titled 'Dealers awaiting the return of the Herring Boats, Yarmouth' displayed at the NSA exhibition that year, it is one of Cotman's earliest-known oils. It is also one of his only signed and dated paintings which suggests it had particular personal significance.[47] The painting is therefore close enough in date to be stylistically comparable to the paintings included in the exhibition.

With the full range of his work exhibited in hundreds of examples at his Wymer Street house, some likely framed and others possibly displayed loose in portfolios, Cotman's one-man exhibition must have packed a remarkable punch, with nothing quite like it in Norwich (even the first two NSA exhibitions in 1805 and 1806 contained half the number of works). And yet, there is nothing in the archive to indicate its outright success or that it made the splash that Cotman had undoubtedly intended given its extraordinary scale and perpetual promotion. Neither the *Mercury* or *Chronicle* reviewed it, nor is there any mention to be found in other surviving source material.[48] For William Blake, the paucity of reviews of his own one-man show, staged in London in 1809, and the single diatribe that was published, signalled its utter failure.[49] That said, it is worth noting that Norwich did not have London's culture of art criticism. Besides commentary on the NSA exhibitions, the *Mercury* and *Chronicle* were not review papers, particularly during the war years. In any case, exhibition reviews suited a London readership due to the city's sheer size, population and the number and variety of events in its social calendar. For a much smaller city like Norwich news could travel by word of mouth. Yet what the Norwich papers lacked in reviews was made up in their adverts, a medium frequently manipulated by Cotman and which can shed more light on his exhibition's outcome.

Initially, Cotman's adverts specified a two-week run, but on the day of his show's advertised closure (3 January 1807), he posted another which announced its extension for

[46] JSC to DT, 15 October 1806, MC 2487/1, NRO.
[47] Only one other oil, *From My Father's House at Thorpe* (NCMAG, 1894.75.1), is dated: 'Jan^{y} 18 1842'. See Moore, *John Sell Cotman*, 149.
[48] This includes correspondence between the cultural figures of Norwich who knew Cotman, such as the members of the Society of United Friars which he had rejoined as a Resident Member in January 1807, and the letters between Cotman and the Cholmeley siblings with whom correspondence did not wholly cease after 1806. Unfortunately no correspondence between Cotman and Dawson Turner survives between December 1806 and July 1811.
[49] See Robert Hunt in *Examiner*, 17 September 1809, quoted in G. E. Bentley, *Blake Records*, 2nd edition (New Haven and London, 2004), 282-5.

'a fortnight longer'. Then, four weeks later, 16 February was given as the new closing date. After 24 January, the adverts made no further mention of either the admittance fee or the catalogue, indicating that Cotman stopped charging. This, together with the extended opening time, suggests that the exhibition was either successful in terms of demand, visitor figures and possibly sales (including those of the catalogues, perhaps leading him to run out hence their absence from the last two adverts), or that it was a non-starter, requiring Cotman to push for a greater number and frequency of visitors by continually prolonging its existence, stopping the sale of catalogues and abolishing the admittance fee. A brief analysis of the outcome of Cotman's new school, which the adverts linked to the exhibition, helps to shed further light on the show's outcome.

Despite advertising his exhibition under the title 'SCHOOL...', Cotman did not provide related information until his third advert on 10 January 1807: 'J.S.C. will commence his Instructions on Monday, 19th, 1807. Terms of Teaching, In the Academy by the quarter, 2*l*, 2*s* Four Private Lessons, 1*l*, 1*s*.' These terms were expensive compared to those charged by other Norwich drawing masters such as James Sillett whose tuition fees at his 'Evening-School at his home' were half the price of Cotman's.[50] The fee charged by Charles Hodgson at his 'Young Gentlemen's Academy' were more expensive with 'Pupils under Nine Years of Age, Twenty Pounds per ann. above Nine Years of Age, Twenty-five Pounds per ann. Entrance One Guinea', but this included a year's full board and education in a variety of subjects, including drawing.[51] Established in 1802, Hodgson's boarding school was also situated on Wymer Street, thus making him and Cotman neighbouring competitors.

After Cotman's last advert appeared on 7 February 1807, no further mention of his school was made until 27 June. Under the title 'DRAWING FROM NATURE', an advert informed 'his Friends that, in addition to his other Teaching, he has commenced giving Lessons from Nature, which comprehends the Pencil Sketch, the Claro Obscuro, and Colouring. Specimens may be seen at his house in St. Andrew's Broad Street.'[52] This implies that teaching had commenced, although the reference to 'his house' rather than

[50] At one guinea per quarter, and with entrance at half a guinea; NC, 24 September 1803 and 14 July 1804.
[51] NM, 8 July 1809
[52] NC, 27 June 1807. 'Claro Obscuro' suggests Cotman's employment of traditional artistic terminology for what he previously referred to as 'Drawings in light and shade', which suggests that these were monochrome wash drawings. St Andrew's Street, as mentioned at the end of the advertisement, was used interchangeably with Wymer Street during the period. Broad Street was another variation also referred to by Cotman during the period.

his 'school' is telling.[53] Mention of 'his other Teaching' also indicates that Cotman was diversifying his teaching practice, taking pupils beyond Wymer Street to practise *en plein air* and in various media.[54]

No more adverts concerning Cotman's 'School' appeared after mid-June 1807. While no news may signify good news, their disappearance is in stark contrast to his competitors' use of the press, including Hodgson, Sillett and the drawing master, Robert Dixon, who regularly posted ads pertaining to their schools.[55] Furthermore, a remark from Cotman to Dawson Turner four years later – 'I am a perfect stranger to teaching school fashion' – appears incongruous unless the school had faded as a component of his working life.[56] While he continued to give lessons,[57] the lack of evidence pertaining to the school's existence after 1807, together with what he did next (launch a circulating collection of drawings to lend out to amateurs beyond Wymer Street, considered shortly), strongly suggests that the school never really took off. A similar conclusion might apply to the outcome of the one-man exhibition.

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That Cotman's initial manoeuvres in Norwich were largely ineffectual appears to have been because he confronted the city's limits. To become a player in Norwich's art world was not automatically straightforward simply because it was much smaller than London's. By 1806, Norwich contained a relatively sizable body of art-world individuals, including the proprietors of copious print shops, artists' suppliers and auction rooms, as well as a healthy membership base of the NSA whose exhibitors included local professional painters, engravers, architects, framemakers, drawing masters as well as amateurs and artists' students. In August that year, the *Mercury* praised the rise in the number of NSA exhibitors who constituted 'one-sixth of the members which the whole

[53] Hodgson's school was also his home, but was never publicly referred to as such.
[54] This could enable Cotman to offer something different to Hodgson who gave lessons in 'Landscape Drawing' at his school.
[55] Unlike Cotman, who remained unmarried until January 1809, these three artists had wives. While such an observation may seem superfluous, Cotman's bachelor status may partially explain the lack of activity that seems to have occurred at his school. Not only could an artist-cum-school master's wife soften the character of a school, she would also likely have tended to its upkeep. For an unmarried man in his mid-twenties to have opened a drawing school may have seemed socially improper.
[56] JSC to DT, 17 December 1811, MC 2487/9, NRO.
[57] An advertisement promoting his Circulating Portfolio in 1810 mentions 'Lessons in Drawing, terms, Four: One Guinea', NM and NC, 6 January 1810. It is not specified where these lessons took place, though it was likely to have been at Wymer Street.

kingdom ever brings together in the annual exhibition at Somerset House.'[58] With a well-filled art world and one markedly provincial in its composition, integrating oneself thus appears to have been rather difficult, particularly for somebody who, like Cotman (regardless of his 'birthright' and pre-existing recognition), had come from outside.

Despite local competition, efforts were nevertheless taken to perpetuate a rhetoric of joint progress in the arts and camaraderie amongst artists.[59] The same *Mercury* review as above 'congratulate[d] every one of our brotherhood upon the many subjects for feeling and for praise which the pictures of this year exhibit' while their exhibition review from the previous year emphasised the 'intercourse so liberal' that was to be found between both amateur and professional exhibitors.[60] With the emphasis on accommodation and fellowship, there were probably good reasons for why Norwich had few precedents for one-man exhibitions. For a young artist to have returned from London and immediately staged such a large solo show risked upsetting the balance of Norwich's art world.[61]

The showy connotations of Cotman's solo exhibition would undoubtedly have been intensified by the lack of local patronage available. Whilst a number of portrait commissions had been given to artists by the Norwich corporation from the mid-eighteenth century for the main civic building, St Andrew's Hall, the city lacked the tradition of patriotic arts patronage with few citizens actively collecting local contemporary art. As early as 1808, the local papers were petitioning for material support for Norwich's artists, appeals that would continue for decades to come: 'experience', lamented the *Mercury* in 1823, 'has taught our artists that the meaning of the word patronage, the foster mother of genius, is totally and entirely unknown in Norwich.'[62] As in London, the number of Norwich-based artists outweighed those prepared to buy their art, a situation worsened by the wartime slump in an already deteriorating economy.

[58] NM, 16 August 1806.
[59] On the good fellowship that was felt to exist amongst Norwich society, see Trevor Fawcett, 'Measuring the Provincial Enlightenment: The Case of Norwich', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 8 (1982), 13-27, 15.
[60] NM, 16 August 1806 and 10 August 1805.
[61] All this said, Cotman's one-man exhibition seems to have been an attractive model for Sillett who mounted a solo exhibition at a coffee house upon moving temporarily to King's Lynn in 1808 to take up a position as a drawing master. The proposed format and description of Sillett's exhibition bears strong similarities with the manner in which Cotman had described his own, with the former's adverts describing the contents as comprising 'upwards of two hundred subjects, executed by himself ... the result of several years' application ... Catalogues at the room, 3D.each'. NM, 30 January 1808 and NC, 23 January 1808. Unlike Cotman, however, Sillett appears to have recognised the need to be more subtle by mounting an exhibition which was half the scale, staging it more overtly within a public space, and posting just two adverts in the local press. No reviews appeared under the King's Lynn section of the Norwich newspapers.
[62] NM, 2 August 1823.

Local figures who did provide some artistic patronage, including the merchant-manufacturer Thomas Harvey who bought works by John Crome and Robert Ladbrooke, more regularly collected Old Master paintings and prints, an imbalance which gave rise to a much broader anxiety among contemporary British artists.[63]

There was also a limited market for watercolour in Norwich. Most locally-purchased artworks were oils. An extant list from c.1819 of Dawson Turner's collection lists only one watercolour as Cotman's *Fountains Abbey*, valued at a rather modest six guineas.[64] No evidence survives to indicate whether Cotman sold any of the drawings he had advertised for sale in his exhibition, and despite his connection with Turner, one man alone was not enough to sustain him.[65] Furthermore, the NSA with whom Cotman exhibited in 1807 and joined as a member in 1808, was not overtly commercial in its aims. Out of the 1,551 works displayed in its first seven exhibitions (1805-11), only 155 were asterisked in the catalogues for sale, and none of them Cotman's.[66]

In order to successfully turn himself about, then, Cotman would need to negotiate both the possibilities and the limits of Norwich by passing himself off in other ways. These could not be the kind of flash-in-the-pan displays of individual ambition as represented by his exhibition, nor could they imitate too closely the practices of other artists already established in the city, as with the case of his drawing school. Instead, Cotman would need to position himself somewhere in-between in order to remain both competitive in Norwich's art world and appropriate to its socio-cultural atmosphere.

3. Negotiating identities: public exhibition strategy and the Circulating Portfolio

[63] See Philippa Simpson, *Exposing the British school: the Rise of the Old Master Exhibition Culture in London, c.1793-1825*, unpublished PhD thesis (Courtauld Institute, 2009). The focus of business activity in the fine arts in Norwich was on the resale exchange of Old Master paintings and prints at auction.
[64] See f.n. 30 on page 122.
[65] In any case, Turner moved in intellectual and artistic circles beyond Norfolk, and while he owned a choice group of paintings by Crome and Ladbrooke, and commissioned other local artists – Cotman included – to provide him with images for his extra-illustrated copy of Blomefield's *History of Norfolk* (considered in the next chapter), he did not favour any one artist. The bulk of Turner's collection was instead composed of Old Master paintings and prints. See *Catalogue of the Valuable Collection of Pictures by Italian, Flemish, French, Dutch, and English Masters: The Property of that Well-known Collector, Dawson Turner...* (Christie & Manson: London, 1852).
[66] That said, the lack of asterisks accompanying Cotman's exhibits may signal an attempt to offset explicit commercial associations in the exhibition room.

The years following the one-man exhibition saw Cotman adopt various approaches which demonstrate his recognition of the need to offer Norwich something different from his competitors and yet familiar enough to suit local culture, while still managing to retain a sense of artistic self and ambition. This part considers the ways in which Cotman sought to strike this balance and argues that he managed to do so by taking his art out of his home and circulating it directly within Norwich's public sphere.

Display strategy continued to play a central role in Cotman's practice, but this was now transposed into the public space of Sir Benjamin Wrenche's Court, the NSA's exhibition room near the Market Place. Cotman quickly associated himself with the NSA, showing eighteen works at their third exhibition five months after his own exhibition's closure. The following year, in 1808, he was voted in as a full member by the majority of its thirteen members (comprising art-world professionals and local amateur artists) and showed again at their annual exhibition.

Listed in the accompanying catalogue were the names and addresses of the exhibitors and their titles. Cotman appeared as 'Portrait-Painter', undoubtedly as much an attempt to distinguish himself from the six exhibiting drawing masters (and his main competitors), John Crome, Robert Dixon, Charles Hodgson, Robert Ladbrooke, James Sillett, and John Thirtle,[67] as a bid to associate himself with a comparatively 'liberal' title. 'Painter' could also situate him at the top of the traditional media-based hierarchy whilst also providing evidence of his purported intention of 'studying Painting' (as he had put it to Turner back in December 1806). 'Portrait-Painter' also indicates Cotman's recognition of a recent opening for portraitists in Norwich. William Beechey and John Opie who were temporarily resident in Norwich in 1780s and late 1790s respectively had dominated the city's portrait commissions.[68] By the mid-1800s, their names were still bandied about the local papers and frequent advertisements appeared of prints after their portraits of Norwich 'worthies'.[69] Yet in April 1807, Opie's death created a vacancy for a provincial 'genius' capable of producing distinctive likenesses as well as 'fancy portraits', a genre for which he was famous and which remained popular into the nineteenth century.[70] It

[67] John Thirtle appeared in the catalogue as 'Drawing-Master and Miniature-Painter'.
[68] Other commissions were given to notable London-based artists, including Gainsborough, Lawrence, Hoppner and Phillips during the last decades of the eighteenth century.
[69] The framemaker, printseller and member of the NSA, Jeremiah Freeman, chose a fellow member, the engraver Edward Bell, to engrave several portraits of Norwich figures by both artists.
[70] Joseph Clover was the only other well-regarded professional portraitist in Norwich, while a few others such as John Thirtle and James Sillett occasionally advertised themselves as portrait-miniaturists.

was not long before the local press anticipated 'a second Reynolds, a Gainsbro', a Wilson, or an Opie' to emerge from the NSA.[71]

With his eye clearly on this vacancy, Cotman exhibited sixteen oil portraits at the NSA in 1808, three of which are better categorised as 'fancy portraits' (Figs 91-93). Listed in the catalogue as 'Boy at Marbles', 'Beggar Boy' and 'Portrait—*For, I heard of battles, and I long'd to follow / to the field some warlike Lord.—DOUGLAS*', each painting shows a boy holding an attribute relative to each title: the first curls his forefinger around a white marble from a bag of green ones beside him, the second, a shabbily-dressed beggar boy who offers up an empty hat in appeal for a coin, the last gently holds the hilt of a sword in his (oversized) right hand. Each is a deliberate invocation of fancy portraits by Opie. Indeed, the quotation accompanying the title of the last (Fig. 93) is taken from the ballad *Norval on the Grampian Hills* on which the playwright John Home based his tragedy *Douglas*, and which plausibly identifies Cotman's sitter as the play's hero, Young Norval. Opie had famously exhibited a full-length fancy portrait of the celebrated child-actor, Master Betty in the character of Young Norval (Fig. 94) at the RA in 1804 which was later engraved by James Heath in 1807. The print's wide circulation and the fact that Cotman had exhibited at the RA in 1804 make it probable that he knew Opie's portrait. Given Opie's fame and reputation in Norwich, it is thus likely that the character of Cotman's portrait was chosen primarily for its associations with the late 'master'.

The manner in which Cotman painted *Young Norval* differs from Opie's *Master Betty*, yet his three oils do share stylistic characteristics with other fancy portraits by the latter, such as his *John Vivian of Pencalenick* and *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green and his Daughter* (Figs 95 and 96). All bear a similar construction of painted blocks of predominately russet hues, with few attempts to model the drapery or to blend and soften the stark lines and shadowy patches. A comparable emphasis is placed on the subjects' oval eyelids, full lips, thick highlights on the skin and dryly painted hair-ends. Apart from the red stripes on the waistcoat of *Vivian of Pencalenick* and the blue pinstripes on the breeches worn by *Boy at Marbles*, the handling is comparably heavy, the medium applied with a loaded brush, sometimes dryly, and in thick noticeable brushstrokes.

The thirteen portraits and three fancy portraits exhibited by Cotman in 1808 constituted only a quarter of his submissions to that year's NSA. The other fifty-one – totalling a huge sixty-seven submissions in total which went unmatched in the NSA's thirty-three-

[71] NC, 25 August 1810.

year history – encompassed marine, architectural and landscape subjects, suggesting that Cotman was a 'Portrait-Painter' by name before practice. Certainly, his relinquishing of the title in 1810 when the American portraitist, Ralph Earl, arrived in Norwich and exhibited under the same, indicates that his initial association with 'Portrait-Painter' was to distinguish himself from the other exhibitors as well as for its status significations.[72] Nevertheless, the style and technique of Cotman's fancy portraits continued to characterise the majority of his other work from the period. One of two extant images with almost identical compositions – one in oil, the other in watercolour (Figs 97 and 98) – is likely to have been the work titled 'Ferry House, Bristol' in the catalogue of the same 1808 exhibition. Whichever work was displayed, both share a similar 'graphic' style to Cotman's fancy portraits, with stark shadows, patches of flat paint and only light modelling of forms. The motifs in the watercolour version, for instance, are summarised by sizable daubs of pure pigment rather than by layered washes or minute details as had been the case just four years earlier in a watercolour like *Fountains Abbey*.

The visual characteristics of Cotman's art during this period have been noted in the secondary literature, but they are either under-interpreted or simply attributed to artistic 'progress'. Also neglected is the significance of this stylistic shift from his works of a few years earlier. As discussed in Chapter 2, marked shifts in the language of Cotman's art occurred in conjunction with social change. Similarly, it is my contention here that the chunky shapes, thick strokes and bold palette in his oils and watercolours from c.1807-12 were less to do with progress than with his realisation of the need to hone his style to suit the particular atmosphere of Norwich. This style needed to be distinctive to enable him to carve out a space in its art world and thus retain the mark of original artistic identity. Yet this style also had to be comprehensive and imitable to give him something to retail in a local market for drawing instruction. He certainly needed the income and does not seem to have garnered any prestigious portrait commissions off the back of the 'Portrait-Painter' tag, nor must he have reaped a steady income from the lessons he advertised in 1807 given the lack of evidence pertaining to his school's success. The bulk of his material capital would thus have to come from elsewhere.

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[72] The following year, two more artists, John Heuhan and Edward Villiers Rippingille, arrived in Norwich and King's Lynn respectively, advertising themselves as portraitists. NC, 5 January and 16 February 1811.

There is solid evidence for Cotman's intention to combine artistic distinctiveness with saleability in the Circulating Portfolio from which he lent out his own drawings to local subscribers for copying from July 1809.[73] While loaning material to amateurs and students was not unprecedented in artists' teaching practices,[74] nothing came close to the longevity or scale of Cotman's Portfolio which comprised 600 drawings from its launch and grew to many thousands by his death.[75] The Circulating Portfolio represents Cotman's second substantial bid to turn himself about in Norwich. It became a sustainable way for him to generate income alongside the production of work for his own, more 'liberal' purposes such as exhibiting. To end this part I shall focus on the Portfolio's initiation and management as a strategy which he developed to negotiate his professional identity and livelihood in Norwich.

The first reference to the Portfolio appeared on 15 July 1809, and exactly where one might expect to find it: the advertisement section of the local papers.

> A Circulating Collection of Drawings.
> *J.S.COTMAN*
> HAS opened to the Public, on the plan of a Circulating Library, a collection of Six Hundred DRAWINGS, consisting of Landscapes, Compositions on Design & Figures, Coloured Sketches from Nature, Sketches in Claro Obscuro, and his original Pencil Sketches from the Saxon, Norman, and Gothic Architecture, chiefly from the counties of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Essex, and Norfolk.
>
> The Drawings may be viewed on Monday the 17th and Tuesday the 18th inst. at J.S. Cotman's, St. Andrew's, Broad-street; and delivered to the Subscribers on Monday July 24.
> *Quarterly Subscription Ticket One Guinea.*
>
> J.S. Cotman will attend the delivery of the drawings to the subscribers, that he may facilitate their copying of them by his Instructions.
>
> Days of delivering Mondays and Thursdays, between the hours of 12 and two.[76]

Cotman appears to have changed tack from the tone of his previous adverts promoting the exhibition. Whilst a Circulating Portfolio of Drawings was unprecedented in Norwich, he refrains from making bold assertions of its 'individual' and 'daring' nature and, instead,

[73] Cotman referred to this project as both his 'Circulating Collection' and 'Circulating Portfolio'. I use the latter term here.
[74] John Glover charged 5*s* for the loan of a selection of his own drawings. See Stephens, *A Catalogue of the works of Francis Towne*, unpublished PhD thesis, 1166.
[75] As was announced in the eleven local newspaper adverts he placed between July 1809 and August 1810.
[76] NM and NC, 15 July 1809. In all, Cotman posted eleven adverts pertaining to his Circulating Portfolio: NM, 15, 22, 29 July and 5 August 1809 and 6 and 13 January and 18 August 1810; NC, 15 and 29 July, 5 August 1809 and 6 January 1810.

likens it to a circulating library for which Norwich had many precedents. Formalised circulating libraries of books and music, and even of musical instruments, had been popular since the mid-eighteenth century and by 1809, there were over a dozen circulating book libraries in the city – with at least one on Cockey Lane since Cotman's teens and one on Wymer Street during his residency[77] – and approximately four for music and instruments.[78] Customers would subscribe to the terms set by the collector, usually a bookseller who ran his or her own premises, the material being dispatched by carriage to subscribers on weekly stints.[79] This format suited a small literate city like Norwich which had good roads out to the surrounding area. It could also benefit Cotman's enterprise; the eleven advertisements he posted between July 1809 and August 1810 reveal that he circulated the drawings on a biweekly basis, likely on foot if his subscribers lived in Norwich and on horseback or by wagon if outside the city.

Another benefit of a circulating library was its flexibility, the owner being able to incorporate or omit material to reflect demand. The format also suited subscribers, allowing them to self-educate without having to pay for private or school tuition. This flexibility was equally attractive to a client wanting to learn to draw. As mentioned above, the art world responded to the demand for drawing tuition by publishing huge numbers of drawing manuals which, in theory, could enable aspirants to teach themselves.[80] Unlike some of his contemporaries, including John Varley, David Cox, Francis Stevens and James Sillett, Cotman never produced a drawing manual. Yet the pedagogic purpose of his Circulating Portfolio (together with his *Miscellaneous Etchings*, discussed in part 4) can be regarded in a similar vein.

Besides circulating libraries, Rudolph Ackermann likely influenced Cotman's decision to develop the enterprise. When in 1806 Ackermann decided to discontinue his drawing school located at the top of the Repository of Arts to make room for more shop space, he launched a 'portfolio of prints and drawings for the use of pupils and dilettante, upon the

[77] The bookseller and binder, Richard Beatniffe ran his circulating book library from his shop at 6 Cockey Lane from the 1770s. The 1811 Norwich Directory lists Robert Lane as the owner of a circulating library on Wymer Street.
[78] See Fawcett, 'Music Circulating Libraries in Norwich', *The Musical Times*, vol. 119, no. 1625 (July, 1978), 594-95, David Stoker, 'The Norwich book trades before 1800: a biographical directory', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, vol. 8 (1981), 79-12, the Norwich Directories for 1782, 1801 and 1811, and various advertisements in the NM and NC.
[79] In 1809, the bookseller William Booth advertised a collection of 'more than 5000 volumes' which could be 'sent to any distance'. NC, 25 November 1809.
[80] Such manuals were advertised in the Norwich newspapers, including an Ackermann-published 'New Drawing Book' with engravings 'in imitation of Indian ink', and were available to purchase in Norwich from Jeremiah Freeman's shop. NC, 26 August 1809.

plan of a circulating library of books.' The terms for borrowing were four guineas a year, two for six months and one guinea per quarter for as many sheets as the subscriber could copy.[81] Cotman's subscription terms were similarly one guinea per quarter.

His Portfolio differed in one major respect to these precedents, however. Whereas Booth and other circulating librarians' collection of books were written by others, and Ackermann hired professional artists to produce copy-material for his portfolio, Cotman's was made entirely by his own hand and of his own designs, thus retaining their aura of being original artworks that were hand-delivered by the artist himself.[82] We might even regard the Circulating Portfolio as a more appropriate way for Cotman to keep his one-man exhibition on the road – given its individual authorship, ambitious scale, pedagogic purpose and public promotion – with the added potential of reaching a much larger audience beyond Wymer Street. It is also possible that some of the drawings that had featured in the show were used or reworked for circulation. Indeed, his adverts' descriptions of the circulated material chimes with those employed to describe his exhibited works featured in the show. Similarly, by citing various genres: 'Landscapes, Compositions on Design & Figures', media: 'Coloured Sketches from Nature, Sketches in Claro Obscuro, and his original Pencil Sketches', and specific subjects: 'Saxon, Norman, and Gothic Architecture',[83] Cotman was presenting the full range of his work and consolidating his labours (now of ten years) into a marketable package from which material could be circulated like money.

To provide the public with a more tangible sense of what he had to offer, Cotman again turned to the exhibition room. At the 1809 NSA, he displayed thirty-seven works, again the largest number submitted by any artist that year. Twenty-four of these were asterisked, not to indicate their availability for purchase, but to advertise their place in 'his Circulating Portfolios, now open to the public on the plan of a Circulating Library', as read the line in the catalogue next to his title. The blurb in the 1810 catalogue similarly read: 'the drawings exhibited by J. S. Cotman form a part of his Circulating Collection, established for the use of Students'. By explicitly associating the majority of his exhibits with the Portfolio, Cotman could present his new enterprise as tailored specifically to the public. The NSA exhibition was a particularly appropriate venue in which to make such a

[81] See Samuels, *Ackermann*, unpublished PhD thesis, 18-19.
[82] Originality is directly referred to by Cotman in his Portfolio adverts' inclusion of the phrase 'his original Pencil Sketches'.
[83] To which more were added in the adverts of January and August 1810, see NM and NC, 6 January 1810 and NM, 13 January and 18 August 1810.

claim. With the majority of the founders drawing masters whose aim it was 'to Discover and Point out the Best Methods of Study', the NSA outwardly promoted artistic learning and instruction.[84] Moreover, with the titles of specimens from his Portfolio listed in the NSA catalogue, and by exhibiting them in the space of the public exhibition – which the *Mercury* remarked was 'very fully attended' in 1809 and 'more numerously' so in 1810[85] – Cotman effectively secured a free form advertising.

One of the asterisked lots in the 1809 exhibition called 'Fish Swills, Rudder, etc', can be identified as the signed and dated watercolour illustrated in Figure 99 in which a pile of fishing boat gear claims the compositional centre. Placed on the slope of a beach, the objects include a barrel-bucket and two wicker fish swills. A rudder cuts a left-to-right diagonal across the composition, driven into the sand at one end while the other rests on the edge of the nearest swill. A diminutive terrier delineated with delicate touches of brown and grey pigment, lies within the swill's stark shadow, the tip of its body mimicking the rudder's upward oblique. The watercolour is more dryly applied than the smooth washes in *Ferry House*, but both share a similar light, bright palette of blues, greens, light greys and warm browns punctuated by bright red and blue details. In both, there is little attempt to blend these colours. Tonal variation is primarily articulated with different touches or patches of watercolour, while faint pencil markings are allowed to be read through thin areas of the wash: on the light brown of the foremost swill to delineate its weave in *Fish Swills*, and on the visible side of the building in *Ferry House* to mark out the window tracery.

Fish Swills is entirely in keeping with the style and technique of Cotman's watercolours of this period, yet it is difficult to conceive of a beginner being able to make a straightforward copy despite its association with the Circulating Portfolio. The bright colours and emphasis on irregular shapes do very little to aid the copyist in determining where to commence imitation. The delineation of the motifs is rather complicated with few outlines to trace and little clarity of parts to render the image fully comprehensible. Are those green strokes behind the furthest swill meant to represent loose grasses or seaweed? Are they behind the swill or in it? And what exactly are the red roll and flash of blue supposed to represent?

[84] *Articles of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of an Enquiry into the Rise, Progress and Present State of Painting, Architecture, and Sculpture, with a View to Discover and Point Out the Best Methods of Study, to Attain to Greater Perfection in these Arts* (Norwich 1803).
[85] NM, 5 August 1809 and 13 August 1810.

Yet rather than read this visual discrepancy as a bluff on Cotman's part as per his promotional descriptions, we might interpret his public display of drawings which bear little clear relationship to teaching material as a ploy to demonstrate his skill as an artist. In turn, this could attract subscribers who wanted to learn from high-quality artworks. For those amateurs who fancied themselves as relatively accomplished artists, a drawing like *Fish Swills* could play to their aspirations by offering them both a challenge and a model of what could be achieved through practice. Certainly, the NSA exhibitions quickly became dominated by amateurs and it was not uncommon to find the students of local drawing masters, including Crome and Ladbrooke, showing their work and linking themselves to their teachers' names or schools in the catalogue.

Yet unlike these drawing masters, Cotman offered only a minimal amount of one-to-one tuition to those who subscribed to his Portfolio. Instead of travelling to amateurs' houses to provide full demonstrations or supervise their copying of straightforward monochrome wash or pencil drawings (as were the methods followed by most drawing masters), Cotman delivered (and collected) batches of drawing-copies to his subscribers in biweekly, two-hourly stints. While his adverts did inform subscribers that he would 'facilitate their copying of them by his Instructions', the enterprise was not characterised by active intervention with 'students' but relatively passive interaction with 'his Subscribers'. As 'facilitate' implies, he would have indicated how the copyist might proceed or improve in their mimetic task rather than guide them step by step. Besides, the two hours in which he claimed to make the day's deliveries would give him little time to do even this.[86]

The reference to 'his Instructions' may, however, imply that Cotman included a sheet of instructions in the batch of drawing-copies he delivered to each subscriber.[87] If so, then this may have resembled the extant handwritten sheet entitled 'Rules to be Observed in Drawing' (Fig. 100) produced when teaching in Yarmouth and Norwich in the late 1810s

[86] It is possible that most of Cotman's initial subscribers were Norwich-based. By January 1810, allocated time slots of 12 until 2 pm on Mondays and Thursdays had disappeared from the adverts and the days of delivery left vague. This suggests that Cotman had initially misjudged the amount of time it took to make deliveries or that the Portfolio had many subscribers who were by now aware of the delivery times. NM and NC, 6 January 1810.

[87] Later in 1838, the Leicester drawing master John Flower produced a handmade portfolio of lessons in landscape which he lent out to his pupils for imitation. Each lesson was accompanied by a loose handwritten sheet of instructions which were intended 'to be reflected upon and applied to other subjects' other than those illustrated in the series. The portfolio is held at Yale Center for British Art (hereafter YCBA), B1975.3.569-593.

and 1820s.[88] These 'Rules' are an interesting mix of sequential steps on drawing a subject from scratch and advice concerning the attitude to take when doing so, the latter of which verges on a kind of heartfelt statement as if written from the artist's own personal experience of drawing. Had Cotman been offering such personally-inflected 'Instructions' from 1809, we might recognise them as another one of his gambits to flatter his subscribers just as the association of his public persona with his exhibited drawings could invite comparison between the professional artist and amateur-subscriber. A drawing-copy like *Fish Swills*, for example, would implicitly require the copyist to primarily look rather than comprehend what each part represented, thereby inviting a visual, almost sensory way of (re)producing art. Such an approach bears similarities with the experiential, almost chemical relationship with the natural world said to be possessed by the original, liberal artist, not the drudge drawing master who produced simplified art for imitation.[89] The emphasis on paint, surface texture and bright colour stands in stark contrast to the comparatively accessible wash drawings which Robert Dixon produced for his pupils to copy. These might include the monochrome drawing of a Norwich ferry house in Figure 101 which differs in handling and finish to the comparatively worked-up watercolours Dixon exhibited at the NSA such as *City Wall, Junction of Barrack Street and Silver Road, Norwich* of 1809 (Fig. 102).[90] With its pencil underdrawing and monochromatic tints applied in broad, soft washes and punctuated by dot-dashes to delineate easily identifiable detail, Dixon's drawing resembles the simple shaded compositions represented in popular progressive method manuals such as Ackermann's *Lessons for Beginners in the Fine Arts* of 1796 (Fig. 103). Dixon's drawing is thus linked with the beginner in a way that Cotman's *Fish Swills* refutes.

Cotman's arrival at his subscribers' homes and brief commentary on their work would also have held a certain cachet, whilst allowing him the opportunity to directly encourage those subscribers to renew their subscription. At the same time, the Circulating Portfolio appears to have been a strategy to dodge the problematic status of the full-time drawing master. The tensions that attended this occupation have been well documented by Greg Smith who points out that 'the image of the drawing master as a drudge compelled to compromise his or her ambitions as an independent creative artist' was well perpetuated

[88] While the sheet is undated, the handwriting matches that of Cotman's from this period, which had become larger and bolder with more loops.
[89] See Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter*.
[90] This was likely to have been the work titled 'Ruins of a Tower on the City Walls' exhibited at the 1809 NSA exhibition.

during the period.[91] Opie, among others, had criticised the drawing master for producing a debased form of art in order to compensate for his pupils' limited capabilities, which resulted in a dangerous blurring of the boundaries between both parties.[92] Moreover, as Smith has observed, it was well known that artists often produced finished works from their pupils' sketches, and in many cases collaborated on the same work.'[93] That Cotman appears to have been highly aware of the tensions associated with copying is suggested by his implied reaction to the *Mercury*'s review of the NSA show of 1809 which had initially read: 'Amongst many of Cotman's pencil sketches may be selected some copies after old masters, manifest much knowledge of art.'[94] A week later, the editor issued the following apology:

> In our paragraph respecting the Exhibition last week it may appear from an error in the punctuation, that Mr. Cotman had introduced "copies after old masters", we simply meant to convey, that amongst the very meritorious productions of this Artist, the pencil sketches seemed to be those of the highest talent, and to direct the notice of our readers to them. We are assured that he has not a single copy exhibited.[95]

As discussed previously and as alluded to in the apologetic tone of this remark, originality was celebrated as the key guarantee of an artist's status. We can, I think, see the Circulating Portfolio as another way in which Cotman tried both to distinguish himself from the amateur artists with whom he came into contact and to remain an outwardly original artist. This interpretation departs from the reading provided by Cotman's biographers which regards him as a fully-fledged drawing master during this period, an identity of which the Portfolio was a material component.[96] Yet as we have seen,

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[91] Smith, *Emergence*, 107-15, 108.

[92] John Opie described the drawing master as somebody who 'sculk[ed] through life as a hackney likeness-taker, a copier, ... or pattern-drawer to young ladies' also did...'. John Opie, *Lectures on Painting*, Lecture 1, 16 February 1807 (London, 1809). This was advertised on sale in Norwich in 1808, NC, 29 July 1809.

[93] Smith, *Emergence*, 110.

[94] NM, 29 July 1809.

[95] NM, 5 August 1809.

[96] Bermingham and Smith, among others, have presented Cotman as one of the archetypal drudge drawing masters of the early nineteenth century, Bermingham, *Learning to Draw*, 131 and Smith, *Emergence*, 108. To provide evidence of this status, Cotman's biographers and art historians alike have quoted from two letters that Cotman wrote to Dawson Turner in 1811 and 1825, both of which contain some of his more begrudging references to teaching: 'saving a few of the best scholars tis but a sorry drudgery and only calculated for money making. When a Man fags from door to Door merely for the £ sterling.', JSC to DT, 17 December 1811, MC 248/9, and 'to be & to find myself <u>but a mere Drawing Master</u> -- <u>The very thing I dreaded most on setting out in life</u> !!! is most galling to me.', JSC to DT, 2 July 1825, MC 2487/20, both NRO. Yet just as the letters between Cotman and the Cholmeley family should be carefully interpreted, these often-quoted remarks, now so far removed from the letters that contextualise them, should be treated with similar caution. Reading the entire letter which contains the first quote shows that Cotman was not referring to the nature of his current work in 1811, but one that

Cotman's subscribers were largely left to their own devices upon receipt of the drawings (despite 'his Instructions', if they ever existed). Any 'Instruction' he did offer was to be on 'his' terms, a lesson he may well have learnt from his time as the Cholmeleys' unofficial drawing master when his own work had been openly judged by those he was supposed to be teaching.

When not making the biweekly deliveries, Cotman spent his time making local tours to gather material, producing artwork for the Portfolio, for exhibition and, from 1810, for his *Miscellaneous Etchings* (considered next), as well as providing lessons to supplement his income.[97] On the whole, the quality and style of the drawing-copies that date from this period are remarkably similar to the material that Cotman produced for exhibition (as seen with *Fish Swills*) and for his *Miscellaneous Etchings*, which suggests that he tended not to simplify his work for copying. Subscribing to Cotman's Circulating Portfolio might accordingly be seen as tantamount to purchasing a high quality product where it was up to the customer to get out of it what they wanted, similar to the relationship that an amateur might have with a drawing manual. By managing the Portfolio in this way, Cotman could attempt to retain his independence from his subscribers which would otherwise be lost on the drawing master. In other words, there was no need for him to bow to the abilities of his customers because, unlike the majority of his artist-contemporaries, he was not their teacher and not invested in them as his pupils.

The Circulating Portfolio enabled Cotman to carve out a unique role in Norwich. It could enable him to retain a sense of himself by continuing to produce artwork in his own style, but which he could also surrender temporarily for use by others. Depending on how many subscribers he acquired, each paying one guinea per quarter, the enterprise could deliver good returns, whilst also circulating his style and name more expansively. By applying his recent experiences to negotiate his market, the Portfolio demonstrates Cotman's growing ability to survive within a regional context of the British art world.

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he wished to avoid in Yarmouth. The second quote is extracted from a much later letter from the late 1820s, yet its dramatic tenor should be read in the light of Cotman's characteristically hyperbolic writing in that period. For the purposes of this chapter, 'drawing master' does not accurately describe Cotman's professional identity.

[97] 'Lessons in Drawing' are only mentioned in the two adverts pertaining to the Circulating Portfolio which Cotman placed on 6 and 13 January 1810.

4. Expansive Circulation: Cotman's *Miscellaneous Etchings*

For all its novelty, the Circulating Portfolio of Drawings did not remain so for long. Soon James Sillett was advertising his own intention of 'opening a Port-folio of Drawings, to be lent for copying by subscription'.[98] That Cotman recognised the need to continually expand, diversify and 'turn about' his output is indicated by the launch of a new project in 1810, the *Miscellaneous Etchings*, a volume of twenty-four etched plates depicting picturesque views, which represents his third substantial bid to manage his role and identity in – and, indeed, beyond – Norwich.[99]

As with his work in other media, Cotman taught himself to etch. His adoption of the etching needle demonstrates a further – and unsurprising – diversification of his material range as an artist. There is, however, a tendency amongst Cotman scholars to consider the *Miscellaneous Etchings* (hereafter referred to as *Etchings*) and the other printed volumes he produced between 1810 and 1822 separately from the rest of his output. Consequentially, they overlook the relationship between his prints and the production and function of his work in other media, particularly the drawings he was producing concurrently for his Circulating Portfolio and for exhibition. Thus, rather than provide an account of the production of the *Etchings* here (already given in Andrew Hemingway's 1982 *Walpole Society* article),[100] I offer a reading which regards *Etchings* as a high-quality commercial product to be used by Cotman's customers *and* as a work of art which could signify his artistic originality and authority. These qualities, I shall argue, were central to his management of a regional art world.

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Just like the one-man exhibition, Cotman intended to integrate *Etchings* firmly into his oeuvre to-date. Various plates recycle compositions from earlier works, a number of which he exhibited while resident in London as well as more recently in Norwich. There are, for example, striking parallels between etchings like *Croyland Abbey* and *St Boltoph's Priory* and the exhibition watercolours of the same compositions exhibited at

[98] NM, 13 and 20 July 1811 and NC, 13 July 1811.
[99] Published in six parts between February and August 1811.
[100] See Hemingway, "The *English Piranesi*': Cotman's Architectural Prints', *Walpole Society*, vol. 48 (1982), 210-44.

the RA in 1805 and the NSA in 1807 (Figs 104-107). Similarly, plate thirteen of *Byland Abbey* (Fig. 108) reproduces the basic compositional layout of the watercolour sketch Cotman executed in 1803 during his first visit to the Cholmeleys (Figs 52), as well as the watercolour he worked up from it and later exhibited at the NSA in 1808 (Fig. 109). The *Byland* plate and the 1803 watercolour likewise refer to a large finished watercolour from 1810 (Fig. 110) which is characterised by Cotman's chunky style and high-key palette, thereby demonstrating the continuity of his subject matter as well as its stylistic variety. Elsewhere in the publication, references to an early artistic talent (and therefore experience) are alluded to in the plates' inscriptions, such as that in *Garden House on the banks of the River Yare* (Figs 111 and 112) which states that the subject was allegedly first 'Sketched in 1800' when Cotman would have been eighteen.

Besides the visual references to his own artistic past and output, Cotman linked his new product more explicitly with the Circulating Portfolio, the wording of his seven Norwich press advertisements and the printed prospectus strongly resembling the adverts he had posted for the Portfolio:

> *Publishing by Subscription*
>
> A COLLECTION of ETCHINGS, in Six Numbers, consisting of Picturesque Specimens of Saxon, Norman and Gothic Architecture and Landscape, Shipping, &c.
>
> The present Work is submitted by its Author, as a faithful representation of the different specimens of Architecture, and the care with which the accompaniments will be adapted to the principal object in each place is a ground, upon which he hopes it may be recommended as a Work of useful reference, both to the professional and to the amateur artist.
>
> The whole will be Drawn from Nature, and Etched by
>
> *JOHN SELL COTMAN*
>
> Each Number will contain four Plates, price *Seven Shillings.* The first number will be delivered to the Subscribers as early as possible in January 1811. Specimens to be seen at Mr. Munn's, 114 New Bond-street, London; at Messrs Freemans', London-lane; at Mr. Cotman's, Cockey-lane; and at Mr. J.S. Cotman's, St. Andrew's street, Norwich; at Mr. Miller's, Lynn; and at Mr. Shalder's, Yarmouth.[101]

Indeed, *Etchings* could provide the perfect complement to the Portfolio in terms of its organisation and management. With more than 600 drawing-copies in circulation by the

[101] NM, 17 November and 1 December 1810 and NC, 24 November, 8 and 22 December 1810, 5 January and 19 February 1811. The verso of one of the prospectuses serves as writing paper for Cotman on which he wrote a letter to Francis Cholmeley in November 1810, asking him to add names to his list of subscribers, JSC to FC, 24-25 November 1810, ZQH XII 12/1/968, NYRO.

time the publication was advertised, Cotman needed a sustainable way of organising their accumulation and circulation. In the first instance, he gave the drawings a number, which suggests the existence of an accompanying list or catalogue to enable subscribers to easily select material.[102] Comparable aids accompanied Norwich circulating libraries, including that of William Booth who advertised a catalogue in 1809 to enable subscribers to navigate their way through his 5000-plus titles.[103] There are certainly enough visual links between the drawings belonging to the Portfolio and the plates in *Etchings* to suggest that the printed volume functioned, at least in part, as a visual 'catalogue' to the former. The plates, *Byland Abbey* (Fig. 108), *Garden House* (Fig. 111), *North Creake Abbey* (Fig. 113) and *Duncombe Park* (Fig. 115), all existed as drawing-copies by Cotman or student copies after them (see Figs 117, 118-120, 114 and 116) in which the character and placement of graphic marks bear strong resemblances to one another. These drawings may, therefore, have been primarily preparatory for *Etchings* from which Cotman could work up plates before allocating them numbers to insert into his Portfolio. The drawings for the *Duncombe* and *Byland* plates, for example, are numbered '2436' and '2492' respectively, which indicates that they were in circulation at a later date.

In addition, the plates bear strong similarities with Cotman's pencil technique, a relationship noted at the time by the Cholmeley siblings who were back in contact with Cotman following the death of their mother in October 1810. In February 1811, Francis gave Cotman mixed feedback on the resemblance between the pencil sketches and some of the annotated proofs that the artist had sent to Brandsby:

> It strikes me that yours' would be more likely to attract if finishd like pictures as Cuitt's are than having only the character of pencil sketches as they now have a good deal. Indeed I think you transfer yourself onto copper wonderfully.[104]

The similarities were relayed to Cotman more enthusiastically by Katherine Cholmeley:

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[102] That said, not all extant drawing-copies have numbers. This may be due in part to subsequent trimming. In any case, the numbers are not always a reliable guide to the date of a drawing's production. In the instance that stock became worn, damaged or lost, Cotman would normally reproduce the same image to which he would add the number from before so as to maintain the Portfolio's order. A further complication arises from extant close copies by subscribers, which at first site can appear to be the work of Cotman himself.

[103] NC, 25 November 1809.

[104] FC to JSC, 24 February 1811, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM. 'Cuitt' is George Cuitt, the Yorkshire-born etcher and Chester-based drawing master. Between 1810 and 1811, he published eighteen etchings in three numbers of ancient and picturesque buildings in Chester, which Francis Cholmeley had 'got & think them very good'.

> To say how nearly they resemble your pencil drawings is sufficient to prove how beautiful they are, but to me there is a strength & softness which excels even in your original sketches.[105]

The *Etchings*' link with the Portfolio was further strengthened by its advertisement 'as a Work of useful reference, both to the professional and to the amateur artist' which mimicked the target audience of the Portfolio. A watercolour after Cotman's drawing-copy of *Garden House* attributed to the young James Stark (Fig. 120) suggests that Cotman's pitch to the 'professional' artist was embraced by budding professionals like Stark;[106] that, or Stark had drawn on both the Portfolio and the plate of *Garden House* in *Etchings* to which he had subscribed by February 1811.[107] Stark's colouring is extremely close to Cotman's drawing-copy, while the positioning of the riverside figure in the former's copy resembles more closely that in Cotman's etching. It is therefore possible to view *Etchings* as a collection of original images which, like the Portfolio drawing-copies, could be circulated for consumption by others who were not merely amateurs. In turn, Cotman could hope for both financial remuneration (at two guineas per set for each subscriber, and an increase by eleven shillings by June 1811)[108] and 'fame', as he told Francis in March 1811.[109]

Print publications had the obvious benefit of having a comparatively expansive reach to most other forms of artistic material, enabling Cotman to circulate much more widely his name, style as well as his subscription list. With a healthy 212 individuals subscribing to *Etchings*, Cotman's return was respectable at £700 and he quickly 'sold all my first Edition, One Hundred copies', leading him to 'order a reprint of one Hundred more, which I do not doubt disposing of'.[110] By January 1812, he was due an additional £150 from booksellers in London, York and Edinburgh through whom he sold the work, [111] and

[105] KC to JSC, 6 April 1811, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.
[106] Another copy of *Garden House* made by a pupil in the 1830s is at NCMAG, 10.25.964.
[107] Stark's name is included in a list compiled by Cotman in a letter to Francis Cholmeley, no date, February 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1036, NYRO.
[108] Cotman informed Francis that 'The work is increased in price to two & half guineas, every one thinking it too cheap & so it is.' JSC to FC, 5 June 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1063, NYRO. In December 1811, Cotman admitted he was 'very fond' of the work which 'gives me spirits, for I fancy a long line of patrons, & this being my first essay.' JSC to FC, 20 December 1811, ZQG XII 12/1 (end number reference unknown, NYRO.)
[109] JSC to FC, 5 March 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1040, NYRO.
[110] JSC to FC, 5 March 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1040, NYRO. In a previous letter, Francis had written 'I shall be most truly happy if your work answers and think it only be known to make it do so.' FC to JSC, 24 February 1811, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.
[111] See a reference to this sum in JSC to FC, 5 June 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1063, NYRO. Cotman's principal booksellers were Boydell and Colnaghi, in London, Todd in York and Whyte in Edinburgh, all of whom appear on the work's frontispiece.

a further £69 'due from sundry places for my etchings'. [112] In the Norwich artistic community, John Crome, Joseph Clover, Robert Dixon, Jeremiah and William Freeman, Robert Ladbrooke, John Thirtle as well as Stark all ordered copies, while several figures from Cotman's earlier career also subscribed, including Dr Monro, John and Cornelius Varley, Francis Cholmeley, Henry Englefield, Mr Morritt, Paul Sandby Munn and Dawson Turner. Munn signed-up for fifteen copies, no doubt to sell at his New Bond Street shop where he was also displaying specimens of the plates as noted in Cotman's advertisements. By June 1811, the work was being sold through the London printer, Josiah Boydell who took a 25% cut; 'a good profit methinks' Cotman told Francis, 'but 'tis customary so must not complain.'[113] The work also had some limited critical success, the *Gentleman's Magazine* describing it as comprising 'twenty-four beautiful Etchings of some of the most distinguished remains of Saxon and Norman Architecture in England'.[114] In answer to a letter from Francis in which he wished Cotman financial and critical success, Cotman pronounced: 'This would have pleased your poor mother, as I am sure it does you, this is am Ansr: to your "I hope that the work Answers" it does.'[115]

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The success of *Etchings* seems to have had much to do with its distinctive visual qualities. In his 1982 article, Hemingway pointed to Cotman's status as a self-taught etcher to account for the 'difficulty' he appears to have had in arriving at wholly integrative compositions. He attributed what he called the 'airless and flat' qualities of the earlier plates to the lack of delineated sky.[116] In 1811, Francis himself quibbled over the absence of sky in the proofs that Cotman had sent him: 'The only thing I could wish otherwise now (& perhaps I am wrong) is that you would put in skies in order to give the whole more the appearance of a finishd piece.'[117] As discussed in Chapter 2, it was Cotman's perceived lack of stylistic finish that was neither to Francis nor his late mother's tastes. In at least eight of *Etchings*' plates, the sky is left blank, while fifteen plates lack the line he ruled around the remaining nine which frames the central image.

[112]JSC to FC, 10 January 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1153, NYRO.
[113] JSC to FC, 4 June 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1042, NYRO.
[114] *Gentleman's Magazine*, July 1811, vol. 110, no. 40.
[115] FC to JSC, 24 February 1811. Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM and JSC to FC, 5 March 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1040, NYRO.
[116] Hemingway, '"The English Piranesi": Cotman's Architectural Prints', *Walpole Society*, vol. 48 (1982), 215-17.
[117] FC to JSC, 24 February 1811, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.

For those with a featureless or borderless sky, the design appears to levitate just above the surface of the sheet, three good examples being *Croyland Abbey*, *North Creak Abbey* and *Howden Church* (Figs 104, 113 and 121). In *North Creak Abbey*, the dark mosaic-like pattern of crumbling masonry in the pyramidal structure appears suspended in negative space, while the apex of the tower and arch in *Croyland* and *Howden* look as though they might burst the plate mark. Of the latter etching, Francis lamented: 'but Howden, alas! tho' excellent in other respects not only totters but tumbles.'[118] Criticism like this has been attributed to Cotman's novice status as an etcher rather than something more intentional in both function and meaning.[119] Whilst accepting that Cotman did experience some difficulties in the printing process, as he himself admitted,[120] it is my contention that the 'airless and flat' qualities of his plates were partly intended as attractively utilitarian for his target audience.[121]

For example, most plates present a centrally-situated (predominantly architectural) motif in close proximity to the picture plane, thus providing little sense of a middle or a background, as in the close-up wooden doorway and proximate view of a medieval stone arch in *A Doorway at Valle Crucis Abbey, North Wales* and *A Doorway Leading to the Refectory of Rievaulx Abbey* (Figs 122 and 123) respectively. In his adverts Cotman claimed to have taken 'care' to focus attention on the 'principal object' to which 'the accompaniments will be adapted'. These 'accompaniments' refer to details such as his characteristic natural motifs and his often-employed open window, both seen in Figures 122 and 123; 'accompaniments' might also signify the sky which is absent from eight of the plates. The lack of sky serves to enhance the presence of 'the principal object' which seems to hover just above the blank sheet of paper as if it might be lifted off and inserted onto another surface.

This sense of the etched subject as portable and adaptable is significant in its relation to the manner in which *Etchings* were marketed. Cotman included the word 'Specimens' three times in his advertisements: 'Picturesque Specimens of...', 'as a faithful representation of the different specimens of Architecture...', Specimens to be seen at...'. The repetition of a word which denotes an exemplar of something belonging to a larger

[118] FC to JSC, 24 February 1811, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.
[119] Hemingway, '"The English Piranesi", *Walpole Society*, 216.
[120] Cotman told Francis that 'An accident happened to the best plate I ever etched: while biting, stopping out some pts that ought to be feignt, the wax melted from too strong a heat & the whole bares the same proportion of tint. This plate took me three weeks—it is St. Boltoph's Priory, Colchester.' JSC to FC, 5 March 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1040, NYRO.
[121] Hemingway, '"The English Piranesi": Cotman's Architectural Prints', *Walpole Society*, vol. 48 (1982), 215 and 217.

context implies that Cotman was offering his subscribers samples or details of architectural structures as 'useful reference[es].' These could then be copied by the amateur and adapted by the professional artist for their own work – particularly, perhaps, the London artist who had less ready access to architectural antiquities in their natural settings.

The emphasis on 'Specimens' may also explain why the geographical specificity of the scenes depicted in the plates is of comparatively little importance. Whilst a brief 'Descriptive Index' of each plate's subject was printed to accompany the volume once bound, less than half the prints are inscribed with titles signalling their location, while four of these titles are obscured by foreground details. The lack of easily identifiable place was something that perplexed some of Cotman's subscribers. In April 1811, Francis wrote to inform him that subscribers in Edinburgh 'did not like the view of Duncombe Park, [Fig. 115] because it might have been any where.' Francis continued with the advice that 'Two thirds of mankind, you know, mind more what is represented than how it is done.'[122] Cotman's reply came two months later with no response to this criticism (or misreading) – his focus was not on context or particularity but on re-deployable motifs. Accordingly, *Etchings* could function in a similar way to a pattern book, a drawing manual or even Cotman's own Circulating Portfolio, all of which offered their user a range of images which could be employed according to their choosing.

All this is not to say that Cotman surrendered *Etchings* entirely to his subscribers' needs. The project was also calculated to circulate his skill, ambition and, crucially, his name, as the adverts made clear with the lines, 'Drawn from Nature, and Etched by *JOHN SELL COTMAN*', as do the inscriptions 'J.S.Cotman Del et Sc', 'JSC' and 'Etched and Published by J.S.Cotman' on the plates themselves. Yet the most emphatic expression of Cotman's authorship is the publication's dedication plate (Fig. 124) where his name appears three times alongside that of Sir Henry Englefield, Francis Cholmeley's maternal uncle, a past patron of Cotman's, an important cultural figure in London (particularly within antiquarian circles where the demand for volumes of medieval architecture images was highest) and the man to whom Cotman dedicated his *Etchings*.

Contained within a scroll topped by two eagles which brandish the Englefield coat of arms, Cotman's dedication takes the form of a highly performative handwritten letter addressed to the London dilettanti. It opens with an apparently humble pronouncement of

[122] FC to JSC, 16 April 1811, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.

both the 'favour with which the public have honoured these first efforts of my graver' and the 'kindness' shown by Englefield in receiving *Etchings* (he had subscribed to two bound copies whilst another was gifted to him by Cotman).[123] Apparently due to these public and private expressions of support, Cotman claims to have been 'induced to take a liberty ... of sending them out under the sanction of a Dedication to you ... a most liberal & enlightened patron of every thing that appertains to the arts.' '[T]o me it is material', the letter continues, 'that it should be known that through life I have uniformly been honoured with your patronage & thus, while I discharge a debt of gratitude, I most effectually serve my interest & gratify my vanity.' While we might read the obsequious language as another instance of Cotman giving up his art for others (in this case a well-known figure and patron), the self-confident tone is clearly meant to present Cotman as an important artist who mixed with the cultural elite and one in particular who saw in him a talent worth patronising 'through life'.[124]

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By the time *Etchings* was delivered as a complete publication in the summer of 1811, Cotman had successfully managed to turn himself about in Norwich. He had integrated himself into the city with appropriate yet innovative artistic products, partaken of the artistic community important to the equilibrium of the city's art world (becoming the NSA's President that year), while promoting an individual style and status in the press, exhibition room and the homes of his Portfolio subscribers. Finally, he had disseminated that style and status even more expansively through the publication of his first etched volume. Cotman's work on *Etchings* also witnessed a spate of renewed contact with London and, in 1810, he began submitting oils and watercolours to London's new exhibiting societies, the six-year-old British Institution, the venue most favoured by ambitious landscape painters, and the Associated Artists in Water Colours, founded in 1808 to rival the SPWC. To the latter, he sent three watercolours associated with prints from *Etchings*, thereby promoting the visibility of his art beyond Norwich and thus resituating himself within the metropolitan art world.

[123] JSC to FC, 5 March 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1040, NYRO.
[124] Indeed, Cotman told Francis that it was Englefield who 'was the first person I mentioned my plan to, when I was in London last' and who encouraged him to pursue the printing of the *Etchings*. JSC to FC, 5 March 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1040, NYRO.

From manoeuvres that were misjudged to inventive and, ultimately, critically and commercially successful, Cotman's actions during the years 1806-1811 provide meaningful insight into the mechanisms of an artists' survival in the British art world: it was not only about striking a balance between one's own practices and output, but resisting a singular artistic identity, keeping mobile, and constantly turning oneself about.

Chapter 4

Etching, Historical Knowledge and the Effects of Collaboration: Cotman in Great Yarmouth and Normandy 1812–1822

By the end of 1811, Cotman's reputation in Norwich as a professional 'Artist', the title he appended to his name in the newly-published Norwich Directory, was firmly established. However, in April 1812, he left this position of apparent stability for Great Yarmouth, the seaside town lying twenty miles to the east. Taking with him his pregnant wife and two-year-old son, and buying a house in the suburban area of Southtown, Cotman based himself here for the next eleven years under the patronage of local luminary, banker and antiquary, Dawson Turner, whose family he taught drawing.

It can of course be argued that Cotman had always conceived of Norwich as an interim place of employment; his remark to Turner in 1806 – 'it will give me an opportunity of turning myself about during my stay' – suggests that he had initially planned to use his hometown as a place in which to turn himself *towards* another destination. But despite negotiating ample time off from teaching Turner's family so as to work on his own print projects, Cotman's move to a seaside town at England's most easterly point seems at odds with the canny attempts he had made in Norwich to position himself within a vibrant art world, retain his independence from any one patron, and distance his identity from that of the drawing master.

Cotman's move to Yarmouth came at the beginning of a decade in which his watercolour practice and exhibiting activity were scaled down. He submitted forty-six works at six NSA shows between 1812 and 1823 (as opposed to 181 submissions between 1807 and 1811, not including the fifteen works sent to London institutions) and refrained from exhibiting in 1816-17, 1819 and 1822. Most of his summers were instead filled with sketching tours of East Anglia and Normandy, resulting in an astonishing six etched publications comprising a total of 365 plates depicting medieval architecture and antiquities.[1] These were: *Specimens of Norman and Gothic Architecture, in the County of Norfolk* (1816-18, fifty plates), *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk* (1818, sixty plates,

[1] These years also saw him produce many other single etchings, together with plates that were not published and drawings that were engraved for other publications.

with letterpress by Dawson Turner), *Engravings of the Most Remarkable of the Sepulchral Brasses in Norfolk* (1819, 112 plates of hand-tinted etchings with letterpress by Turner), *Engravings of the Most Remarkable of the Sepulchral Brasses in Suffolk* (1819, thirty-six plates of hand-tinted etchings), *Architectural Antiquities of Saint Mary's Chapel, at Stourbridge, near Cambridge* (1819, ten plates), and *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy* (1822, ninety-seven plates in two volumes, with letterpress by Turner). At least two of these, the second and last, were largely financed by Turner and completed on a speculative basis. These two publications, henceforth referred to as *Antiquities of Norfolk* and *Antiquities of Normandy*, can also be considered Cotman's most technically and aesthetically ambitious print projects, and offer compelling case studies for how the different circumstances in which they materialised produced strikingly different visual effects.[2]

Accordingly, these two volumes form the respective focal points of this chapter which examines the possibilities and the limitations of Cotman's collaboration with Dawson Turner and, subsequently, a wider group of people involved in the works' production. In turn, it considers the implications that these social interactions had on Cotman's artistic identity and experience. Touching on questions of etching, commerce, antiquarianism and accuracy, this chapter opens up a wider area of enquiry into the place of *Antiquities of Norfolk* and *Antiquities of Normandy* in contemporary debates on historical knowledge and its production.

Before turning to those publications, it is important that we account for Cotman's move to Yarmouth and the intersection that took place there between his own artistic approach and the cultural pursuits of Dawson Turner. This first part thus addresses what it was that drew these two men together and sets the scene for the ensuing analyses of the print projects in parts two and three.

1. Cotman, Turner and the beginnings of *Antiquities of Norfolk* (1811-12)

On one level, family circumstances and financial debt had much to do with Cotman's move to Great Yarmouth in April 1812. The first sign of financial difficulty in his family came in October 1808, when Henry Englefield wrote to his nephew Francis Cholmeley

[2] While both volumes of Cotman's *Brasses* were initially conceived to form one large volume, with those depicting Norfolk brasses totalling more plates than in any other work, their compositions are characterised by relatively uniform and simple figure-outlines which required far less labour time than the distinctive and fully-etched plates of the *Antiquities of Norfolk* and *Antiquities of Normandy*.

concerning Cotman, remarking cantankerously: 'I was prevailed on by him to assist his father by being security for 200£ & I dare say that I shall end by paying it, which I dont at all like.'[3] Six months earlier, a fire had damaged the stock at Edmund Cotman's haberdashery, possibly prompting Cotman to ask Englefield to be his father's guarantor for a loan.[4] Norwich's declining textiles industry appears to have had a further direct impact on the Cotman family business, eventually leading Edmund to declare bankruptcy in 1812.[5] As discussed in Chapter 3, Norwich had experienced anxieties over the future of its main trade since the 1790s, when overwhelming competition from the north, post-war economic depression and disrupted European trade combined to diminish the city's economic fortunes. By 1812, the severity of the situation was being noted by commentators throughout Britain, including Joseph Farington who supposed Norwich 'to have suffered more from the decay of its manufacturers owing to the want of exportation in these difficult times than any other town in the kingdom.'[6] Aside from Norwich's weavers (many of whom were left in search of work and consequentially became impoverished), tradesmen whose livelihoods were linked to the weaving industry were also at risk, haberdashers chief among them. Requiring large amounts of working capital to finance their stocks, a haberdasher's business could be further undermined by an accumulation of bad debt, characteristic slow payment from their customers or sharp market changes. As Peter Earle has observed, these conditions led many haberdashers to become bankrupt during wartime.[7]

Against this backdrop of deteriorating financial fortunes, Cotman's banker and pre-existing patron, Dawson Turner, invited him to become his family's drawing master in Great Yarmouth. His wife, Mary Turner, had made copies after Cotman's drawings since 1805; she and her daughters were therefore already familiar with his style and were accomplished amateur artists in their own right.[8] In addition, the thirty-three-year-old Cotman was a desirable alternative to the family's existing drawing master, John Crome, eleven years his senior, who was effectively ousted from the post by Cotman in early

[3] HC to FC, 31 October 1808, ZQG XII 12/1/637, NYRO.
[4] Cotman described to Francis the extent of the blaze that had 'entirely consumed' many high-quality items, JSC to FC, 22 April 1808, ZQG XII 12/1/597, NYRO.
[5] The bankruptcy was first announced in the Norwich press on 8 August 1812 and continued to be mentioned in the wider regional press in the following years.
[6] FD, 16 August 1812, vol. 12, 4181-82.
[7] See Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650-1750* (London, 1994), 68. Another Cockey Lane haberdasher, J. Cole, also went bankrupt in 1812, NM, 30 May 1812.
[8] JSC to DT, 30 November 1805, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.

1812.[9] Turner's proposition was attractive: Cotman would reside in Yarmouth and teach the family (who lived above Turner's bank on the town's fashionable South Quay) in return for £200 per annum, an exceptional salary for a drawing master, with Cotman acknowledging it as 'a great sum for an individual to make in that line'.[10] He was also given six weeks' annual holiday and was free to teach other local students, Turner estimating that this would increase his salary by a further £100 a year.[11] Cotman actually appears to have received an annual £140 from Turner after negotiating three days off a week to work on *Antiquities of Norfolk*.[12] Even so, this salary offered him the prospect of financial security in light of his family's debts, which he had begun to pay off by 1812 and would continue to do so for much of that decade.[13]

Yarmouth itself offered further reasons for Cotman to move. Since the 1760s, when the health benefits of seawater bathing became promoted in Britain, this active commercial and fishing port had become a popular coastal resort.[14] Tourists who flocked there were broadly middle-class East Anglians and may have formed much of the client base on whom Turner based his annual £300 estimate for Cotman. Yarmouth was also home to prosperous merchant families who, like the Turners, lived in large townhouses near or on the quay and boasted exceptional art collections whose strengths lay in Old Master paintings, save a smattering of modern and contemporary artworks.[15] Many of these residents also collected prints, drawings and antiquarian volumes, thereby offering a prestigious market for Cotman's works.[16] Yarmouth therefore offered a body of potential patrons which Norwich lacked. Moreover, it did not suffer from the same oversupply of

[9] Turner's preference for Cotman seems to have caused some tension between the three men, Cotman telling him that 'I told him [Crome] I wishd to speak with him—but he evidently avoided me. therefore I have not had an opportunity of ... stating to him my grounds for coming to Yarmouth & the full determination I had of not interfering with his concerns.' JSC to DT, 25 January 1812, Anderdon Grangerised Catalogues, 1812, facing 20, AND/15/48, Royal Academy Archives (henceforth RAA).
[10] JSC to DT, undated 1811, B1/F/37, NRO.
[11] JSC to DT, 17 December 1811, MC 2487/9, NRO and DT to HG, 5 April 1817, N1/1/9, NRO.
[12] The sum of £140 was relayed in a letter from Cotman to Francis Cholmeley, 10 January 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1153, NYRO. Yet we might treat this sum with some caution, Cotman perhaps underplaying his salary to Francis from whom he was requesting a £200 loan to help him purchase a house in Yarmouth.
[13] 'Endebted to Sir H.C.Englefield, Bt. £50' noted Cotman to Francis in 1812, suggesting that he was gradually repaying his father's loan, JSC to FC, 10 January 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1153, NYRO. Five years later, Turner wrote to his banking partner, Hudson Gurney, that 'Cotman's purse is low & that he lost £500—(almost all he had) by his father's failure', presumably meaning Edmund's bankruptcy of 1812, DT to Hudson Gurney (hereafter HG), 5 April 1817, N1/1/9, NRO.
[14] See James Rymer, *A Sketch of Great Yarmouth...; with some reflections on Cold Bathing* (London, 1777) and Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1986), 156.
[15] See John Henry Druery, *Historical and Topographical Notices of Great Yarmouth, in Norfolk, and Its Environs* (Yarmouth, 1826), 80-6.
[16] See Druery, *Historical and Topographical Notices*, 82-3.

artists that characterised Norwich's art world. Meanwhile, Cotman could continue to distribute his Circulating Portfolio drawing-copies, which grew by over 1,500 sheets before he returned to Norwich in 1823. Many of these depicted Yarmouth subject matter, the town's long coastline emerging as an attractive sketching site in this period, something which may have further vindicated Cotman's move.[17]

To a large extent then, Cotman's acceptance of employment by Turner was motivated by material factors: a family financial crisis, a large salary and the profitability of Yarmouth. However, these should not obscure Cotman's artistic ambitions which clearly had a bearing on why he eventually accepted Turner's offer. Initially wary of the idea, his letters to Turner in late 1811 (when still in Norwich) reveal unease about the impact that moving to Yarmouth and teaching the family might have on his art and identity. Recounting at length the importance of his work on *Antiquities of Norfolk* (for which he had already begun gathering material), Cotman indicated to Turner that printmaking had become a new means of constructing a more streamlined persona: 'I now have a reputation to be as even as an Engraver', he declared, later noting that he had no intention of becoming merely 'a poor drawing master'.[18] In any case, he argued, 'I should not have time to dedicate to teaching' given that his work on *Antiquities of Norfolk* meant that:

> I think upon nothing else so much does it engross my thoughts. And I have a dread of anything likely to take me from it under such circumstances perhaps I had better decline all thoughts of removing to Yarmouth.[19]

Yet between that letter (6 December) and his next to Turner (17 December), Cotman changed his mind:

> I have been considering & turning over in my mind your proposition relating to my residence in Yarmouth or in the neighbourhood & the result is that I wish to do so providing I can meet with a pleasant respectable House, not too small, in some quiet situation, over the Bridge I should prefer from its being more likely to be reasonable. When you can hear of such a place that may be likely to suit me, I will ansr your letter by return of coach in person if possible.[20]

[17] On Yarmouth as a sketching site, see Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture,* 196-241.
[18] JSC to DT, 6 December 1811, MC 2487/8 and 17 December 1811, MC 2487/9, NRO.
[19] JSC to DT, 6 December 1811, MC 2487/8, NRO.
[20] JSC to DT, 17 December 1811, MC 2487/9, NRO.

Such a turnaround of opinion suggests that Cotman had come to terms with the benefits of occupying some kind of middleground in Yarmouth where he could insist upon his artistic independence whilst exploiting the remunerative potential of regular work. It is also possible that Turner helped to sway Cotman's opinion by altering his 'proposition' to make it more conversant with Cotman's artistic concerns, namely his *Antiquities of Norfolk*.

Conceived in early 1811 and delivered in 1818, this single volume book was published by Cotman himself.[21] It consists of sixty etchings depicting fifty-two exterior and eight interior views of local medieval architecture 'most deserving of attention in Norfolk, either entire or in part' in both portrait and landscape formats.[22] The selection of architectural subjects was principally led by what Cotman (with guidance from Turner)[23] deemed to be the most remarkable in the county, not necessarily in their historical importance but in their 'curious' appearance and architectural diversity. The publication was therefore less a survey of as many buildings as it had plates than one determined by a taste for architectural details, ruined fragments and visual variety. Indeed, it did not matter that it contained eight plates depicting the same structure twice, such as plates fifteen and sixty representing East Barsham House (Figs. 125 and 126); instead, the emphasis was on providing the viewer with different views of a familiar building.

The work was initially issued in ten instalments between February 1812 and January 1818, with each containing six plates and about two sheets of letterpress (thirteen sheets in total). A further instalment of title page, chronological list of subjects and index followed, all of which were written by Dawson Turner, although his name did not appear as either the volume's author or patron.[24] Above each of Turner's descriptions of the represented specimens were relevant references to antiquarian texts, which situated *Antiquities of Norfolk* within a corpus of British antiquarian publications. Cotman's sixty plates appeared after and thus separately from Turner's short paragraphs, which are organised under the headings 'Monastic', 'Ecclesiastical' and 'Military, Civil, and

[21] 'This summer I am going to commence Etchings of all ornamented Antiquities in Norfolk', JSC to DT, 10 February 1811, inserted into *Antiquities of Norfolk*, 166, D22, BM.
[22] *Norfolk* 'Prospectus', see Appendix 4 for full transcription.
[23] Cotman's letters show that he regularly asked and thanked Turner for his advice on medieval architectural specimens and his representation of them.
[24] In 1838, Henry Bohn published a series of sketches and studies by Cotman under the title, *Liber Studiorum*, which included forty-eight plates of etchings and soft-ground etchings. In his republication of plates from *Antiquities of Norfolk*, Bohn identified Turner as the author of the original volume's letterpress. The adverts that Cotman posted for the *Antiquities of Normandy* also referred to his previous publications and identified Turner as the author of all accompanying letterpress. See NC, 9 August 1823.

Domestic', and correspond to either a single etching or a group. The descriptions' content generally consists of a note on what, if anything, is known about the depicted building's history, a speculative remark on its date of origin, a brief description of its salient features and, occasionally, justification for the detail or viewpoint chosen. The description accompanying Yarmouth Priory is typical and serves to emphasise the publication's contribution to historical knowledge:

> Of the Priory at Yarmouth, the accounts left us are as imperfect and unsatisfactory as its ruins. Indeed, nothing of its history appears to be known, except that it was founded by Bishop Herbert, about the year 1120, though not completed till 1250; to which date, what is here figured, must be referred: with regard to the building, this plate exhibits the whole that remains—a single room, now used as a stable. The walls are of flint; and, by a late judicious improvement, have been made to form a boundary to the burial-ground of the Church; towards the south-east end of which, and not far from it, this building was situated.

While this passage mentions Cotman's corresponding plate (Fig. 127), it does not explicitly reference its visual content, an apparent disconnect between text and image which recurs throughout the volume. When read more attentively, however, the passage provides subtle prompts which an inquisitive reader/viewer might have picked up on when turning to Cotman's plate. The reference to flint walls, for instance, finds an echo in Cotman's deployment of multiple lines, scribbles and marks on the depicted walls and ceiling which evoke the sharp appearance of flint. Meanwhile, the unattended brooms, bucket and hook emphasised by the oblique shard of light, together with the heap to the left which may represent manure, indicate the building's modern-day function as a stable. Any initial cleavage between text and image might therefore be reinterpreted as Turner refraining from determining Cotman's etching, enabling it to rise above the purely illustrative and provide complimentary knowledge on its own terms.

Despite the basic text-image organisation, there is no taxonomic order to Cotman's plates. The distributed instalments did not follow a geographical trajectory such as a tour, nor did the arrangement adhere to Turner's 'List of Plates', which groups the prints by architectural genre, or to his chronological list. More often, the plates are ordered numerically, though it is rare to find surviving volumes with an identical sequence given that Cotman on occasion accidentally gave two prints the same number. Nevertheless, this structural looseness may be significant in offering the subscriber the freedom to bind the prints as they wished. Indeed, a surviving copy once belonging to a Norfolk resident,

George Smith, contains plates with no clear geographical, chronological or numerical system, suggesting that he arranged them according to personal preference.[25]

Elsewhere in the volume, subscribers are invoked more unequivocally. In fifty-four of the plates, Cotman's low and close viewpoints orientate the viewer's gaze towards the personal dedications that are included either within the image or, more often, in a lower panel. Besides those dedicated to Cotman's friends and close associates, including Dawson and Mrs Turner, Francis Cholmeley, Henry Englefield and William Stevenson, the remaining fifty dedicatees are generally Norfolk landowners and MPs (including Horatio William Walpole, 4th Earl of Orford), clergymen (Henry Bathurst, Bishop of Norwich), antiquaries (notably the President of the Society of Antiquaries (1811-46), George-Hamilton Gordon, 4th Earl of Aberdeen) and prominent local professionals (the Norwich physician and politician, Edward Rigby, for example), eighteen of whom we are told had some affiliation with their dedicated building through ancestry, marriage or parish. Without an extant list of subscribers, these dedications provide evidence of Cotman's intended audience: the relatively well-off and 'enlightened' subscriber who could afford to pay five guineas for the work (around £330 in today's money), three-hundred editions of which Cotman claimed would generate a 'clear £1556' in profit.[26] Moreover, by linking the plates with illustrious men (less so women, with only two female dedicatees), Cotman could raise the status of the plates and potentially encourage subscriptions from other notables, their acquaintances or parishioners.

In ten of the inscriptions, explicit mention is made of the dedicatees' commitment to the history and preservation of East Anglia's ancient architecture, indicating a keenness on Cotman's part to inflect his subject matter with historical meaning whilst also catering to local pretensions. At a time when medieval buildings were entering public consciousness as never before (aided and abetted by the visual arts), architectural styles and dates became both debated and important to conceptions of local and national history.[27] With hundreds of illustrated publications on 'Gothic' antiquities circulating on the antiquarian book market, Cotman's publication thus fed into a contemporary desire for images and knowledge of Britain's medieval past. Yet its sole focus on Norfolk, a county brimming

[25] See NCMAG, 190.940.
[26] JSC to FC, 10 January 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1153, NYRO. A genteel market was made explicit by Cotman in the postscript to his prospectus and first adverts: 'P.S. The Nobility and Gentry are respectfully invited to view the Drawings for the Work and Specimens of the Etchings at the Author's, St. Andrew's-Street, Norwich.'
[27] See Michael Hall, *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings* (Reading, 2002), Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story* (2009), 139-82, and Rumiko Handa and James Potter (eds), *Conjuring the Real: The Role of Architecture in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Fiction* (Lincoln and Nebraska, 2011).

with antiquities, suggests that he also recognised the gap in the market for an illustrated volume on antiquities from a single county, most publications chronicling the history, style and dates of those from a group of regions.[28] Against the backdrop of Norfolk's economic decline, moreover, Cotman's juxtaposition of images depicting surviving ancient buildings with the persisting social structures invoked through his dedications, might act as a bulwark against such anxieties. Thus, despite his prospectus and initial advertisements (issued in July and October 1811, see Appendix 4 for the full transcription of the prospectus), which announced the opening of nationwide subscriptions, the publication was primarily a Norfolk-focused venture. [29]

However, the *Antiquities of Norfolk* that appeared in its entirety in 1818 was not the work that Cotman initially advertised in 1811, before Turner's offer of employment. His prospectus announced two different formats of the publication, a folio and a quarto, the latter being intended to 'be bound either with the new edition of BLOMEFIELD'S NORFOLK, in Quarto, or with LYSON'S MAGNA BRITANNIA, both which it is designed to illustrate', a line repeated in other advertisements that year. [30] Francis Blomefield's *History of Norfolk* was a three-volume topographical and historical survey of the county, originally published between 1739 and 1775 before being reprinted by William Miller in eleven quarto volumes between 1805 and 1810.[31] A popular title, *History of Norfolk* was commonly extra-illustrated, including by Turner who added thousands of images to his new edition over forty years, many of which were made by his family after Cotman's own prints and drawings. [32] Cotman was not, therefore, only aiming *Antiquities of Norfolk* at well-off individuals, but at those who partook in the fashionable pastime of extra-illustrating antiquarian titles with images that would be

[28] For instance, John Britton's *Beauties of England and Wales* (1801-15) and *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain* (1805-14) and James Storer's *Antiquarian and Topographical Cabinet...* (1807-11) and *History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Churches of Great Britain* (1814-19).
[29]NC and NM, 5 October 1811.
[30] *Gentleman's Magazine*, July 1811, vol. 110, 40, NC and NM, 5 October 1811, and the 1811 NSA exhibition catalogue. As with the promotion of his Portfolio and *Etchings*, Cotman marketed the *Antiquities of Norfolk* through the NSA exhibition with five preparatory drawings for 'Cotman's "Antiquities of Norfolk" [being] Illustrations of Blomefield's Norfolk'. Also included in the hang was the publication's prospectus, a commercially-bold move which may have been allowed due to Cotman's NSA presidency that year.
[31] See Francis Blomefield, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk...* (continued by the Revd Charles Parkin), 3 vols (King's Lynn, 1739-75), reprinted in 11 vols (London, 1805-10).
[32] See *Collection of Drawings, Etchings and Engravings and Original Deeds, formed towards the Illustration of a Copy of Blomefield's History of Norfolk*, ADD MSS 23024-52, British Library (hereafter BL).

subservient to their text.[33] His reference to the Lysons brothers' *Magna Britannia* broadened his publication's geographical scope, yet it is hard to see how Cotman's county-specific subject matter could fit with the Lysons' volume given the latter's omission of Norfolk.[34] Furthermore, neither the royal paper size nor the plates fit the quarto dimensions of a Blomefield or Lysons. This meant that an etching such as *The Monument of Thomas Lord Morley in the Church at Higham*, (Fig. 128) with which the Norfolk vicar Rev. Strickland Neville-Rolfe extra-illustrated his own copy of Blomefield,[35] needed to be trimmed down and folded, demonstrating the problem that would face extra-illustrators subscribing to *Antiquities of Norfolk* – something that Cotman himself acknowledged to Turner before his move to Yarmouth:

> As to the Quarto I am afraid it will be but an ugly piece of work ... my Subscribers will not approve of my taking the liberty to double the large Plates...'[36]

While subsequent promotional material does suggest that a quarto edition was produced alongside the larger format, it was less frequently advertised and apparently difficult to obtain, suggesting that far fewer copies (if any) were produced.[37] Moreover, only royal volumes (which Cotman referred to as 'folio') exist in public and private collections today, all measuring approximately 51.5 x 35.5 cm. It seems, then, that at some point relatively early on in its production, Cotman raised his ambitions for *Antiquities of Norfolk*, lifting it out of the realm of supplementary illustration. I propose that he decided to do so with Turner's collusion, a collaboration that would further explain why Cotman came round to accepting Turner's offer of employment.

Seven years Cotman's senior, Dawson Turner was a successful bank owner with a branch in Yarmouth and London (the latter managed by his London-based partner, Hudson Gurney (1775-1864)). Besides his day job, Turner had pursuits in areas as wide ranging as botany, antiquarianism, extra-illustration, writing, and art, autograph and book

[33] On extra-illustration as a social practice, see Lucy Peltz, *Facing the Text: Extra-illustration, Print Culture, and Society c.1769-1840* (San Marino, forthcoming 2016).
[34] See Daniel and Samuel Lysons, *Magna Britannia, Being a Concise Topographical Account of the Several Counties of Great Britain*, 6 vols (London, 1806-22).
[35] Held at class L942.61, Norfolk Heritage Centre.
[36] JSC to DT, undated 1811, B1/F/37, NRO.
[37] See advertisements in NC, 22 May and *Bury and Norwich Post*, 26 May 1813. Between 1818 and 1821, John Britton wrote multiple times to Dawson Turner to ask how he might obtain Cotman's quarto volume, something he seems to have been unable to accomplish, see 15 July 1817, 22 July 1817, 1 November 1817, 21 March 1818, 18 January 1819, 24 August 1821, bound in *Letters chiefly on Literary and Scientific Subjects addressed to Dawson Turner* (arranged in eighty-three volumes chronologically), GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.

collecting, gaining him hundreds of international contacts. Earlier in 1805, Turner had orchestrated an introduction between Cotman, then in London, and one of these contacts, William Miller, who had begun printing the new Blomefield edition that year. This resulted in work for Cotman as 'Draughtsman to the History of Norfolk now publishing by M^{r} M'.[38] According to one of Cotman's adverts from around 1817, this work involved hand-colouring and illustrating a copy of the new edition as well as producing 300 drawings and sketches of Norfolk antiquities which could extra-illustrate Blomefield's text (I have not, however, located a Blomefield copy which contains watercolours and drawings by Cotman of this kind, so it is unclear whether the material was related to his *Antiquities of Norfolk* or composed a body of work in its own right – I suspect a mixture of the two.). The advert marketed both collections for sale at a pricey £30 and 100 guineas respectively.[39] Given this pre-existing work on Norfolk subject matter and its relationship to Blomefield's publication, not to mention its similarity with Turner's own extra-illustration project, it is conceivable that Turner advised Cotman to downplay his etched publication's Blomefield connection in favour of authorial originality and enhanced intellectual scope.

With both men already on friendly terms and sharing a common interest in Norfolk's 'curious' medieval fragments, it is possible that Turner proposed his own involvement in Cotman's project, as its patron, advisor and anonymous author of its letterpress. Certainly, the letters Turner wrote to Hudson Gurney in 1817, the year both men began funding Cotman's Normandy excursions (discussed later), reveal his own intellectual stakes in the artist's publications, their funds being 'well spent towards the promoting of a study in which both of us take pleasure.'[40] Turner was also enthusiastic about Cotman's artistic approach to medieval architecture, considering him 'eminently qualified ... for this task; he adds considerable knowledge of the subject to great zeal, equal diligence, & a taste & sweetness of execution that is not to be surpassed'.[41] Turner appears to have exemplified a distinctly modern notion of the patron: the enlightened, silent facilitator who had no need to claim the limelight or determine the artist's work because he was already a part of it. In other words, he was there at its genesis and a collaborator in its production, while 'disinterestedly' reaping the benefits of its cultural and intellectual return. This may help to explain why Turner was willing to pay Cotman such a high

[38] It is unclear whether this was offered by Turner or Miller, but I suspect by the former. JSC to DT, 25 February 1805, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.
[39] The advertisement is datable to 1816/17 and is pasted to the cover of *Antiquities of Norfolk* at YCBA, S271.56 (Folio A).
[40] DT to HG, 5 April 1817, N1/1/9, NRO.
[41] DT to HG, 5 April 1817, N1/1/9, NRO.

salary,[42] though it is possible, too, that the salary incorporated some kind of commission. Besides seven copies of *Antiquities of Norfolk* that Turner requested from Cotman, he was also provided with the artist's original etched proofs to compose a unique presentation copy.[43]

In turn, Turner's enthusiasm motivated Cotman's attitude towards the publication's production and enabled him to work with relative freedom. The involvement of a well-connected banker, moreover, could help Cotman to keep the market at a remove and thus dispel the possibility of that market determining his work and reducing his etchings to illustrations (as his initial plan had risked). That Cotman uncharacteristically posted just two subscription adverts in the Norfolk press may also indicate that Turner was promoting the work more privately within his own antiquarian circle of which a number of the plates' dedicatees (including the Rev. Edward Edwards, Rev. John Homfray and William Jackson Hooker) were close members. Finally, Turner's experience of managing money and business might have satisfied Cotman's own intention 'to be as even as an Engraver', a comment divulged to the banker in December 1811. To be 'even' implies that Cotman was aware of the need to produce a consistent product that could appeal squarely to his market, a remark which therefore has business resonances. Nevertheless, the emphasis placed on the word 'Engraver' – a specialised profession which, unlike the artist-etcher, was understood to be increasingly removed from 'liberal' art practice and closer to commerce – suggests that Cotman posited himself as *like* an engraver but not *an* engraver; that is, to work with consistency across the project but to produce work as an artist: with variety, individuality and imagination. As the following discussion will show, Cotman, enabled by Turner, used *Antiquities of Norfolk* to balance the work of *art* (making original artwork) with the *work* of art (making a virtue out of his need to survive materially).

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[42] To this we might add financial return, although there is no evidence to suggest that Turner took a cut of the profits of any of Cotman's publications.

[43] 'I have seven folio subns from this family for my Norfolk work.' JSC to FC, 21 January 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1158, NYRO. Turner's *Unique Copy* is bound in two volumes and held at the BM, 166, D22-D23. Turner also possessed a *Unique Copy* of the *Antiquities of Normandy* in four volumes, D24-D27, and of *Brasses of Norfolk* and *...of Suffolk*, in on copy each, 166, D28-29, all BM. Additionally, Cotman dedicated his *Brasses of Norfolk* to Turner and belatedly dedicated his 1816-18 volume, *Specimens of Norman and Gothic Architecture, in the County of Norfolk*, to Mrs Turner, JSC to Mary Turner, 19 July 1823, contained in the first volume of Turner's presentation copy of *Antiquities of Normandy*, Case 166, D24, BM.

Turner quickly found a house for Cotman in Southtown, a hamlet over the River Yare just west of Yarmouth. It clearly met with Cotman's specifications (see page 156). Writing in January to Francis Cholmeley, who would lend him £200 to help complete the purchase, Cotman revelled in its ample size and position, the east front commanding a view of the quay 'at a sufficient distance to make it delightful.'[44] Yet the fact that Cotman had given Turner a set of provisions at all is revealing for what it indicates about the set-up for which he was prepared to move as well as for what it conveys about the two men's relationship. Having met with an increasingly ambiguous situation at the Cholmeley's Yorkshire estate less than a decade earlier, Cotman's conditional acceptance of Turner's offer suggests he had learnt from past experience. His employment in Yarmouth would only work if there were boundaries to help him maintain a level of independence. Prescribing the nature of his weekly schedule to Turner was one way in which he sought to do this, the greater time and emphasis placed on printmaking enabling him to preserve a liberal persona set apart from teaching.[45] The Yare – which cut off Yarmouth from its suburbs and was only passable by bridge – presented a further, physical boundary between Bank House on the quay and Cotman's situation less than a mile away, thereby placing his house 'at a sufficient distance to make it delightful'. Finally, the confident, conditional manner in which Cotman relayed his specifications – 'providing I can meet with a pleasant respectable House'; 'over the Bridge I should prefer' etc – reveals a desire to retain control in shaping his own situation whilst also underscoring a level of openness that clearly existed between the two men. By mid-April 1812, Cotman, his wife and toddler, Miles Edmund, had arrived in Great Yarmouth.[46]

2. Etching, 'accuracy' and knowledge: *Antiquities of Norfolk* (1812-18)

The affinity I am claiming existed between Cotman and Turner is absent from the conventional account. While Kitson's view that Cotman became little more than Turner's hired draughtsman during these years has now been largely refuted by Andrew Hemingway and Timothy Wilcox, there remains a tendency for scholars to suggest that the banker took a wholly systematic approach to the architectural subject matter that Cotman depicted, in which 'freedom of handling had no place'.[47] As indicated above, this

[44] JSC to FC, 10 January and 13 April 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1153, 1182, NYRO.
[45] JSC to DT, undated 1811, B1/F/37, NRO and JSC to FC, 10 January 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1153, NYRO.
[46] JSC to FC, 13 April 1812, ZQG XII 12/1/1182, NYRO confirms Cotman's arrival just before 13 April.
[47] Hemingway, '"The English Piranesi", *Walpole Society*, 214. For references to Kitson and Wilcox, see Kitson, *Life*, 172-3 and Timothy Wilcox, *Cotman in Normandy*, exh. cat. (London, 2012).

assertion appears at odds with the evidence presented in the correspondence between both men and in Turner's letterpress for *Antiquities of Norfolk*, both of which suggest a man who revelled in the provisional nature of history, who was open about the fragmentary quality of knowledge (his attainment of it led by curiosity rather than strict method), and who admired Cotman's free and spirited treatment of antiquities.

Such an open – even unmethodical – approach to historical practice chimes with Cotman's own career which, as we have seen, was multidirectional in all respects – what he described as his 'mazy path'.[48] David Simpson has shown how British cultural thought in this period became defined against the dryness of method and system 'in favor of a mythology of common sense, including within it an 'aristocratic' component of freedom of maneuver and a more quotidian dimension of inductivism.'[49] Being unmethodical or 'mazy' could actually be formative and freeing, a sign of one's pursuit of truth acquired through a curiosity for fragments of knowledge, gathered but never entirely known.[50] I propose that a synchronicity existed between Cotman and Turner whereby each man subscribed to an approach to the past that was more often conjectural, subjective and open to interpretation than methodical, objective and 'accurate' (in the strictest sense of the word).[51] That synchronicity can be located both verbally and visually in *Antiquities of Norfolk* as well as in the surviving correspondence. This material provides a useful means for unpacking the particular character of Cotman and Turner's collaboration which, as I will show, gave significant form to the publication. Analysis of individual plates further demonstrates how the collaboration enabled Cotman to maintain an apparently disinterested artistic identity while producing what was essentially a commercial product.

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[48] JSC to FC, 20 December 1810, ZQG, XII 12/1/1009, NYRO.
[49] David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago, 1993), 50. To this end, also see Joshua C. Taylor, *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1987), 123-4.
[50] Turner admitted that his 'foolish habit of procrastination' led him to leave things incomplete, DT to HG, 25 May 1818, TURN III/10/25, Trinity.
[51] The ground for critical enquiry into early nineteenth-century engagements with history has been well prepared by scholars since Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973), including: Stephen Bann, *The Inventions of History: Essays on the Representation of the Past* (Manchester, 1990) and *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York, 1995); Myrone and Peltz (eds), *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice, 1700-1850* (Aldershot, 1999); Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven and London, 1994); and Rosemary Hill, *Antiquaries in the Age of Romanticism: 1789-1851*, unpublished PhD thesis (Birkbeck, 2011).

Since 1804, Cotman and Turner had corresponded about representational accuracy, with both agreeing on what constituted 'correct' visualisation of medieval architecture. In a letter to Turner from January 1812, Cotman continued a previous conversation about two recently published engravings of Wolterton Manor in East Barsham, Norfolk, by John Basire the younger after drawings by the architect, John Adey Repton. (Figs 129 and 130).[52] Employing language that evokes contemporary art criticism, Cotman complained: 'I cannot help noticing that I think Mr Repton's Plates of Barsham House are very vile things but. I expected very much better, at least correctness, from an Architect—which they do not possess.' Where Repton had supposedly gone wrong was in giving the manor house a level of 'finish where none was meant. and altering that which he could not understand.'[53] Only four days earlier, Cotman had similarly complained to Turner about another representation of a Norfolk antiquity by local artist Henry Ninham: 'How very often is very, very bad drawing—crude outline. ~~giving~~ representing neither rotundrla nor squareness given to represent a thing, that the utmost delicacy and judgmt. is necessary in'.[54] In both remarks, Cotman implies that 'correct' representation was achieved neither by presenting an overly-finished view of a building nor by over-strengthening the outline of its delineation. Instead, 'correctness' was achieved through close and patient study of its separate parts, shapes and details – however ruined – affording a fuller, more three-dimensional understanding of its whole. Turner agreed, writing anonymously in *Antiquities of Norfolk* that 'Clear views' on architectural 'facts' could 'only be obtained by much study, and by a scrupulous attention to detail.'[55]

Comparing Basire's engravings of Wolterton Manor with Cotman's two plates of the same building (Figs 125 and 126) helps to clarify the nub of Cotman's critique. Basire (after Repton) places the building at a distance from the viewer whose eye level is that of a passing rider. Our perspective allows a general view of the building while clearly positioning us within the surrounding landscape, our sightline disrupted by the oblique wedge of road in the one image and the fence in the other. From here we get only an impression of the building's intricate masonry, turrets and chimneys to which Cotman, by contrast, offers us proximity and detail. Taking advantage of the low, close viewpoints of just a partial fragment of the building's facade, Cotman's plates include crumbling and mossy masonry between the turrets (Fig. 125) as well as a wall creeper, a boarded-up

[52] These were later published in the Society of Antiquaries' fourth volume of their series, *Vetusta Monumenta.*
[53] JSC to DT, 25 January 1812, facing 20, AND/15/48, RAA.
[54] JSC to DT, 21 February 1812, MC 2487/12, NRO.
[55] *Norfolk* letterpress, 12.

window and dishevelled interior (Fig. 126), signs of architectural ruination which signify the past. Again, unlike Basire, Cotman emphasises the building's surface textures. The tight crisscrossing on the walls, broken line of the cylindrical chimney breasts, wrinkled pattern of the wooden window boards and scribbled shapes of the stonework fill the plates with multiple graphic effects. These invite the viewer to engage with the process of etching itself, a medium understood to be denotative of the artist's mind, spirit and soul rather than servility to nature.[56]

At ground level, Cotman includes conspicuous figures who, unlike Basire's tiny, inanimate livestock, are shown interacting with the house. In *West End of East Barsham House*, a woman carrying firewood seems to have rested a pile against the building's side, whilst in *South Front of East Barsham House*, another woman holding a jug and a swaddled infant appears to have just exited the house from a small door. These figures help us to imaginatively reconstruct the physical experience of being there, watching everyday life unfold amidst the structures of the past. Indeed, half of the publication's plates show men, women and children going about their daily business: for instance, a women shows a hen to her toddler before Yarmouth Tower (Figs 131 and 132); a young man, perhaps a sleeping vagrant, lies face down (Figs 133 and 134), while three slouched men stand curiously close to (or urinate upon) the wall of the Bishop's Palace Gate in Norwich as another looks on (Figs 135 and 136). These figures are much closer to the coarse individuals who populate the etchings of Giovanni Battista Piranesi than those present in contemporary antiquarian volumes such as John Britton's *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain* (1805-14) where male antiquaries passively survey the main architectural subject, as in the small duo of resting breeched men in Britton's own plate of East Barsham House (Figs 137 and 138). While Cotman did incorporate antiquarian types in *Antiquities of Norfolk*, they engage more actively with the structures than those in Britton's by looking closely, sketching and pointing (Figs 139 and 140). Cotman's decision to include his Piranesian figures in the final prints also implies (though should not be taken to indicate) that such mundane forms of everyday experience unfolded right before him as he recorded Norfolk's medieval past, reinforcing the publication's claims to accuracy and knowledge.

[56] According to John Landseer, engraving affords 'a means analogous to the objects themselves, of drawing and describing all those objects of which wildness and freedom communicated by spontaneous perception and feeling, is the Soul', John Landseer, *Lectures on the Art of Engraving...* (London, 1807), 237, a copy of which Cotman owned and which was sold in his Norwich sale of 1834. See *Catalogue of the Extensive &Valuable Collection of Rare and Fine Engravings and Etchings, a few Paintings and Drawings, Library of Books, Books* of *Prints,... which will be Sold by Auction by William Spelman, on ... the 10th, 11th, & 12th Sept. 1834 at the Residence of John Sell Cotman Esq. St. Martin's Palace Plain Norwich, (Who is leaving the City)* (1834), lot. 128.

By setting up an opposition between Cotman's and Basire's prints, I do not mean to suggest that Cotman presents us with a 'correct' or 'better' image (despite his contestation). Instead, I want to argue that Cotman's prints make artistic claims beyond those of conventional antiquarian images and are able to do so, despite appealing to the same market, because the forms of accurate representation of the past were by no means decided at this date. This, in turn, led to various visual and verbal interpretations of the same historic artefacts. The definition and systematisation of history as a discipline were still very much in their infancy in the early nineteenth century. Questions about the past were open to debate, speculation and problematisation, while historical practice was characterised by a relatively lively treatment of surviving sources: 'a rhetorical performance – almost a form of fictional realism' as Sam Smiles has described the approach.[57] Whilst images were recognised as valid research tools capable of presenting a useful record of what their makers saw, their imaginative potential was not lost on those participating in the archaeology of knowledge. As Smiles reminds us, images and their makers 'possess the power not simply to record but to invent and, as such, to attempt the retrieval of cultures that have vanished.'[58] In what Stephen Bann has termed 'the "antiquarian" attitude' to the past, the imagination was understood to go hand-in-hand with historical scholarship which, as Smiles has further observed, allowed 'the researcher to devise fresh approaches to the problem of visualizing the past'.[59] Thus, while the 1810s saw a more active move in some circles, namely London's Society of Antiquaries, towards classifying and mastering the past (including its architecture with Thomas Rickman's influential *An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of Architecture in England*, published in 1817), a fluid and playful language of antiquarian discourse was still widespread.[60]

This language is readily detectable in Turner's *Antiquities of Norfolk* letterpress. At one point the reader/viewer is advised to regard his classifications of architectural styles and dates 'only as a sketch' because they 'rest only on conjecture, I am thus fully sensible of its probable inadequacy to convey distinct notions, and I also feel that nothing of the kind

[57] Smiles, 'British Antiquity and Antiquarian Illustration' in Myrone and Peltz (eds), *Producing the Past*, 58. On the playfulness of early nineteenth-century antiquarianism, see Hill, *Antiquaries in the Age of Romanticism: 1789-1851*, unpublished PhD thesis, 17-99.
[58] Sam Smiles, 'Imaging British History – Patriotism, Professional Arts Practice and the Quest for Precision' in Sheila Bonde and Stephen Houston (eds), *Representing the Past: Archaeology through Image & Text* (Providence, 2013), 13.
[59] Bann, *The Inventions of History* and Smiles in Bonde and Houston, *Representing the Past*, 13.
[60] See Smiles, *Eye Witness: Artists and Visual Documentation in Britain, 1770-1830* (Aldershot, 2000), 52.

can be otherwise.'[61] Openness and conjecture were, Turner implies, the only ways to re-present the past for modern audiences. His approach also serves to invoke the reader/viewer who is addressed not only as a recipient of knowledge, but as an enlightened peer participating in its acquisition and one conversant with a self-reflexive mode of writing which admitted the possibilities and limits of chronicling the past. Cotman was similarly frank about the volume's open and imaginative approach to the past in the prospectus to the publication:

> Although it will be the principal object of the Author to exhibit faithfully the styles of the various Structures, yet he will not be inattentive to the selection of the most favourable points of view; being persuaded it will be the wish of his Subscribers to see architectural fidelity combined with picturesque effect.

All this is not to say that antiquarianism did not demand accuracy in the strictest sense of the word.[62] As we shall see in the following part, it is clear that it did. Indeed, openly mixing 'architectural fidelity' with 'picturesque effect' led some to question Cotman's treatment of medieval antiquities. In January 1812, the editor of the *Norfolk Chronicle* and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, William Stevenson, subscribed to four volumes of *Antiquities of Norfolk*, but only after receiving assurances from the respected Dawson Turner, whom Cotman thanked 'for being my advocate as Mr. S—told me you had vindicated my cause by your belief that I was a correct draughtsman.'[63] Even with Turner's recommendation, however, Stevenson continued to question Cotman's representational 'correctness'. In February 1812, the artist told Turner of an instance (previously mentioned) in which Stevenson had chosen Ninham over himself to draw the porch of Arminghall Hall, because 'Mr. Stevenson said I could not do it sufficiently correct for an Antiquarian.'[64] As an artist who continually associated himself with different personae, media and genres, who openly blended accuracy and effect, and who had published just one etched volume which had been aimed at amateur practitioners and professional artists, what indeed qualified Cotman to provide the antiquarian market with 'correct' representations of Norfolk's architecture?

The antiquarian emphasis on direct observation could help Cotman in this regard. Writing under the pseudonym 'Normanno-Britannicus' in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1819, and

[61] *Norfolk* letterpress, 12.
[62] On the various debates and understanding around accuracy in the visual recording of historical remains, see Smiles, *Eye Witness*.
[63] JSC to DT, 11 January 1812, MC 2487/10, NRO.
[64] JSC to DT, 21 February 1812, MC 2487/12, NRO.

again under his own name in *Antiquities of Normandy*'s 'Preface', Turner identified Cotman's nativeness to Norfolk as an asset in his production of many 'excellent' printed volumes of the county's medieval antiquities.[65] 'Bred up in the midst of these, and warmly partaking in the admiration for them', here was an artist with the innate ability to provide the antiquary with detailed, local knowledge of Norfolk's artefacts. Moreover, given his 'strong attachment to his profession and the subject', it was natural that Cotman should 'chance to add a residence in Norfolk' enabling him to devote 'his pencil and his graver to the diffusion of their fame.' By framing the artist's authenticity in terms of his social origins and geographical location, Turner spins Cotman's residence in Yarmouth as being motivated by his dedication to the objects of his study rather than by necessity. In so doing, Turner indirectly invokes the metropolitan bias (discussed in Chapter 3) by implying that dedication had prompted Cotman to risk his career by residing in his home county, thereby making a virtue out of that necessity. Unlike antiquarian patrons and publishers in London who sent their draughtsmen out into the field to take a subject which would then be passed onto a printmaker in the metropolis, Cotman was the artist, the etcher and the publisher of his images. Alongside his collaboration with a respected and knowledgeable local resident, those images could be depended upon to substantiate close and sustained knowledge.

Attestations to first-hand information are made verbally and visually in *Antiquities of Norfolk*. Written in the first person and as if by Cotman himself, Turner's letterpress is scattered with references to the artist's physical interaction with Norfolk's architectural sites.[66] Cotman is cast as a seasoned traveller whose knowledge and experience of the region enabled him to draw architectural comparisons and vouch for the exceptionality of the selected specimens:

> Round Towers, such as that of this Church, are of common occurrence in Norfolk and Suffolk, but not so, I believe, in other parts of England.[67]

Other passages refer to the physical exertion endured by the artist in representing a remote antiquity, amplifying both the rarity and purported veracity of both text and image. An accompanying description to the plates of Church at Walsoken asserts that:

[65] *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 126, no. 2 (November 1819), 408-9.
[66] The illusion that Cotman was both author and artist differed from other antiquarian volumes where the division of labour between printmaker and author was clearly visible or overtly stated, as in James Storer's preface to his first volume of *History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Churches of Great Britain* (1814) which stated 'the writers are not the artists.'
[67] *Norfolk* letterpress, 5.

> it has hitherto escaped the observation of every author on the subject of antiquities. This has, probably arisen from its situation in the fens, remote from any public road...[68]

Claims to presence are also made in the prints, most notably in the attention Cotman pays to surface textures and minute details of which *Interior of South Runcton Church* and *Bromholm Priory* (Figs 141 and 142) are apt examples. Here, multiple tiny lozenges, rectangles and squares signify flint, brick and stone, and threaten to break away from the main architectural mass, recalling the textural and compositional effects that Cotman achieved in plates from his *Miscellaneous Etchings* such as *North Creek Abbey* (Fig. 113), as well as those deployed in etchings by Piranesi (see Fig. 143 for example) whom Cotman expressed a desire to 'decidedly follow' in his own printmaking.[69] Exercising such sensitivity to the unruly character of ruined medieval buildings could, these images suggest, provide an accurate representation. This stance likely prompted Cotman to take Britton to task for his publication of comparatively finished and refined representations of certain Norfolk antiquities. In the third volume of his *Architectural Antiquities* (1812), Britton included two etchings by John 'Antiquary' Smith depicting the interior and exterior of the Lady Chapel in King's Lynn which Cotman had also visited and drawn in 'two points of view' in September 1811. Presumably having seen the proofs of Smith's etchings, Cotman announced to Turner that 'Britton is most unpardonably incorrect, both in the general and in the detail' of this structure.[70] Referring to the publisher instead of the printmaker or the original artist (Frederick Mackenzie who incidentally trained under John Adey Repton), Cotman's statement insinuates that Britton had waved through his employees' 'incorrect' representations because he had not seen the chapel himself.

Again, a comparison between Cotman's plate of this architectural structure (Fig. 144), which was distributed in the third instalment in spring 1812, with Smith's etching of the same subject (Fig. 145), indicates what it was that seems to have drawn Cotman's ire. Neatly and tightly etched, Smith's plate has an even, finished surface. Thanks to the manipulation of architectural perspective and the lighter area of the composition's central space which draws the gaze upwards, the vaulted ceiling and its tracery are shown in full,

[68] *Norfolk* letterpress, 6.
[69] JSC to DT, 10 February 1811, inserted into *Antiquities of Norfolk*, 166, D22, BM. In February 1812, Turner purchased a set of Piranesi etchings from William Stevenson, an acquisition which seems to have been prompted by Cotman's enthusiasm for the Italian master, DT to William Stevenson, 7 December 1811, quoted in Hemingway, '"The English Piranesi", *Walpole Society*, 241, f.n. 28, where Cotman's interest in Piranesi is addressed more fully.
[70] JSC to DT, 20 September 1811, MC 2487/7, NRO.

thus highlighting them as the image's main subjects of antiquarian interest. Cotman's (larger) image does none of this. Instead, it provides the eye with plentiful visual stimuli and various etched marks which are considerably more vigorous and assorted in their thickness and alignment. His motifs and marks scatter the gaze across the surface, an effect amplified by our comparatively low and oblique position which affords as much focus to the cluttered, potholed floor as it does to the vaulted ceiling. This floor appears to be on the point of eruption. Slabs of pockmarked stone, broken masonry and wooden planks rest unevenly on an exposed layer, providing a plethora of shapes and an irregularity of marks which forge a dramatic contrast with Smith's level sheet of floor tiles, only antiquated by the odd clump of fallen masonry.[71]

We can read the disorderliness of Cotman's scene as a characteristic device to conjure a sense of picturesque antiquity. Yet the profusion of visual details also serves to bolster the volume's claims to authenticity by acting together as a sort of 'reality effect', Roland Barthes' term for describing the deployment of an overabundance of seemingly superfluous detail which has the illusionistic effect of endorsing the reality of a scene.[72] Recalling the doubts that Cotman expressed about the 'correctness' of Basire/Repton who gave 'finish where none was meant', we can similarly suppose that it was the uncluttered space and stylistic completion of Smith's plate that Cotman judged 'incorrect'. For him, authenticity was in the detail, and detail implied physically-close looking. In this way, Cotman's etchings are openly performative: truth is to be found in the performance of their own production, not only technically – the vigorous marks and textures calling to mind the artist's own hand and the images' status as etchings – but also somatically, the reader/viewer (via Cotman) encouraged to rehearse the very process of exploring a different angle or unusual aspect of a building.

Indeed, Cotman's etchings seem to have been intended to incite a desire to go and look. Even Britton admitted that 'Cotmans Etchings have excited my curiosity to see, & examine'.[73] The vigour and texture that Cotman was able to achieve were evidently the

[71] The uneven ground remains in another composition in which Cotman took the same viewpoint as Smith (known through various copies by the Turner daughters: Turner family album at Ashmolean Museum, ADD MSS 23034, BL and 1954.138.Todd18.Freebridge.30, NCMAG) and an etching by Cotman included in *Specimens of Architectural Remains in Various Counties in England, but principally in Norfolk* (plate 25, vol. 2), published by Henry Bohn in 1838.

[72] Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford, 1986), 141-48.

[73] John Britton (hereafter JB) to DT, 26 January 1818, Trinity. JB to DT, 12 December 1816, 29 March 1817, 15 July 1817, 21 March 1818, 18 June 1818, GBR/0016/TURNER1/01, Trinity. Britton's letters to Turner from the 1810s reveal his keen interest in Cotman's art and Turner's knowledge, as well as a

qualities that Britton wished to see in his own print publications. Writing to Turner in 1813, the publisher admitted to often feeling obliged to publish plates in a comparatively finished (what he called a 'middling') style because of his etchers' abilities (many of whom had trained as engravers). Lamenting the 'light, rather faint' plates that appeared in his *Historical and Architectural Essay Relating to Redcliffe Church, Bristol* (1813), Britton told Turner of his original intention to have them:

> left as smart etchings, but the engravers did not feel with them & I was obliged to have the plates at last published in a middling style or between finishd & Etchings. I want to have some Architectural plates in the clear, firm & vigorous manner of Piranesi, or in the style of the N. Porch at Redcliffe by Le Keux.[74]

To be 'left as smart etchings' implies a purity and immediacy of medium, the original incisions bitten, printed and then left with little intervention or finishing-off. Speaking to the students of the RA in 1798, James Barry had employed the same word with a similar connotation when describing how to capture the folds in drapery by rendering 'some more smart and frequently interrupted, others more flowing, majestic, and composed of larger parts.'[75] The juxtaposition of the word 'smart' with 'frequently interrupted' and their distinction from 'flowing', indicates that 'smart' was synonymous with terms such as 'distinct', 'quick' and 'energetic', as per its dictionary definition.[76] To these we might add Britton's adjectives 'clear, firm & vigorous' which he associated with the etchings of Piranesi and the London printmaker, John Le Keux – words we might also use to describe Cotman's etchings. Britton's remark implies that with 'smart' etchings came originality and authenticity, the textural effect being looser in finish and closer to drawing.

By these definitions, Cotman's *Antiquities of Norfolk* plates can be considered 'smart etchings', their deeply bitten marks, vigorous flecks and the thickness and tonality of their lines being technically close to his pencil drawings – there is a stylistic similitude between the marks achieved in *South Front of East Barsham House* and *The North-West Tower, Yarmouth* (Figs 126 and 131) and those in their preparatory drawings (Figs 146

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frequent eagerness to know of the former's projects and whether the latter would bestow him with antiquarian contacts and information. JB to DT, 21 March 1818, GBR/0016/TURNER1/01, Trinity also shows that Britton subscribed to several copies of the *Antiquities of Norfolk* and Cotman's other printed works which he then sold from his Tavistock Place premises.

[74] JB to DT, 29 December 1813, GBR/0016/TURNER1/01,Trinity.

[75] James Barry, *The Works of James Barry, Esq, Historical Painter*..., 2 vols (London, 1809), vol. 1, 498.

[76] 'smart, *n*, *v*. and *adj*.', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (1989), https://www.oed.com, accessed 3 June 2014.

and 147), the latter inscribed '2064' showing that it was also circulated as a drawing-copy.[77] Such intermediality between etching and drawing registers contemporary notions of the former as a facile, immediate and spirited medium which, like drawing (but notably unlike engraving), had associations with private moments of the artist's experimental process.[78] Unlike the comparatively tight technique of engraving, etching was understood to have a correspondingly loose association with the market – associations which could help Cotman to protect his artistic persona and make a virtue out of his engagement with that market. Furthermore, etching was attractive to fine artists like Cotman because it required relatively little specialist training yet could still signify as the product of artistic skill. This might explain why *Antiquities of Norfolk* was consistently advertised as comprising 'Sixty Highly-Finished Etchings', invoking issues around rarity and value as well as material concerns to do with how much of the plate was etched and at what point the artist made the judgement to stop. Unlike engraving, the etched copper plate yielded a limited print run meaning that those in circulation were available on a limited basis only. Rather than referring to conventional notions of 'finish', therefore, 'Highly-Finished' might also attest to *Antiquities of Norfolk* etchings' flawlessness, originality and their status as artworks. That they were received as such is indicated by a critic for the *Gentleman's Magazine* who, in March 1818, described them as 'drawn and etched, in a clear, free, and spirited style, by Mr. Cotman, who by their execution has evinced very considerable abilities', words picked up by the *New Monthly Magazine* who noted Cotman's 'spirited and intelligent manner (lo bello stile che gli la fatto onore) which so conspicuously marks his productions.'[79]

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After its publication in January 1818, *Antiquities of Norfolk* was variously mentioned in the periodical press. Few reviews appeared, however, though it is probable that the work was received more privately within antiquarian circles, and Turner certainly appears to

[77] An 1830s copy by the amateur, Francis Anne Martineau, is at NCMAG, 13.25.964.
[78] The key text here is the Revd. William Gilpin's *Essay Upon Prints* (first published 1768) which conflated drawing and printmaking: 'The needle, gliding along the surface of the copper, meets no resistance; and easily takes any turn the hand pleases to give it. Etching indeed is mere drawing: and may be practised with the same facility', 5th edition (London, 1802), 31-2.
[79] *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 88, part 1 (March 1818), 253 and *New Monthly Magazine* vol. 12, no. 67 (August 1819), 24.

have sold Cotman's publications within his own networks.[80] Nevertheless, the work was a personal success for Cotman, leading him to boast that 'my works have gained me credit in ye world & have been introduced through them to many of the first men in London this flatters me.'[81] It also led to his involvement in other topographical publications, including Thomas Cromwell's *Excursions Through the County of Norfolk...* and *...of Suffolk* (1818) to which he contributed seventy-seven drawings. Besides the salary from Turner, there is little evidence concerning the publication's immediate financial outcome,[82] yet Cotman's production of other etched volumes, not to mention his embarkation on *Antiquities of Normandy* in 1817, suggest that there was a market for his prints amongst the upper echelons of society. Additionally, as Hemingway speculated, Cotman 'seems to have kept the management of his publications [excepting *Antiquities of Normandy*] entirely to himself, using professional publishers only as his booksellers'.[83] Whilst I would add to this statement the involvement of Turner, this does appear to have been the case: by publishing the volume himself, Cotman could potentially retain the profits. [84]

Hemingway's point can be pushed further, however. Despite his employment by Turner, it does seem that *Antiquities of Norfolk* was a project in which Cotman was able to maintain a substantial amount of creative independence. Besides Charles Sloman of Yarmouth who printed the work, the London and Norfolk publishers who sold it, and the apprentices who were employed to help Cotman finish the later plates, Turner was the artist's only true collaborator, and one who does not appear to have been an impinging factor on the work's production.[85] Turner's anonymous patronage and authorship as well

[80] In 1816, the antiquary William Upcott told Turner that he was 'aware of Mr Cotman's interesting works, tho' I have never seen more than a few specimens, but am acquainted with a person in the profession of them, and shall therefore notice them in their proper place.' William Upcott (hereafter WU) to DT, 1 July 1816, GBR/0016/TURNER1/01, Trinity. A year later, the politician and botanist, George Hooker, wrote to Turner with confirmation that he had paid a £10.16s 'debt to you for Cotman's works', George Hooker to DT, 17 October 1817, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013,Trinity.

[81] JSC to FC, 21 January 1818, NYRO.

[82] Though, in 1820, William Upcott wondered why Cotman 'should suffer his Norfolk plates to be hawked about as they are—in shop windows at 1/6 each—and to be met with at most sham print sales––in Cheapside—& elsewhere...', WU to DT, 15 July 1820, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013,Trinity. This statement also substantiates the point made in the main text that Cotman was not seeking to control the *Antiquities of Norfolk* as a commercial package, but was reconciled to leaving its afterlife – like its format and delivery – relatively open-ended.

[83] Hemingway, 'Cotman's 'Architectural Antiquities of Normandy', *Walpole Society*, vol. 46 (1976-8), 164-85, 173.

[84]Alongside the publishers, Longman, Lackington, Colnaghi and White in London, the Freemans in Norwich and Sloman in Yarmouth, Cotman's own title, 'THE AUTHOR, AT SOUTHTOWN, SUFFOLK', appeared on the frontispiece. Boydell and Britton also sold the volume and both sets of *Brasses*. See WU to DT, 15 July 1817 and JB to DT, 21 March 1818, both GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.

[85] Evidence for Cotman's employment of an apprentice is provided in Hemingway, '"The English Piranesi", *Walpole Society*.

as his first-person narrative to which Cotman's identity was appended, positioned the artist as the volume's sole producer. The character of both men's relationship also enabled Cotman to retain a reasonable amount of freedom in the management of his working life in Yarmouth, including, as we have seen, the use of his etchings' preparatory material for other ends. Should the arrangement with the Turners have been ad hoc at times, the set number of days which Cotman worked on his print projects could, in theory, liberate him from the identity of the fully-fledged drawing master. In short, the arrangement worked. By selling *Antiquities of Norfolk* but engaging only lightly with the market, working closely with a likeminded collaborator but outwardly retaining sole authorship, and making prints that were antiquarian in their subject matter and projected audience but whose artistic style and status as artworks remained intact, Cotman could work in a relatively safe zone between art and business. That relationship would shift dramatically, however, during the production of *Antiquities of Normandy*.

3. The clash between art and collaboration: *Antiquities of Normandy* (1817-22)

In the spring of 1817, letters flew back and forth between Turner and his banking partner, Hudson Gurney, about bankrolling a new work by Cotman on Norman antiquities. Writing to Gurney in April, Turner introduced the plan and its artist:

> whom you know, I believe, only by name, but whom you will believe upon my authority to be no less worthy as a man than he is industrious & disposed to be useful as an artist, sees his publication upon Norfolk Ancient Architecture & on Sepulchral Brasses nearly brought to an end, without his pockets being filled, & without his seeing any other work immediately before him that may help him to support his family. He has been talking to me therefore about going to France this next Midsummer Holidays, & spendg his six weeks of leisure in making drawings of remains of antiquity in Normandy, which he may publish on his return ... I hope indeed, & my hope made me also to think, that the book wd sell; & I consider him eminently qualified (except in his ignorance of the French language)...[86]

Correspondence between Turner and Gurney from earlier in the decade reveal their long-standing interest in Anglo-Norman antiquities, each having travelled to France around the time of the Peace of Amiens (1802-3), amassed books on Normandy and made contacts with Norman antiquaries. Since then, Turner had been writing a two-volume *Account of a*

[86] DT to HG, 5 April 1817, N1/1/9, NRO. All underlining is by Gurney in different ink to Turner's.

Tour in Normandy (which was subsequently published in 1820 and illustrated with etchings by his family after drawings by Cotman). Turner and Gurney's Normandy pursuits belonged to a broader interest in the province that had been developing in Anglo-French antiquarian culture since the mid-eighteenth century, central to which was the question of whether the Norman (that is, Romanesque) architectural style had originated in France or England.[87] Well aware that both countries' ancient histories were linked, English and French antiquaries began to see the benefits of a comparative approach to studying Norman remains. In 1767, the English antiquary, Andrew Ducarel, published *Anglo-Norman Antiquities* which sought to differentiate the 'Norman' and 'Saxon' styles in both countries. Yet as the Norfolk antiquary and a dedicatee of *Antiquities of Norfolk*, Frank Sayers, observed in 1805, Ducarel had 'merely begun an enquiry which might certainly be pursued with great advantage' by somebody else.[88] The subject of Cotman's proposed publication could thus be pitted against a tome like Ducarel's. It was also topical and could be expected to sell.

The publication initially conceived by Cotman – and likely to an extent by Turner, given his personal interest in both the subject matter and the artist's financial circumstances – appears to have been similar in scope to *Antiquities of Norfolk*. It was ambitious insofar as it would focus on provincial architectural antiquities, manageable in that it was intended to be produced and published by the artist himself, and focused enough for the expenses to be kept low and the preparatory work confined to Cotman's leisure time. Turner's praise of Cotman as a 'useful' artist who could provide a study in which he and Gurney shared an interest evidently persuaded the latter to agree to patronise the project with Turner and 'assist Cotman to the amt. you mention' (Turner had suggested £30 or £40).[89] However, Gurney was at pains to point out several things he saw lacking in Cotman's plan, identifying a larger, more serious historical project requiring more knowledge, preparation and people:

> I do not think a man so little acquainted as Cotman is described to be either with French or with what he is to look for would make much of a journey to Normandy simply as an artist—There seems evidently a prior step wanting—Namely to have <u>what</u> remains of an age that would render it generally interesting in England—purveyed by some one, alike of

[87] See Hill, *Antiquaries in the Age of Romanticism*, unpublished PhD thesis, 17-161.
[88] Frank Sayers, *Miscellanies, Antiquarian and Historical* (Norwich, 1805), 71. Likewise, Gurney told Turner that 'Ducarel for modern interests is out of date—& his Antiquities very bad—& I know of none, English since.' HG to DT, 20 April 1820, TURN II/K1/31, Trinity.
[89] HG to DT, 17 April, quoted in Hemingway, 'Cotman's 'Architectural Antiquities of Normandy', *Walpole Society*, 169 (original un-locatable at Trinity).

> architecture. This is, the desiratum appears to me, to be—a Historical tour in Normandy—illustrated by the artist—a sort of work which would be no small Historical preparation to set about.[90]

What Gurney (who was elected to the Society of Antiquaries in 1817) was essentially proposing was a large, text-heavy historical book that would be structured as a tour through Normandy in order of the dates in which the Norman edifices were thought to have been erected. As his reference to 'some one, alike of architecture' suggests, the book should contain a letterpress written by a knowledgeable architectural antiquary who would also, he implies, oversee the project on which Cotman would work as the illustrator only.

The book that materialised five years later was indeed far closer to Gurney's aspirations than to the tome initially outlined by Turner. Comprising two imperial volumes with over 100,000 words of letterpress (eventually contributed by Turner) and ninety-seven etchings by Cotman, the *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy* was a large commercial enterprise involving expenses of over £2,000, funding of hundreds of pounds from Turner, Gurney and a London speculator, the antiquary William Upcott (1779-1845), and the involvement of several others.[91] These included tour guides, antiquaries, booksellers, printers, publishers, an assistant etcher, and Cotman's own wife who helped to manage the assistant and update Turner on her husband's progress in his absence. Yet with over six months spent away from Yarmouth between 1817 and 1820 and an enormous amount of work to produce, Cotman's teaching duties became interrupted, the sheer volume of labour exacerbating his pre-existing health problems (including poor eyesight, worsened by the acid used when biting the plates)[92] and various other pressures delayed the publication's completion by over a year. When finally completed in 1822, *Antiquities of Normandy* received only a lukewarm reception. Meanwhile, Cotman's relations with his various 'collaborators' were left strained, including with the book's 'author', Dawson Turner.

[90] HG to DT, 23 April 1817, TURN III/A10/10, Trinity.
[91] While the publication was advertised with 100 plates, there are actually ninety-seven: Cotman gave the five largest plates a double number and added two plates which he left unnumbered. £2,000 is the amount calculated from references in the surviving correspondence and mirrors Hemingway's calculation (1976-8).
[92] During these years, Cotman complained of exhaustion, sweaty night sleeps and poor eyesight. The latter had had dogged him since his twenties but painful eyes had become increasingly frequent and sometimes incapacitating meaning that, on occasions, he had to stop work altogether.

This final part argues that the relatively stable balance between art, collaboration and business that Cotman had been able to maintain in concert with Turner during the production of *Antiquities of Norfolk* became considerably more fragile as he worked on *Antiquities of Normandy*. Brought ever closer to the terms and expectations of the various people involved in the project, Cotman was forced to make artistic concessions which compromised his identity as an independent artist and impacted upon the style, technique and meanings of his etchings. Unlike Tim Wilcox's recent account of Cotman in Normandy which interprets the involvement of these other people in a predominantly positive light, the story that I tell here is one about the artist's struggle to retain autonomy in the face of the social and economic realities of making art in an increasingly commercialised and networked British art world.[93]

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Before telling that story, however, it is helpful to set the scene with a description of *Antiquities of Normandy*. Comprising two bulky volumes, Cotman's sixth and final print publication chronicles the architectural history and styles of over fifty churches, castles and houses in the French province. Most of these were believed (at least by Turner) to date from the rule of the Norman dukes, stretching from the end of the tenth century to the cessation of the Duchy in 1259. '[B]y taking those [edifices] whose dates are best defined', stated Turner's 'Preface', the book was intended to enable 'the British antiquary and the amateur ... not only to know the state of this extraordinary people, as to their arts, at the epoch of their greatest glory, but also to compare what is in Normandy with what they find at home'. The cross-Channel comparative approach was therefore posited as a central feature of the project. Indeed, Turner's letterpress is filled with comparisons of British – particularly Norfolk – buildings in the Norman style with the French specimens he described.

The book's emphasis on the Norman era meant that Cotman occasionally cropped out later architectural additions in his plates. For example, the spire of the Abbey Church of St. Georges de Boscherville in plate six (Fig. 148) is lopped off because, according to Turner's description, it was not of Norman origin. Nevertheless, Turner and Cotman continued to be interested in architectural diversity within this time span. Cotman's letters

[93] See Wilcox, *Cotman in Normandy*.

regularly rhapsodised about the 'curious' architectural features he had encountered on his Normandy tours, an enthusiasm which is carried over into Turner's letterpress, which frequently delights in the variety offered by Norman buildings.

However, the variety of marks, textures and details that characterise the etchings of *Antiquities of Norfolk* are lacking in those of *Antiquities of Normandy* which are more stylistically uniform and finished.[94] The plates of the *Church of St Peter, at Lisieux* and *Abbey Church of St. Etienne, Caen* (Figs 149 and 150) are two indicative examples: controlled, steady marks, slender, perpendicular lines, sizable, crisp shapes and blank, negative spaces characterise the appearance of these two structures, which are placed at a relative distance from the viewer to admit a view of their full-frontal entirety. There are a number of instances where Cotman did vary the images' viewpoints: sometimes, for instance, he provides a lower perspective (again, Fig. 148); occasionally we view a castle surrounded by landscape from a remote vantage point (see Fig. 151), whilst in others we assume a relatively elevated position as if looking across from an adjacent building (as in Fig. 152). Yet we are rarely allowed to get as close to the subject as we were in the *Antiquities of Norfolk* plates, nor do the majority of the images' foregrounds include conspicuous figures as before; more often, they consist of under-etched, sparsely-populated blank spaces as in Cotman's fifteenth plate of *Great House At Great Andelys* (Fig. 153). The representational modes that Cotman employed in *Antiquities of Normandy* are more akin to those of conventional architectural volumes: besides seventeen interior and sixty exterior views (five of which fold-out on a double sheet), Cotman provided seven elevations, three pages showing two or more architectural subjects and nine pages of studies such as capitals or relief sculpture, which similarly filled standard antiquarian tomes such as John Carter's *The Ancient Architecture of England* (1795-1814) and the Society of Antiquaries' long-running illustrated series of papers, *Vetusta Monumenta.*

Moreover, unlike the separation of text and image in *Antiquities of Norfolk*, Cotman's ninety-seven plates are interspersed with Turner's 125 pages of letterpress, mirroring the general design of other illustrated antiquarian volumes. The etchings do not follow the structure of a geographical tour, nor are the buildings arranged in date order, while

[94] On a practicable level this uniformity may have been partially determined by Cotman's employment of an assistant, the Yarmouth-based artist Joseph Lambert, who helped to finish the plates from 1819. Cotman's style would therefore need to be clear and replicable enough to enable Lambert to retain stylistic consistency, as a letter to Ann Cotman implies: 'pray Lambert take up any of them & carry them on a you see is consistent with my style.' JSC to AC, 2 September 1820, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM. Yet as this quote demonstrates, there are other explanations for the shift in style made by *Antiquities of Normandy* from Cotman's earlier etchings.

Turner's letterpress, composed of 1,000-3,000-word essays per building (including lengthy endnotes), follows a geographically-haphazard arrangement corresponding to the plates' production dates. This is unsurprising given the plates' distribution in four numbers between January 1820 and June 1822. Yet the random order also implies the relatively haphazard nature in which Cotman went about his tours,[95] which may in turn be symptomatic of the different directions in which he was being pulled by his 'collaborators' (discussed shortly).

Turner's essays generally comprise a historical narrative followed by a description of the subject's architectural features, the former occasionally containing quotes apparently from ancient notables as well as accounts of the structures' ownership and use history. The architectural remarks are typically more dry than his *Antiquities of Norfolk* descriptions. Of these, Bann has noted that Turner 'simply enumerates the bare facts ... which we can then verify (if we feel so inclined) by checking Cotman's image for ourselves.'[96] The following pairing of Turner's letterpress and corresponding image by Cotman of the *Church of St Nicholas, at Caen* (Fig. 154) illustrates Bann's point:

> In the east end of the church of St. Nicholas, (see *plate fifty-six*,) may be remarked a sensible approximation in point of style, to the same part in the church of the Trinity. The circular apsis is divided into compartments by slender cylindrical pillars; and each intercolumniation is filled by a couple of windows of comparatively large size, placed one above the other, while a row of narrow blank arches occupies the lower part.[97]

Bann calls such paragraphs Turner's 'redundant passages of description'.[98] They do not serve to enliven Cotman's image or leave much to the reader/viewer's imagination as was the case in *Antiquities of Norfolk*. Yet given the book's textually-minded audience, we might invert Bann's phrase and propose that it is actually Turner's passages which make Cotman's images redundant by running all over them with their 'precise' description and data – a point to which I shall return.

Perhaps due to the scale of the project and its international (rather than local, Norfolk-based) market, no dedications were appended to Cotman's plates. While Turner's 'Preface' did nod to three French antiquaries who had assisted Cotman on his tours,

[95] As has been charted in a map of Normandy published in Wilcox, *Cotman in Normandy*, 14-15.
[96] Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History*, 115.
[97] *Normandy* letterpress, 60.
[98] Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History*, 116.

Auguste le Prevost, Philippe Rondeau and Charles de Gerville, as well as to the historian (and Turner's son-in-law) Francis Cohen who provided historical information, numerous other collaborators were not acknowledged which piqued their annoyance. It is to the production and the problems of *Antiquities of Normandy* that we shall now turn.

***

Cotman set off for Dieppe on 19 June 1817.[99] For over seven weeks he toured Normandy sketching architectural remains, sometimes accompanied by Turner and Gurney's French antiquarian contacts, and writing several letters back to Turner about the antiquities he encountered. However, just a few weeks in he told Turner that he did not find the architecture as remarkable as in Norfolk: 'I have not yet met with one so fine, so curious as our Castle Rising Ch'.[100] Aware of the need to focus on Norman buildings, he nonetheless found that 'The churches of y middle ages are the most beautiful'.[101] This is something that Gurney had been afraid of when agreeing to help fund the project a few months earlier; Cotman, no longer the native boy, did not possess the 'innate' knowledge of Normandy or the stricter, methodical approach to antiquarianism taken by Gurney.[102] Unconvinced of Cotman's qualification for the job, Gurney expressed to Turner his regret that he had not seen the artist before his departure, when he could have affirmed the importance of sticking to the project's historical framework:

> as though I doubt his being the Artist—yet if any competent artist did go—I should greatly wish to be aiding in which to a person with my taste would appear a National desideratum.—and the £15 you advance him before—did not go to my ideas of the Assistance fair to be given—With the £30 you so let him have—& £50 more in that country—He may be at least go—& see—But I would wish if you could with propriety & without interfering with his views as an artist—that you would set him on Anglo-Norman remains—Rather than on what He may find of

[99] I do not aim to give a full account of Cotman's tours and experiences in Normandy. For this, see Rajnai and Allthorpe-Guyton (eds), *John Sell Cotman: Drawings of Normandy in Norwich Castle Museum*, exh. cat. (Suffolk, 1975) and Wilcox, *Cotman in Normandy*. These texts draw on Cotman letters to his wife and Turner, now in the Barker Collection at the BM (1956.12.12.47-75), which were published in H. Isherwood Kay, 'John Sell Cotman's letters from Normandy 1817-1820': part 1, 1817-18, *Walpole Society*, vol. 14 (1926), 81-122 and part 2, 1820, *Walpole Society*, vol. 15 (1927), 105-30.
[100] JSC to DT, 6-7 and 12 July 1817, 1956.12.12.50-1, Barker Collection, BM (hereafter referred to by reference number and 'BM' only).
[101] JSC to DT, 6-7 and 12 July 1817, 1956.12.12.50-1, BM.
[102] Gurney frequently spoke of the need to develop a 'methodized' approach to antiquarian enquiry which was at odds with Turner's freer approach. See HG to DT, 23 April 1817, TURN III/A10/10, Trinity.

> later construction—as of interest Here—& I have no doubt whatever of their selling better.[103]

Turner replied corroborating his partner's fear by telling him that Cotman was 'full of delight, but it is chiefly at works built after the Anglo-Norman times'. However, Turner had an ulterior motive for underplaying Cotman's success in relation to Gurney's stipulations; after all, Cotman was his employee and Gurney's expectations needed to be managed lest the project became too unwieldy for the artist to handle alongside his teaching duties:

> Cotman is a drawing master, as well as an author-artist & his prolonging his stay abroad at this time wd be likely to be detrimental to his interest among his pupils ... I wish him to return as soon as his £40—is expended, & I am persuaded I shall be able to dispatch him next year with a quarter chance of his answering our purpose & his own. My opinion of his being the right man for his job is quite erroneous with yours. I do not think there is another individual in England equally qualified. But we shall, both of us, soon see who is right.[104]

This passage implies that it was not Cotman's pupils who would suffer his absence from Yarmouth, but Cotman himself.[105] Turner no longer positions Cotman as a colleague or a collaborator but as an answerable employee to be directed and dispatched, even, as his last remark implies, to take a punt on. And while he touted Cotman as 'the right man for the job', it was nevertheless a job that he was being funded to do. In turn, Turner's insistence that Cotman return home suggests his uneasiness about the artist's involvement in a project that was already being determined by Gurney, a representative of a particular kind of antiquarianism – one self-consciously obedient to exacting norms by which accuracy was claimed and for which Gurney's own London Society of Antiquaries provided the yardstick.[106] Such individuals and societies were unlikely to accommodate Cotman's imaginative approach to architecture. Should the project become as large, commercial and 'collaborative' as Gurney evidently intended, Cotman's images would risk being crippled by the determinants of their functional ethos, in turn stripping him of the ability to claim artistic originality and authority. Despite Turner's attempts to contain

[103] HG to DT, 14 July 1817, TURN III/A10/15, Trinity.
[104] DT to HG, 19 July 1817, N1/1/11, NRO.
[105] The word 'pupils' may suggest local students and Circulating Portfolio subscribers besides the Turner family.
[106] On various occasions, Gurney checked the accuracy of Cotman's Normandy drawings with other Society of Antiquaries members. See a reference to this in HG to DT, 6 February 1818, TURN III/A10/19, Trinity.

the scope of the project, he conceded to Gurney's request to advance more money to Cotman, who remained in Normandy three weeks longer.

Even as work on *Antiquities of Normandy* was beginning, then, Cotman was being placed in a double-bind by two different men. While Gurney claimed that he did not want Cotman's 'views as an artist' to be interfered with, he was nevertheless content to prescribe his movements, subjects and even the nature of his 'taste'. Likewise, Turner was keen for the project to satisfy his own antiquarian interests and welcomed the opportunities it could give Cotman's career and finances, yet he simultaneously stepped-up his management of the artist to treat him more like an employee than a collaborator. Moreover, with a strict historical framework, instructive purpose, niche subject and particular antiquarian audience, Cotman could not now purport to be willed by his artistic spirit and depict the specimens that appealed to his own imagination. He would now need to be directed to relevant specimens and illustrate them with accuracy in the strictest sense of the word. There would be little room for 'picturesque effect' this time; his etchings could be pleasing to the eye but not at the expense of their truthful communication of useful, 'objective' knowledge, as Turner indicated in his 'Preface':

> The author of a work which professes to be in any degree didactic, can never impress too strongly upon his mind the value of the Roman precept, "prodesse quàm delectare" ["to be of service rather than to delight"]; and an artist, accustomed by his habits to the contemplation of the beautiful and the picturesque, requires above all men to be warned on this head.[107]

Similar remarks appear elsewhere in the book, such as that accompanying Cotman's plate showing an elevation of the Church of Than:

> Subjects like this, however necessary for a work expressly devoted to architectural antiquities, obviously afford no room for picturesque beauty, or for an attempt, on the part of the artist, to produce what is called *effect*. Horace's line is altogether applicable to them, that
>
> "Ornari res ipsa negat, contenta doceri"
> ["the subject requires no ornament; to have it apprehended is all"].[108]

The need to be obedient to the didactic context in which the publication was produced and prohibit the picturesque resounds with Cotman's use of the Graphic Telescope. This

[107] 'Preface' in *Normandy* letterpress, iv.
[108] *Normandy* letterpress, 15.

optical instrument, which aided the magnification of objects to be traced accurately onto paper, had been invented by Cornelius Varley in 1811 and was given to Cotman by Henry Englefield prior to his first tour, during which he used it to make finished drawings of Rouen Cathedral.[109] Two of these drawings, including *Cathedral Church of Notre-Dame at Rouen, West Front, from the Place Notre-Dame* (Fig. 155) formed the basis for two fold-out double plates in *Antiquities of Normandy*'s first volume (Fig. 152 *Cathedral Church of Notre-Dame at Rouen, South Transept, from the Place de la Calande* and Fig. 156 of the same title as the abovementioned drawing), both of which bear the elevated viewpoints, strong perspective, emphasis on parallel and vertical lines and central, full-frontal positioning of the entire facade which the Telescope facilitated. [110] The unbroken slender lines, sharp details, blank areas of non-ornamented surface, and overall lightness of tone combine to produce etchings which (as Hemingway has also noted) bear a striking resemblance to line engravings.[111] As such, the appearance of these plates chimes more with conventional architectural engravings than Cotman's *Antiquities of Norfolk* etchings; for example, that of Lichfield Cathedral (Fig. 157) engraved in 1782 by the Society of Antiquaries' official engraver John Basire the elder after their draughtsman John Carter.

This is not to say that playfulness is entirely evicted from *Antiquities of Normandy*. In *Cathedral Church of Notre-Dame at Rouen, South Transept* (Fig. 152), Cotman omitted the tower over the crossing which seems to have been allowed to pass into print without Turner's text accounting for the loss because of its non-Norman date. Yet when Cotman deviated from accurately depicting features which were Norman, such as his lengthening 'to a very disproportionate degree' the smaller arches of the *Church of Oyestraham* (Fig. 158), Turner pointed out that the artist had 'indulged himself in what may be termed an architectural conceit ... in order that the whole might range in a line with the larger arch in the centre'; in other words, picturesque effect.[112] Cutting Cotman little slack, Turner's comment serves to accuse this 'typical' artist of providing the reader/viewer with an inaccurate illustration. Together with the passages quoted above, this remark suggests a breakdown in the complicity previously enjoyed by both men towards the question of representational accuracy. Clearly recognising that the project's commercial success was dependent on the gratification of strict antiquarian concerns, Turner indicated that Cotman's prints now needed to communicate universal data that was rooted in the object

[109] See Michael Pidgley, 'Cornelius Varley, Cotman, and the Graphic Telescope', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 114, no. 836 (November 1972), 780-6 provides evidence that the device Cotman took to Normandy and called a camera lucida was actually Varley's Graphic Telescope.
[110] JSC to DT,12 July 1817, 1936.12.12.51, BM
[111] See Hemingway, 'Cotman's 'Architectural Antiquities of Normandy', *Walpole Society*, 227.
[112] *Normandy* letterpress, 123.

itself, not in one's subjective, sensory experience of it. As the *Gentleman's Magazine* put the point in their review of *Antiquities of Normandy* in 1823, 'the true lover of antiquities seeks rather to satisfy his judgement than amuse his fancy.'[113]

The requirement of 'objective' knowledge also had an impact on the character of the prints' process of production. The Graphic Telescope played a role here and appears to have been an instrument which Cotman found ambivalent. He complained to Turner that it imposed a mechanical way of working at odds with his usual approach: 'I have bought my experience & I wd not but have y knowledge even at a greater rate ... for such an affair I ought to have had a room, so as not to be obliged to remove the instrument...'[114] On his second tour of Normandy in 1818, Cotman did in fact manage to use an apartment above a shop opposite Rouen Cathedral, which enabled him to install his Telescope with a full-frontal and elevated sightline of the south transept. However, the Telescope worked by placing it (and therefore the artist's body) to the side of the subject to be drawn. Peering one-eyed down the eyepiece at a huge building outside and seen side-on thus doubly-removed Cotman from the close, direct and unmediated encounter so persuasively conveyed in his *Antiquities of Norfolk* plates. Nonetheless, with over a third more etchings to make than that volume, the Telescope could help speed up production and facilitate the plates' stylistic consistency. Even so, Cotman's independent and personal approach was being sacrificed to the pressure to deliver.

Following the first tour of 1817, the production of *Antiquities of Normandy* became the subject of increased correspondence between Cotman, Turner and Gurney, all of whom realised that the work was becoming too ambitious for the artist to publish himself from Yarmouth. Worrying that *Antiquities of Norfolk* was little known outside of East Anglia, Gurney advised that the Normandy tome should have 'regular London publishers—without which his works have not a fair chance'.[115] Things looked initially promising when the London publisher, Joseph Harding, showed an interest in late 1817, asking Cotman to send him his proposal together with some etched specimens. Yet Cotman abstained, telling Turner that Harding's terms would not offer him a large enough profit.[116] This insulted Harding to whom Turner apologised, blaming Cotman's artist-

[113] *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 93, part. 1 (April 1823), 337.
[114] Fuseli warned against professional painters' use of drawing aids due to their negative associations with amateurs and the 'map-work' of cartographers. Henry Fuseli, 'Lecture IV', *Lectures on Painting* (London, 1801-25), 27. JSC to DT, 12 July 1817, 1936-12-12-51, BM.
[115] HG to DT, 20 January 1819, TURN III/A10/39, Trinity.
[116] Joseph Harding (hereafter JH) to DT, 29 November 1817, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity and JSC to DT, 21 January 1818, 1936-12-12-56, BM.

character. Harding replied petulantly: 'The correctness of your remark that the characters of artist and tradesmen are incompatible are never more completely exemplified than in the person of Mr. Cotman', and went onto complain that he had entirely misunderstood how profit division worked in the publishing industry.[117] Indeed, when Cotman tried to strike a better deal with other London publishers, he found the profit margins lower than he had expected and struggled with the realisation that his work was judged as 'a vendible or an unvendible commodity' over and above its artistic status. '[H]ow necessary it is to be a man of business', he disclosed to Turner, 'which I am determ[d] to be!'[118] Yet despite this optimism, Harding's allegation that the identities of artist and businessman were incommensurable clearly bore some truth in Cotman, whose limited business acumen, proximity to commerce and obligation to obey strict antiquarian stipulations posed an uphill struggle as the project wore on.

It took another year to secure a publisher, but in January 1819 Cotman was able to confirm John and Arthur Arch of Cornhill as the publishers of *Antiquities of Normandy*.[119] Nationwide advertising was to commence immediately, subscribers were to be pursued and more financial assistance sought. The latter soon came in the shape of William Upcott, a London-based antiquary and banking client of Turner and Gurney, who made a financial speculation in the publication. The terms settled upon were for 300 copies of a two-volume book illustrated with one hundred plates to be issued in four instalments of twenty-five etchings each at six monthly intervals. The first instalment was due on 1 December 1819 and completion expected in June 1821. Each instalment would cost two-and-a-half guineas (subsequently three guineas because of Cotman's mounting expenses),[120] bringing the total to a hefty £12.12*s* (around £1,000 in today's money). The prospectus (see Appendix 5) tells us that a further fifty copies were to contain rarer proof impressions on higher quality India paper at an even pricier £5.5*s.* Of the profits Cotman could expect to take half with the remainder split between the Arch brothers and Upcott. In the meantime, and in addition to further funding from Gurney and his salary from Turner, Cotman would be able to draw on these men if he made official requests (though his failure to do so consistently created account balancing problems for years to come).[121]

[117] JH to DT, 31 January 1818, GBR/0016/TURNER1/01, Trinity.
[118] JSC to DT, 21 January 1818, 1936-12-12-56, BM.
[119] JSC to DT, 30 January1819, 1936-12-12-63, BM.
[120] WU to DT, 1 October 1819, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity. The expenses were estimated at £2,081.
[121] See John Arch to DT, 19 March 1819, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity, WU to DT, 4 June 1830, GBR/0016/TURNER1/014, Trinity: '[The Archs] state positively that the 250 pounds paid by myself to Cotman is no where acknowledged by him to have been received, or even placed on the credit side of ~~the~~ his Account...'.

Characteristically, Cotman requested that the Archs send 'further information relative to the business of the thing' for Turner's inspection, admitting to 'not really understanding the subject.'[122] Indeed, with a publisher, a speculator and financial arrangements came certain stipulations that were not immediately obvious to Cotman (that, or he chose to overlook them). As Gurney reminded Turner, the Archs were 'men of letter press ... & not men of Engravings',[123] making a letterpress a key requirement of the work (as Gurney had also initially envisaged). Yet who would write it was unclear. Unlike Turner's short descriptions for *Antiquities of Norfolk*, the work required to write a letterpress for the Normandy tome would be considerable given its specific historic focus, projected market, and vast number of plates. Turner actively avoided the subject, despite various hint-dropping from Cotman, Gurney and Upcott who clearly hoped he would volunteer himself.[124] Eventually, however, when various approaches to other prospective authors came to nothing,[125] Turner reluctantly accepted the task 'not very willingly nor with much confidence in myself'.[126] Besides his day job, Turner was busy with his own publications including his involvement in Cotman's Norfolk projects and his own *Tour in Normandy*, imminently to be published, also by the Archs. As such, the letterpress for *Antiquities of Normandy* became delayed, causing complaints among the subscribers who 'have actually refused to purchase until something like a beginning is seen', an anxious Upcott told Turner, his successful speculation dependent on good sales.[127] Clearly Turner had not bargained on being Cotman's collaborator this time. Yet the crowded and commercial circumstances of *Antiquities of Normandy* forced him to occupy the public ground from which, as an enlightened patron of the arts, he would have wanted to steer clear. The strain of the collaboration and Turner's open authorship of the book (his name emblazoned on the two volumes' title pages) appears to have put pressure on his relationship with Cotman. This personal pressure was played out at the level of text and image.

[122] JSC to DT, 30 January 1819, 1936-12-12-63, BM.
[123] HG to DT, 20 March 1818, TURN III/A10/20, Trinity.
[124] JSC to DT, 30 January 1819, HG to DT, 14 April 1818, TURN III/A10/21 and WU to DT, 1 October 1819, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, both Trinity.
[125] JSC to DT, 12 July 1818, 1936-12-12-58, BM, JSC to William Stevenson, 3 February 1820, Add MS 37029 ff.8, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL, and John Layton to DT, 24 December 1817, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.
[126] DT to William Gunn, 13 November 1819 quoted in Hemingway, 'Cotman's 'Architectural Antiquities of Normandy', *Walpole Society* (1976-8), 175.
[127] WU to DT, 2 June 1820, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.

Turner took shortcuts to churn out the letterpress, one of which included pasting lengthy passages from his own *Tour of Normandy* straight into *Antiquities of Normandy*, and citing himself in the main text and endnotes. Destined for another publication and different plates (produced by members of his family and Cotman's own pupils, no less), the incorporation of these passages makes for a wooden relationship between text and image. Turner's quotations do not address Cotman's etchings, nor do they always mention the part of the building the etchings represent. When Turner does speak to the images, his words dominate them with laborious descriptions of the bare facts which can then be confirmed with recourse to the corresponding plate. Both perpetuate Turner's authorship throughout, thereby diminishing Cotman's presence as the work's 'author'.

Neither was Cotman consistently recognised as the sole 'artist' of *Antiquities of Normandy*. In the essay accompanying the plate of the *Church of St Ouen* (Fig. 159), Turner informs the reader/viewer that 'The view of this church, etched by Mr. Cotman, is copied from a drawing made by Miss Elizabeth Turner.'[128] Three similar instances occur in the letterpress where Turner's eldest daughters, Elizabeth and Mary-Anne, are identified as the original artists of the images to whom 'Mr Cotman has to acknowledge himself as indebted to the[ir] pencil'.[129] In June 1818, the two girls and their mother had travelled to Normandy to meet Cotman on his second tour under Turner's instruction. Keen for Cotman not to forfeit his drawing master duties to the publication, Turner asked that he travel with the ladies and facilitate their sketching. While Cotman's replies give little away about how he found the arrangement, the ladies' journal entries and letters reveal that they spent the majority of their tour by his side, Mrs Turner even admitting to her husband that their presence 'may retard his journey'.[130] The letterpress declarations of Cotman's debt to the Turner family's drawings reverse the roles of artist and pupil, despite the fact that the four corresponding etchings are unmistakably by Cotman's own hand (including the characteristic cloud-like clumps of bushes in the etching of St Ouen which his pupils' drawings show they found difficult to replicate) and bear declarations of his sole authorship in the plate-mark inscriptions: 'Drawn & Etched by J. S. Cotman'. Moments such as this show Turner putting Cotman back in his place as a drawing master of Great Yarmouth.

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[128] *Normandy* letterpress, 88.
[129] *Normandy* letterpress, 69.
[130] Mary Turner to DT, 12 July 1818, 1936-12-12-58, BM.

In January 1820, press reviews of the first number appeared, the initial twenty-five etchings having been delivered the previous month (without letterpress, which only appeared in 1822). The critic for the *Literary Chronicle* noted the apparent accuracy of the plates, yet he was indifferent about their artistic qualities and while describing them as 'well etched', questioned their lack of pictorial context:

> Mr Cotman appears to have treated the ground part of the engravings as unworthy of his attention; the work would have afforded more general satisfaction, had the parts other than the architectural, been more skilfully executed...[131]

Had Cotman given the plates a more iconographically-animated and technically-vigorous foreground, the critic suggests, he might have enlivened the architectural subject for a broader audience than its antiquarian viewers. As we have seen, the disorderly details, conspicuous figures and various textures that characterised the foregrounds of *Antiquities of Norfolk* etchings rarely feature in *Antiquities of Normandy* where under-etched blank planes limit the plates' narrative potential. Cotman seems to have taken note of such criticisms and his later etchings became more populated, as in the clusters of traditionally-dressed figures in the plates of the Church of St Etienne and Rouen Cathedral (Figs 150, 152 and 156). However, his emphasis on architectural wholes rather than parts meant that the viewpoints still needed to be distant enough to admit the entire edifice, pushing these small figures back from the viewer, leaving their actions unintelligible and ultimately limiting our imaginative access into the life of the scene.

It was not just Cotman's lightness of engagement with the foreground that drew criticism, but the lightness with which the plates appeared to have been etched. Writing to Turner the day after the above review appeared in the press, Upcott described the first twenty-five etchings as 'cold, chilling and raw', words which not only invoke a similar perceived lack of animation but a technical lack of fullness in the marks, as he went on to indicate: 'the strokes [are] very sparingly scattered—and the lines not sufficiently bitten in.' These technical qualities, Upcott continued, also had commercial ramifications: 'The plates are not calculated for a large impression—500—would wear many of these plain.—I hope the public will be in better humour with it than myself.'[132]

[131] *Literary Chronicle*, vol. 2, no. 37, 2 January 1820, 61-2.
[132] WU to DT, 3 January 1820, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.

The extent of labour involved in the production of *Antiquities of Normandy* drew most comment from the critics. The *Literary Chronicle* described it as a 'very arduous undertaking' while the *Quarterly Review* named Cotman 'an indefatigable artist'.[133] Such praise could present Cotman as a dedicated artist, but it also served to underplay the publication's status as a work of art, imaginatively and impulsively conceived. Indeed, when individual plates were admired by reviewers, their admiration was generally less to do with Cotman's skill at depicting them than about the magnificence of the subject depicted: 'The Castle of Arques is a clever plate of a very ancient fortification, whose battlements appear, from their strength, calculated to defy powerful attacks' and 'The North Porch of St. Michael de Vaacelles at Caen, is a magnificent specimen of Gothic skill' are just two such examples from the *Literary Chronicle*. Here, Cotman-the-artist recedes as a factor in the work's reception, becoming, instead, a mere vehicle or translator of his subjects – an *illustrator*, as Gurney had envisaged him at the project's conception.[134]

One review stands out from the rest, however. In June 1821, the same summer in which Cotman exhibited plates of the *Church of St Peter, at Lisieux* and *Notre-Dame at Rouen, South Transept* (Figs 149 and 152) at the NSA, the *Norfolk Chronicle* reviewed the newly-distributed third instalment. Singled out for particular praise was the double plate of Rouen Cathedral. 'It is Magnificent!', the reviewer rhapsodised, praising Cotman's 'great powers' and 'extraordinary exertions' in the execution of a plate which must have been 'most intense and anxious' for him.[135] This commendation not only hints at Cotman's dedication but that the very process of the print's making was a sublime act borne out in the visual qualities of the finished product. Such commentary begs the question: are the Normandy prints so very different from those of *Antiquities of Norfolk* in their relationship to the *artist*?

On the surface, it would seem that they are. The evidence garnered from the archive and the work itself has suggested that *Antiquities of Normandy* was diametrically opposed to the earlier volume in its style, techniques, meanings and conditions of production. Yet on another level – that of form and affect – the Normandy prints are aesthetically 'Magnificent!', to use the above reviewer's description. I propose that it is the power of this magnificence which partially reclaims mastery for the artist. Indeed, while lacking

[133] *Literary Chronicle*, vol. 2, no. 37, 2 January 1820, 61 and *Quarterly Review*, vol. 44, April 1821, 115.
[134] *Literary Chronicle*, vol. 2, no. 37, 2 January 1820, 62.
[135] NC, 9 June 1821.

the proximity, freeness and vigour of the *Antiquities of Norfolk* etchings, the Normandy prints are full of punchy visual impact. The face-on, entire structures confront the viewer directly and dominate, sometimes uncomfortably so, our field of vision. Daring sorts of simplicity are evident in the bold shapes and blank spaces of prints such as those depicting the churches of St Peter at Lisieux and Oyestreham (Figs 149 and 158), as well as the spire of the west front of Rouen Cathedral (Fig. 156), which give the structures an immovable solidity which strikes and then holds the viewer's gaze. Unlike Basire/Storer's print of Lichfield Cathedral (Fig. 157) which, while visually striking, stands alone as an isolated specimen at close range, Cotman's Norman buildings rise majestically upwards to tower over miniscule signs of modern-day life.

As the buildings dominate their terrestrial and aerial surroundings, they also overwhelm the physical expanse of the sheet, an effect intensified in five double plates, such as those depicting St. Etienne at Caen (Fig. 150) and Rouen Cathedral (Figs 152 and 156), which transgress the boundaries of a single page. While the Normandy prints do succeed in delivering the antiquary with the prerequisites of clear, face-on facade, they simultaneously infuse that formal convention with a quality which could not be read about in Turner's letterpress: what it felt like to be before these magnificent towering structures, even if that experience was sometimes from an apartment above a shop or down a telescope. Thus, if the *Antiquities of Norfolk* etchings were about the process of acquiring knowledge through personal experience, the etchings of *Antiquities of Normandy* essentially uttered the same sentiment but in a different language and with a different emphasis and effect.

In all these respects, Cotman's *Antiquities of Normandy* prints are sublime, that difficult-to-define category of philosophical experience which celebrated the stimulating effects of grandeur, majesty and power on the emotions, and which came to dominate the period's key aesthetic trends. During the period, the sublime object was widely understood to produce an ineffable experience in the viewer of images, one which could exist above and beyond words, speech or description.[136] Undoubtedly aware of the issue presented by the lack of letterpress in *Antiquities of Normandy* (that is until 1820 when Turner commenced writing, but not delivering until 1822), Cotman seems to have anticipated the fact that his images would eventually be reduced to illustrations by his antiquarian 'collaborators' and audience. Accordingly, he seems to have set about producing prints which could self-sufficiently communicate everything somebody would need to know about Normandy's

[136] See Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London and New York, 2006) 1.

most magnificent buildings in one forceful visual statement. By deploying the stylistic and technical means described above, Cotman seems to have resisted the preconception that knowledge was primarily produced by words, and thereby subtly push back at the limiting hand dealt to him in the form of Gurney's requirements and Turner's letterpress.[137]

Bann's observation that Turner's letterpress comprised 'redundant passages of description' might therefore be the more apt portrayal after all, their inventory-like enumeration of the bare facts suggesting that he struggled to find much more to say about Cotman's images than that which Cotman had already 'said' himself.[138] Turner partially admits as much in a line accompanying the etching of the west front of the Church of St. Etienne (Fig. 150): 'The *plate* sufficiently explains all that is to be said of this part of the building...', before trying to pull back with the remark: '...excepting as to the more minute ornaments of the door-ways, which deserve to be exhibited in detail', which again indicates the pressured, perhaps competitive, relationship that had developed between the two men – and, by extension, word and image – over the course of the book's production.[139]

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Antiquities of Normandy was eventually delivered in its entirety in the autumn of 1822, fifteen months later than expected. This delay was due not only to the late letterpress, to the six-plus months which Cotman had spent in Normandy, and to the time it took him to etch such a large number of plates, but also to the artist's exhaustion and the eye problems which caused him to refrain from etching for weeks on end. The delay, together with Cotman's repeated requests for money and what was perceived to be his poor business conduct, frustrated Gurney, the Archs and Upcott, the latter deeming the project 'the very worst speculation I ever took in hand'.[140] Nearly a decade on, Upcott still claimed not to have 'received a six pence from the day of publication to the present hour' and revealed that eighty-seven copies of the book remained unsold in the Archs' warehouse.[141] Poor sales were down to the heftiness and expense of the two-volume tome. The large size of some of the double plates in particular was seen to hinder its overall appearance: 'what a pity', Upcott bemoaned of the double plate of the west front

[137] The second part of J. Hillis Miller's book *Illustration* (London 1992), 61-151, has helped me arrive at this point.
[138] Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History*, 116.
[139] *Normandy* letterpress, 24.
[140] WU to DT, 16 February 1821, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.
[141] WU to DT, 4 June 1830, GBR/0016/TURNER1/014, Trinity.

of Rouen Cathedral (Fig. 156) 'tis so uncouthly large!—that even the fine Copies must be folded.—This is not good generalship!'[142] Britton also took issue with the size of the publication, asserting that had it 'appeared in quarto instead of folio volumes it would have pleased a larger portion of the public'.[143]

The poor commercial and lukewarm critical outcome of *Antiquities of Normandy* was only exacerbated by the appearance of other quarto-sized illustrated books on Normandy. As early as January 1819, Gurney warned of the imminent publication of Thomas Frognall Dibdin's *Bibliographical, Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour through France and Germany* and Charles Alfred Stothard's *Letters written during a Tour through Normandy*, which he worried would diminish the originality of Cotman's work: 'therefore it does appear to me to be of prime importance to him to be out first.'[144] Yet the delay in publication meant that both works appeared before Cotman's, Dibdin's in 1821 hot on the heels of Stothard's in 1820, while Dawson Turner's own *Tour* was published the same year to a positive reception. The critical and commercial success of these publications, together with an upsurge of other printed works about Normandy, decreased the shelf life and value of *Antiquities of Normandy.* Cotman had missed the boat.

In conclusion, *Antiquities of Normandy* was a mistimed, over-determined and financially unsuccessful work. While Cotman and the Archs did receive return from the sales (unlike Upcott), the profits were considerably lower than originally envisaged. Cotman had been able to survive on funding from Turner, Gurney, the Archs and Upcott, yet their patronage brought an assortment of terms and conditions which caused tensions for the artist at a personal level. Pulled in different directions by his collaborators' various expectations, he was encouraged to identify with opposing personae: as an antiquary, a businessman, an artist and an illustrator.

Cotman appears to have tried dealing with – or perhaps suppressing – these tensions by travelling to the province for a third and final time in the summer of 1820 to gather material for a new print project. Writing from Mortain to his wife, he revealed that:

> When I left England I had not made up my mind to any particular object or promised anything, I now may boldly say. get my materials out once in Yarm[0]—and I shall announce to the

[142] WU to DT, 25 April 1821, GBR/0016/TURNER1/013, Trinity.
[143] Britton (ed.), *Pugin and Le Keux's Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy* (London, 1827), 4.
[144] HG to DT, 20 January 1819, TURN III/A10/39, Trinity.

> public in some way or other, not yet decided upon, my firm intention of showing them the picturesque tour of Normandy.[145]

Cotman scholars have framed the third tour as the final episode in the artist's gathering of materials for *Antiquities of Normandy*. However, this work had largely been completed on his second trip in 1818 with extant drawings and letters indicating that he added just five new subjects to the publication in 1820. Moreover, Turner claimed to be ignorant of why Cotman had returned to Normandy to collect 'more and more drawings ... & I am persuaded that he does not know himself.' [146] I propose that the primary purpose for the third trip was to conceive of this 'picturesque tour of Normandy', a print project which used *Antiquities of Normandy* as a launch pad but which moved away from its antiquarian concerns and 'collaborators' towards free landscape and personal, artistic vision. A subsequent letter reveals more about Cotman's plans:

> my folio will shew to you how entirely I have speculated towards another work—or perhaps works—as I have matter 'Deep & dangerous' for two—to carry on the architecture—and to bring out a splendid book (if I can find engravers to join with me) on the picturesque scenery of this most delightful country...[147]

Cotman therefore envisaged his new work as a high-quality print series depicting Norman landscape scenery. Commenced alongside his completion of *Antiquities of Normandy*, a 'picturesque tour' of the province could demonstrate his artistic diversity, offer a novelty on the British print market, and provide another route to material survival. Making artistic references to the history of British landscape painting through a 'picturesque tour' could also help to reinstate him within the British art world as an original landscape artist. The project would still need to be collaborative given the body of work and expenses involved, but it is probable that Cotman's mention of engravers meant that he would appoint printmakers to help him etch his drawings into plates in a similar way that J. M. W. Turner employed artists to work alongside him in the production of his *Liber Studiorum*, produced between 1806 and 1824. This way, Cotman could hope to reserve the artist-author status for himself.

'The picturesque tour of Normandy' was never realised, however. Cotman's disillusionment with the critical and commercial outcome of *Antiquities of Normandy*, his

[145] JSC to AC, 26 August 1820, 1936-12-12-68, BM.
[146] DT to Francis Douce, 21 September 1820, MSS Douce, D.20-28 (D23), Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[147] JSC to AC, 17 September 1820, 1936-12-12-71, BM.

ensuing poor health, the onslaught of teaching duties, pressing money worries and family responsibilities and tragedies (two of his seven children had died during the publication's production) shattered the possibility of its materialisation. Nevertheless, dozens of sepia wash drawings produced with the project in mind still survive and provide an indication of Cotman's ambitions.[148]

An indicative example is the drawing, *Domfront Castle* (Fig. 160) which resembles the horizontal format, compositional construction, tone and motifs of several plates from Turner's *Liber Studiorum*, in particular that of *Norham Castle* (Fig. 161) from 1816 after which Cotman made a pencil sketch (Fig. 162). Like Turner's castle, Cotman's appears to grow out of the distant and centrally-situated rock formation upon which it perches. Whilst at the pinnacle of a pyramidal composition, its dark silhouette does not dominate the picture as had the architectural edifices of his etched volumes. Instead, the castle enhances the picturesque possibilities of the expansive landscape. Compositionally, *Domfront Castle* is not far from *Antiquities of Normandy*'s horizontal plates of castles in the Norman *paysage* (such as Fig. 151). When translated to print, however, etching alone would be incapable of capturing the drawing's plays of light and shade, the billowing smokiness of the distant trees, the vaporous sky and the thick velvety tones of the castle and cliff, which call to mind Cotman's earliest Sketching Society landscapes as much as Turner's *Liber* prints. As the project never materialised, we can only speculate that Cotman, like Turner, may have intended his series of sepia drawings to be reproduced in the mezzotint or aquatint, techniques capable of conveying dramatic tonal contrasts and free handling.[149]

Conceived at a time when the personal, collaborative and commercial conditions of *Antiquities of Normandy* were fraught, the idea of 'the picturesque tour of Normandy' shows Cotman attempting to recover the artistic qualities of printmaking and the autonomy of his practice. Indeed, as we shall see in the final chapter, during the next (and final) two decades of his career, Cotman would attempt to reposition himself much more closely to independent practice and liberal art.

[148] The majority are held at NCMAG.

[149] Cotman later expressed his appreciation of both Turner's *Liber Studiorum* prints and the mezzotint technique employed to produce 'artist like' prints of Normandy scenery: 'I have for more than two years wished to publish,—or rather published for me—a work, in mezatinito, similar in effect to Turner's "Liber Studiorum ... it will embrace views of buildings & scenery ... [in] Normandy. The times and my circumstances were against it.' JSC to DT, 8 March 1834, MC 2487/47, NRO. Again, however, this intention came to nothing.

Chapter 5
Maturity, Materiality and Reputation: Cotman in Norwich and London 1823-1842

By the summer of 1820, Cotman began to envisage a life working away from Yarmouth. While he remained on close terms with Dawson Turner, the strained circumstances around the production of *Antiquities of Normandy* had taken their toll on the pair's professional relationship. As the project neared completion, eventually being published in autumn 1822, Cotman and Turner made no further plans to collaborate. By the end of 1823, eleven years after he had settled in Yarmouth, Cotman was back in Norwich where he remained for a further eleven years, running a drawing school and making art for sale, commission and exhibition.

The last two decades of Cotman's career (the 1820s and 1830s) saw him grapple with the implications of being a mature artist. More than ever before, his letters from these years are self-reflective in tone, with an emphasis on the past tense and more analysis of his career path. They also exhibit a greater awareness of the future in relation to the past, that of his name in art-world culture and the career prospects of his children, several of whom had become professional artists. The letters also indicate his apprehension over his geographical position as it related to his career. By the 1820s, Norwich's art world was experiencing its own anxiety over its residents' lack of support for local artists and poor attendance of the NSA's annual exhibitions, despite being held in an impressive purpose-built exhibition room situated next to Norwich's recently-built Corn Exchange beside the marketplace, and the members' appointment of a royal patron, Prince Augustus Frederick. These concerns related to a broader culture of anxiety in the city over the future of its textile industry which had undergone further decline during the post-war depression. By 1833, this industry had been brought to its knees by overwhelming competition from the north, the NSA had folded, and Cotman was actively looking to leave the city, his sights set firmly on London. In January 1834, he applied successfully to become Professor of Drawing at the recently-established King's College School on the Strand, the street on which he had emerged as an artist thirty-five years earlier. Here he remained until his death in 1842.

This final chapter examines Cotman's artistic output from the last two decades of his career in Norwich and London. It aims to demonstrate how, after a decade spent concentrating on architectural subject matter in monochromatic printed form, he self-consciously repositioned himself in relation to fine art and liberal practice. Like never before, Cotman's output during this period was split between the material he produced as a drawing teacher, predominantly composed of pencil drawings of largely academic subject matter, and the artwork he made as a professional artist, characterised by its striking high colour key, eclectic thematic range and emphasis on materiality. In order to understand both this stylistic split and formal shift in Cotman's late work, this chapter examines representative examples in relation to a set of issues connected to his status as a mature artist and related issues of reputation and legacy.

Cotman entered his forties in the 1820s, a decade which, like that which followed, was attended by deteriorating health, changing responsibilities as a father and a breadwinner, and a broader set of problems around ageing given contemporary assumptions of an individual's decline upon reaching middle age. Writing in the year of the forty-one-year-old Cotman's return to Norwich from Yarmouth, William Hazlitt parodied the widely-held view that

> Artists in general, (poor devils!) I am afraid, are not a long-lived race. They break up commonly about forty, their spirits giving way with the disappointment of their hopes of excellence, or the want of encouragement for that which they have attained, their plans disconcerted, and their affairs irretrievable...[1]

Growing older represented a particular problem within British art. Unresolved questions about what kind of work the mature artist was expected to produce, how that work was regarded in relation to that which s/he had created in his or her youth, and what kind of life s/he was expected to produce, prompted discontent in the critical imagination. As Gordon McMullan has argued, the early nineteenth century saw the prevalence of the myth of 'a transcendent late style' to disavow the perceived differences (read decline) between the art an artist made in his or her mature years and that which had been cherished in their youth – a notion still central to biographical writing on artists.[2] In an attempt to unpack this (enduring) reading of ageing artists' decline and its substitution with the myth of sublime creative ability, McMullan and others, like Sam Smiles, have

[1] William Hazlitt, 'On the Old Age of Artists' [1823], *The Plain Speaker: Opinions on Books, Men, and Things*, 2 vols (London, 1826), vol. 1, 212.
[2] Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (Cambridge, 2007), 9.

advocated a critical approach which values ageing as a force for autonomy.[3] They propose that autonomy might enable a bolder, freer practice precisely because those artists who had survived professionally to reach middle age tended to have overcome the anxiety of having a reputation that could be lost, thus making them more able to ride the risk associated with artistic experimentation. In what follows, Cotman's late works are shown to be as inventive as his earlier watercolours, not because of any emphasis on 'pure' landscape, luminosity of colour or freedom of handling, but because of their distinct materiality, variety of theme and the meanings that these had for his professional and personal identity in late middle age.

The artworks I discuss here will be approached largely transhistorically within a thematic framework rather than one that privileges chronology. This is because issues to do with the conflation of ageing and art apply to the entire period 1823-42, a chronological treatment of which would otherwise produce a repetitive account. Key themes include Cotman's relationship to teaching during these years with particular reference to his position at King's College School, the role and status of paint, colour and subject matter in his late work, and questions of reputation and legacy, as well as the reception and meanings of a career after the death of the artist.

1. Age and the virtues of teaching

From July 1821, Cotman began to resituate himself in Norwich, announcing in the local papers the commencement of 'his Instructions in DRAWING' at his parents' Cocky Lane premises, which acted as his Norwich base while he tried to sell his family house in Southtown in order to move back to his hometown.[4] Over the next two years, while he finished *Antiquities of Normandy* in Southtown and taught pupils in Yarmouth, Cotman increased his Norwich-based lessons, recommenced exhibiting at the NSA (as well as elsewhere, including London and Leeds),[5] and built up his client base, eventually moving back to Norwich in late 1823 to establish a 'SCHOOL for DRAWING'.[6] This school was housed in the Cotmans' new family home, a three-storey townhouse on St Martin-at-Palace Plain to the north-east of Norwich's marketplace. Its grand size is indicative of Cotman's ambitions as well as his necessary outlay at this point.

[3] See Smiles (ed.), *Late Turner: Painting Set Free* (London, 2014).
[4] NC, 7 July 1821. Drawing-copies from Cotman's Circulating Portfolio could also be seen at the house, the advert mentioned.
[5] In London, Cotman exhibited at the SPWC and BI; in Leeds, he sold one watercolour at the Northern Society's annual exhibition in 1825 (see *Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 August 1825).
[6] NC, 10 January 1824.

His NSA exhibition submissions were also on a large scale. In 1823, he showed twenty works, predominantly made up of the sepia drawings he had been producing since 1820 for the unrealised 'picturesque tour of Normandy'. This was followed by an enormous fifty-two submissions in 1824 (perhaps in an attempt to obliterate his rivals) which were highly varied in both their subject matter (including representations of figures and architecture, subject pictures and English, Welsh and Norman landscape scenes) and media (comprising drawings in pencil, watercolour, chalk and mixed media, and oil paintings).

We can imagine that these moves seemed like the logical next steps for Cotman who now had six mouths to feed and weakened finances following the poor commercial outcome of *Antiquities of Normandy*. He began accepting 'Professional Student[s] and Amateur Artist[s]' to his new school in January 1824.[7] This was a more successful venture than the Norwich drawing school he had tried to set into motion in 1806, despite an initial two years of financial hardship due in part to the effect of local economic decline.[8] Cotman involved his eldest children, Miles Edmund, Ann and John Joseph (all teenagers during these years), in the running of the school, tasking them with producing drawings after his own for his students to copy in class. Cotman continued to travel to Yarmouth to teach the Turners as well as some of the other clients he had built up during the previous decade, but the majority of his time was spent teaching at his own Norwich premises. By the early 1830s, 'Cotman' was the most influential name amongst Norwich's art teachers, a local legacy he took care to perpetuate through Miles and John after he left Norwich for London in 1834 to become Professor of Drawing at King's College School.[9]

Cotman's open identification of himself as a drawing school master during these years nevertheless appears at odds with his previous attempts to disassociate himself from that vocation and its negative connotations. Besides the income that could be generated from

[7] NC, 10 January 1824.
[8] This constituted a great source of anxiety for Cotman who, by 1826, was admitting his failure to 'forsee the downfall of the Manufacturing branches and its consequent effect upon all classes' and the 'deplorable' consequences it was having on his income. JSC to Charles Parr Burney, 31 July 1826, MS 4610, NRO. Around this time, Dawson Turner wrote a concerned letter to Cotman's father about the artist's finances: 'his fixing himself at Norwich had not been attended with the success he had anticipated ... the state of the times had naturally had the effect of diminishing the number of his pupils.' DT to Edmund Cotman, 22 June 1826, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM. After 1826, however, things picked up at the school and Cotman could write that 'my pupils increase—with a prospect of more'. JSC to DT, 10 November 1827, MC 2487/68/2, NRO.
[9] NM, 28 July 1832 described 'the Messrs Cotman' as ranking amongst the foremost artists and drawing masters in Norwich.

teaching, the decision seems to have been prompted by his age. In his forty-first year by the time he opened his new Norwich school, Cotman was following a similar path to many of his artist-contemporaries who, upon reaching their thirties and forties, had been obliged to adopt teaching as the mainstay of their income. David Cox, one year Cotman's junior, had become drawing master at Farnham Military College in 1813 before adopting the same post at a girls' school in Hereford where he taught part-time for £100 per annum. Francis Stevens, one year older than Cotman, became part-time drawing master at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in 1816, where William Delamotte, seven years Cotman's senior, also taught drawing from 1812, having moved there from Marlow's military college. Another watercolourist, Anthony 'Vandyke' Copley Fielding, five years younger than Cotman, ran a drawing school at his London home from 1817, which became the teaching base for the Fielding family of artists until the late 1840s. Outside of school hours, all these artists sent work to national exhibitions, produced art to sell and undertook commissions for publishers and patrons.

Forgoing one's own pretensions to 'pure' artistic status – the artist who, according to Hazlitt, had 'but to paint (as the sun has but to shine)' and live off his art which served solely liberal ends[10] – was now an experience shared by most middle-aged British artists, particularly those who worked predominantly in watercolour given the medium's connection with the private sphere. This was partly due to the continuous influx of younger artists to the art world, itself privileging youth and its association with personal enlightenment, promise and risk taking. In addition, older artists tended to have accumulated real-life responsibilities (dependents, ailments, debts etc) meaning that survival now required, as Bourdieu put it, 'the abandonment of practices associated with adolescent irresponsibility … as a function of the objective future they see lying before them.'[11] As such, the baggage of middle age led many artists to reconcile themselves to full-time teaching.

Cotman's mature career provides evidence for this kind of reconciliation as a *condition* of biological and artistic maturity. Yet surviving letters also indicate that his acceptance of teaching had a more positive dimension, including the financial security that would enable him to concentrate on 'liberal' art production outside of classroom hours and without recourse to a patron. In 1825, for instance, he entertained the possibility of leaving economically-stricken Norwich by applying for a position as part-time drawing

[10] Hazlitt, 'On the Old Age of Artists', 212.
[11] Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 154.

master at Chatham Military School.[12] Writing to Dawson Turner's banking partner, John Brightwen, Cotman deduced that while the salary was

> only ab.t £200 P. Annum. to teach ab.t 40 Pupils ... the time they occupy is only the afternoon of Saturday!!!—consequently the time left on my hands may be most advantageously employed—at the moment ... my income from teaching. is not £150. and my time fully occupied.[13]

Cotman's application to Chatham was unsuccessful, but this passage reveals an artist facing up to the benefits of splitting his artistic identity between the drawing master and the 'liberal' artist, rather than attempting to integrate himself as one whose work could serve all ends simultaneously, as had been the case with earlier projects such as the nascent Circulating Portfolio which interrelated teaching material and fine art.

In late 1833, the NSA (renamed in 1828 as the Norfolk and Suffolk Institution for the Promotion of Fine Arts (NSI)) disbanded, the decision to do so taking place at Cotman's house, who at that time was the society's President. Despite the annual exhibitions which had featured thousands of exhibits by hundreds of artists (apart from a three year hiatus between 1826 and 1828), the NSA had increasingly failed to encourage a substantial audience or patrons for modern British art. Ultimately, the fact that 'so little public patronage should have been bestowed upon' the artists by the Norwich public, together with the poor ticket sales which did not even cover the running costs of the expensive exhibition room, led the Society to close its doors.[14] The situation was only exacerbated for these artists by the imbalance that existed between the demand for drawing instruction and the number of drawing masters teaching in Norwich and its environs. In January 1834, Cotman told Dawson Turner that 'the full body of our decomposd society met at my House for the last time' where the late son of John Crome, John Berney Crome, 'faintly hinted it was a lost game to him' as he was now travelling '70 miles for but three pupils'.[15] While Cotman's teaching business fared better than J. B. Crome's, the effort required to run his own school and the continued need to corner the market seems to have worn him down by the end of 1833. This, together with the lack of an official arts society in Norwich (one which had allowed its artist-members to engage with liberal practice beyond their teaching duties), prompted Cotman to increase his search for a salaried

[12] He also considered teaching positions in Ipswich and Derby. See JSC to DT, and 30 June 1826, MC 2487/22 and 31 June1826, MC 2487/21, NRO.
[13] JSC to John Brightwen, 4 March 1825, MC 2487/66, NRO.
[14] NC, 25 July 1829.
[15] JSC to DT, 27 January 1834, MC 2487/42, NRO.

position outside of his hometown. Gathering references from the Mayor of Norwich, Samuel Bignold,[16] as well as J. M. W. Turner, Augustus Callcott and Norwich artist, William Wilkins in London, he applied to an opening at King's College School as Professor of Drawing. At two days a week (Wednesdays and Saturdays) and with a £100 annual salary, the position seemed like a good prospect to Cotman who envisaged using his other days to teach amateurs and make artwork. London also seemed like a promising place to (re)situate himself. While staying with a friend in Mayfair awaiting his interview, he boasted to his family that he had 'gained orders already, & promised pupils'[17] Whatever happened, he said, he 'must leave Norwich'.[18]

On 15 January 1834, the school's council (its governing body) appointed Cotman their new Professor of Drawing and Perspective.[19] He immediately set about making plans to leave Norwich for London, initially leaving his family behind in the house at St Martin-at-Palace Plain, but forewarning his children in a letter that 'at midsummer it is most likely you will be all called from Norwich' to help with the work for the College. Cotman signed off the letter: 'Much as I have ever loved London I have never trod ~~its~~ ∧[its] Gold paved streets so much a man of business and felt so much to belong to it as now.'[20]

Established by Royal Charter in 1829 and opening its doors on the eastern side of Somerset House two years later, King's College School was formed as a school for boys by a group of eminent politicians, churchmen and other professionals 'engaged in various departments of life'.[21] The establishment was divided into two departments, a higher department for youths over sixteen, and a lower, preparatory department for day boys aged seven to sixteen, the latter being where Cotman taught. While the school charged a fee, the sum was a modest fifteen guineas per pupil to allow 'various classes of persons in this metropolis' to be provided with a well-rounded, liberal education. A wide range of classical as well as practical subjects were taught in the lower department, from religious instruction and English literature to mathematics and arithmetic, in order to prepare the boys for a vocational future in 'commercial as well as professional pursuits'.[22]

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[16] A copy is enclosed in a letter to Turner, JSC to DT, 21 December 1833, MC 2487/35, NRO. For his references from London-based artists, see JSC to the Cotman family, 31 December 1833, MC 2487/38, NRO.
[17] JSC to the Cotman family, 31 December 1833, MC 2487/38, NRO.
[18] JSC to DT, 8 January 1834, MC 2487/69, NRO.
[19] JSC to DT, 15 January 1834. MC 2487/40, NRO. The appointment was announced in the School's minutes on 17 January 1834, KAC/RMI-3, King's College London Council Rough Minute books, 1829-1845, 17 January 1834, King's College University Archive (hereafter KCLA).
[20] JSC to the Cotman family, 16 and 18 January 1834, MC 2487/41, NRO.
[21] 'King's College, London' in *Saturday Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 94 (December 21 1833), 234-36, 234.
[22] 'King's College, London' in *Saturday Magazine* (1833), 235.

Cotman was the first drawing professor to be employed at King's, the council recognising the value of drawing in preparing those pupils who might progress to study engineering, a subject deemed particularly important to supply Britain with its future surveyors, architects and designers.[23] Of those pupils who Cotman taught, ten became practicing architects, including George Devey, James Townshend, Edwin Canton, John Diblee Crace, Charles Edward Bielefeld and Frederick William Cumberland.[24] Drawing was not part of the core syllabus and parents of pupils wishing to attend were asked to pay an additional two guineas per year on top of the annual fee. For Cotman, the workload was heavy and he was required to build up his department from scratch, producing large numbers of drawing-copies for a growing number of pupils. These, he noted almost two months into the job, had grown from fifty to 185 and were split into a number of classes. This increase raised Cotman's annual salary from £100 to £185, with the addition of £1 for every new pupil who joined his class after its enrolment reached one hundred. By 1838, the numbers had grown to 222.[25] Unlike the drawings of his competitors for the job, shown to him by the school principal ('such things, things they deserved no other term.—Stuff—and flowers'), Cotman professed to wanting to educate his pupils in the liberal areas of drawing on which he had always concentrated, both as a teacher and as a professional artist: '~~Gothic~~ ~~Norman~~ the Egyptian Architecture, as a scene from the earliest period—Grecian, Roman, Normand & the Gothic.' These, he believed, would allow him to 'improve the taste of gentlemen placed under my instruction as will merely to teach them to draw lines'.[26]

Cotman produced many hundreds of drawing-copies for circulation among his students at King's. They tended to concentrate on particular themes at a time, with most popular examples depicting antique architecture (Figs 163 and 164), shipping (Fig. 165) and picturesque domestic buildings (Fig. 166) as well as more academic subjects such as armour-clad soldiers and classical figures, Cotman augmenting the study of such subjects by introducing suits of armour into his lessons and class trips to survey ancient sculptural

[23] See F. J. C. Hearnshaw, *The Centenary History of King's College London, 1828-1928* (London, Bombay and Sydney, 1929),146-50.
[24] See Thomas Hinde, *A Great Day School in London: A History of King's College School* (London, 1995), 17 and Frank Miles, 'Boy's Own Artist', in *Country Life*, vol. 183, issue 23 (1989), 82-83.
[25] JSC to DT, 25 Feb 1834, MC 2487/45, NRO and MEC to JJC, 19 February 1838, ff.199-200, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.
[26] JSC to his Family, 16-18 January 1834, MC 2487/41 NRO.

specimens first-hand at London collections such as the British Museum (see Figs 167-169).[27]

Back in class, Cotman's master drawings would be passed around the pupils to copy. Some of these drawings were uncomplicated, characterised by single motifs, undetailed backgrounds, clear outlines and punctured holes to provide guidance for pupils to push their pencils through to make marks on their own sheets beneath before joining them up (as in Figs 163 and 165). Others were more difficult, involving challenging perspectives, greater detail and an emphasis on modelling (Fig. 164, for instance). Whatever the boys' level of proficiency, Cotman's liberal subject matter was clearly designed to instil in them a knowledge of the historical past together with an understanding of the multifaceted nature of drawing. In a drawing-copy of *Conway Castle* (Fig. 164), for example, Cotman typically emphasised the structure's antiquity by taking a low perspective to highlight the grandeur of the tower which rises out of an exposed inner chamber where grass, bushes and trees have taken hold of the dilapidated arched walls and windows. The low viewpoint and emphasis on small natural and architectural motifs would not only demonstrate how to deploy the picturesque aesthetic in architectural drawing, but encourage pupils to pay attention to what they were being asked to copy by accurately imitating the detail. It could be suggested that the requirement to copy intricate details might equip the boys in later vocational life where attention to detail was a key component of the kinds of administrative and clerical posts they could be expected to take up upon leaving.

Cotman also seems to have either asked or allowed his pupils to imitate his signature which appears on almost every one of his drawing-copies from this period. The presence of 'J. S. Cotman' on the lower part of the sheets, sometimes combined with a red stamp 'KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL', is often pressured and scratchy, implying either that pupils pressed down hard on their teacher's master copy to leave an indentation on their own sheets beneath, or that the drawing was actually a pupil's own, the darkness of the inscription indicating repeated attempts to get it right. These kinds of marks are detectable in *Roman Soldier on Rearing Horse* and *Man in armour* (Figs 167 and 169-171), the dark scrawl on the former appearing much too angular to be Cotman's own full and curvy autograph, whilst, in the latter, a faint suggestion of his authentic signature

[27] See JSC to his family, 16-18 January 1834, MC 2487/41, NRO. He also planned visits to the National Gallery according to a letter to his son John Joseph Cotman, 19 May 1838, ff. 205-6, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL, in which he also mentions his subscription to a 'glorious collection of armour' for school use.

appears beneath a darker, thicker and relatively stilted imitation. On the whole, the pupils' copies are relatively slavish imitations of Cotman's master drawings.

Cotman's readiness to have his pupils copy his signature is a strong statement of authority. Unlike the rarely signed Circulating Portfolio drawings which, as we saw in Chapter 3, flattered Cotman's subscribers by allowing them to play the artist, the King's drawing-copies were the result of a more slavish imitation by pupils of their master, placing the copyist firmly as a pupil commanded by his teacher. Not quite two years into the job, Cotman claimed that those of his own children who had come to London to help produce drawing-copies for the school, Miles Edmund (then aged twenty-five) who had also begun to assist his father in the classroom, Ann (twenty-three) and Alfred (seventeen), had 'done crack[ing] subjects & they take wonderfully. Little do they [the pupils] ker by whom they are by when given under my name.'[28] This remark, together with the presence and copying of the signature, shows that it was important for Cotman to assert his name in class, whether or not he produced the master copy. Giving his pupils drawing-copies which were rarely by any artist but himself, he could promote himself as author, not just teacher. In other words, Cotman was the exclusive source his pupils studied and thus a reminder of whom they should aspire to.

Cotman asserted his authority at King's in other ways besides copying. When, for example, his pupils became noisy in class, they could apparently be 'hushed by the sentence, "Gentlemen I cannot go on thus. "You must be silent or I leave the room" which he admitted to Dawson Turner made him feel 'really astonished' at himself.[29] The role at King's could also provide him with a sense of self-importance and entitlement. In a letter to the Clerk of the Works at King's in 1837, Cotman detailed various changes he wanted to be undertaken in his classroom before the end of term, including the removal of pegs from the wall, the erection of shelves and the repainting of his desk. Bourdieu talked about how being on the academic staff of an educational institution allows the position holder 'a mode of fulfilment specific to the ambition of the highest career which is implied in membership' of that institution.[30] By simply being a part of an official institutional framework – one in which the people beneath you, such as the Clerk of Works, would obey your requests – Cotman could acquire a new level of security and power which made his job as a school drawing master as positive as possible.

[28] JSC to JJC, 13 November 1835, ff.120-3, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.
[29] JSC to DT, 25 February 1834, MC 2487/45, NRO.
[30] Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Oxford, 1998), 221.

In turn, it is reasonable to propose that the authority, sense of entitlement and benefits that Cotman gained from teaching at King's gave him some sort of solution to the problems of authority that had followed him throughout his career, from struggling to assert his own style under the influence of the Cholmeleys, say, to grappling with the demands of different patrons who were bankrolling his *Antiquities of Normandy*. While the authority that came with the salaried position at King's was not the kind that an artist might expect to achieve in an ideal sense, it could nevertheless enable a level of psychological security and personal kudos which could feed an ego, qualm ambivalences about professional and financial status in older age, and provide an institutional structure in which to re-inscribe one's name. To some extent, we can see Cotman's working practice and experience at King's as providing the structural predicate for the art he produced outside. By November 1834, he could claim that his part-time position had given him 'a year at ease' during which he had 'commenced work in earnest' resulting in 'orders pouring in—who could not be happy with all these adjuncts'.[31] It is to the art that Cotman produced outside of the classroom that I will now turn.

2. Artistic investment: paint, colour and materiality

In contrast to the pencil drawings he produced for his school pupils, the works Cotman made for exhibition and commission during the 1820s and 1830s are characterised by their emphasis on paint, colour and texture. Despite his self-promotion as a drawing master after 1824, Cotman declared that his main aim was to associate his persona not with the draughtsman or teacher but with the painter, having 'been laboring hard lately in that department of my art.'[32] In his watercolours, transparency is replaced by material form, evident in the panoramic scene *Dieppe from the Heights to the East of the Port, looking down upon the Harbour Churches of St. Jacques and St. Remi, and along the coast towards St. Vallery* (Fig. 172), which was exhibited at the NSA in 1824 and the SPWC in 1825.[33] This work is full of sharp scratching and stopping-out and varying degrees of paint application, from smooth washes to scumbled dry-on-dry (Fig. 173). Other watercolours indicate the use of salt or breadcrumbs to soak up spots of the medium giving a speckled appearance as in *Landscape* and *Silver Birches* (Figs 174-176),

[31] JSC to DT, 28 November 1834, MC 2487/50, NRO.
[32] JSC to DT, 1 November 1826, MC 2487/27, NRO.
[33] Cotman produced another version of this watercolour of similar dimensions but which has a smoother, more transparent surface appearance. It is also in the V&A, 3013-1876.

a technique for which J. M. W. Turner had himself become famous.[34] The speckled effect that Cotman achieved in his watercolours imitates the dappled effect of foliage in an oil painting like *Silver Birches*, a version of the abovementioned watercolour (Fig. 177). Indeed, by the late 1820s Cotman was thickening his watercolour paints by mixing rice or flour with pigment to emulate the substantiality of oil, a medium in which he was working more than ever before. The heavy clouds in watercolours such as *Storm on Yarmouth Beach* from 1831 and *St Benet's Abbey* of the same date (Figs 178 and 179), for instance, indicate the use of this 'paste', their opaqueness calling to mind the painterly, clotted finish of the clouds in an oil like *Drainage Mills in the Fens* (Fig. 180) painted around 1835.

This emphasis on the textural possibilities of paint was paralleled by a brightening of Cotman's palette, which emphasised the primaries yellow and blue. Additional accents of red frequently punctuate his scenes, as in the watercolour *Landscape* (Fig. 174) from c.1835 and the oil, *The Baggage Wagon* (Fig. 181), from c.1824-28. In all his media during the 1820s and 1830s, drawing recedes in its material and compositional importance.

There are multiple possible interpretations for the exceptional conjunction of colour and materiality in Cotman's late work, including concurrent developments in the academic and the manufacturing branches of the art world. As Rosie Dias has shown, an open discussion about colour and painting techniques had emerged in academic circles since the turn of the nineteenth century, with artists' lectures and treatises engaging directly with new techniques and scientific colour theory.[35] As a corollary of these engagements, the art world saw the emergence of an enhanced optical culture with an extraordinary increase in the colourific character of British art. A new generation of artists – most notably Clarkson Stanfield (1793-67) and Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859), both of whom had links with theatre painting, John Frederick Lewis (1804-76) and William Etty (1787-1849) who was a comparatively late starter[36] – used colour to distinguish themselves from the muted, transparent and 'picturesque' tones of Cotman's generation.

[34] In 1831, *Arnold's Magazine* described Turner's well-known employment of this so-called process of 'taking out the lights with bread', the crumbs of which 'are laid in with all the effect which local colouring can give, similar to that of oil painting; but the finishing is totally different, as the lights, instead of being painted *on*, as in oil, are really taken out.' *Arnold's Magazine of Fine Arts*, vol. 2, no. 7, August 1831, 55.

[35] For a discussion about the Academic engagement with colour, see Rosie Dias, 'Venetian Secrets: Benjamin West and the Contexts of Colour at the Royal Academy' in Monks et al, *Living with the Royal Academy*.

[36] See Myrone, 'William Etty: 'A child of the Royal Academy" in Monks et al, *Living with the Royal Academy*, 171-94.

Cotman himself admitted to being influenced by the prismatic palettes of these individuals, particularly the young Lewis. In January 1834, whilst in London for his interview at King's, he wrote ecstatically to Dawson Turner about a 300-strong collection of drawings by Lewis which he had seen at the Artist Graphic Conversazione:

> Words cannot convey to you their splendour. My poor Red Blues & Yellows for which I have in Norwich been so much abused and broken hearted about, are faded jades, to what I there saw...

His letter continued with a note to his artist-sons in Norwich: 'when compared to London art we are as nothing ... use more color, I now only wonder we have done so well as we have done.'[37]

The enthusiasm for colour was also related to the emergence of colour shops and technologies for the manufacture of pigments, both of which led artists towards greater experimentation with techniques and new paints.[38] Even Cotman had a stab at playing the colourman whilst in London in the 1830s, producing homemade paints 'from the Raw Materials & warranted on the best principles with due allowance to be made for theft from the olden time sanctioned by appelies & by all artist of high talent to the present day' and jovially referring to his amateur enterprise as 'Cotman & Co, Lab Manufactory.'[39]

Yet Cotman's move away from drawing to brightly coloured painting also had personal meaning linked to his maturing age. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, drawing was associated with artistic promise and youth; it was the medium in which artists began their training, leaving easel painting aside until they had achieved graphic mastery.[40] Indeed, when Cotman's twenty-year-old son, John, was 'itching to have a try at oils', his older brother, Miles, reminded him that there was 'plenty of time yet', urging him to 'draw more first—nothing like drawing'.[41] Cotman, too, emphasised drawing as 'the only true road' for the young artist, and 'the only road the old Boys ever entered upon. I mean

[37] JSC to DT and the Cotman family, 8 January 1834, MC 2487/69, NRO.
[38] See Jenny Carson, *Art Theory and Production in the Studio of Benjamin West*, unpublished PhD thesis (City University of New York, 2000).
[39] JSC to John Maw, 23 November 1835, ADD MS 45,883, BL. 'Cotman and Co.' refers to Cotman and his children, Miles Edmund, John Joseph, Alfred, and Ann, who at various points throughout the 1830s left Norwich to assist their father in London.
[40] On watercolour and the associations of youthful genius, see Smith, *Emergence*, 217-20.
[41] MEC to JJC, 14 February 1834, ff.32-3, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.

those that now live to us in the annals of fame.'[42] The temporality of drawing was also significant: an apparently immediate, dexterous and enlightened function of the artist's hand as opposed to the laborious, considered, expert practice of the older artist who was expected to produce finished and long-lasting products. Greater understanding about the fugitive properties of watercolour – the understanding that the pigments could fade when exposed to light – further fed into drawing's ephemeral connotations,[43] as did the premature deaths of two influential watercolourists, Girtin aged twenty-seven in 1802 and the twenty-six-year-old Richard Parkes Bonington in 1828, whose 'late' watercolours never really lost their associations with inventive buoyancy. Yet drawing's youthful associations sat much more uncomfortably with artists who did survive their youth, particularly those, like Cotman, whose careers were so closely allied to the medium. Far from being the twenty-something 'Cotty' whose 'Dashing & splashing' had resisted stylistic completion, middle-aged Cotman could now expect to be judged on the longevity of his artistic contributions. This goes some way towards explaining the ancillary status of the sketch in his late 'liberal' work and its replacement by paint, colour and materiality.

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All three qualities drew attention from Cotman's critics, generating responses that were most often characterised by ambivalence than by out-and-out praise or disdain. In 1825, the SPWC invited Cotman to join as an Associate Exhibitor without following the standard procedure of sending works for assessment due to his 'known talents' (a change of heart from that of the members who had rejected him twenty years earlier).[44] That year, Cotman showed three Normandy subjects at their exhibition – the aforementioned *Dieppe, from the Heights...*, *Mount St. Michael, Normandy, on the approach from Pontprson, under the appearance of the Mirage* and *Abbatial House of the Abbey of St. Ouen, at Rouen, taken down in 1817*[45] (Figs 172, 182 and 183) – all of which dazzle in their abundance of primary colours. Writing in *The Examiner*, Robert Hunt found their

[42] JSC to JJC, 19 May 1838, ff.205-6, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL. See also MEC to JJC, 20 March 1834, ff.45-6, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL in which Mile Edmund tells his younger brother to 'Not at once throw down your pencil and say I cannot make myself an artist but draw draw through thick and thin—you will find the benefit of it.'

[43] See Smith, *Emergence*, 39-44, on contemporary discussion on watercolour, pigment deterioration and preservation.

[44] One of the Turner daughters to DT, 5 January 1825, 'The Cotman Family' volume, shelf 167, C7, BM.

[45] There are at least two other versions of this watercolour, one in a private collection and the other in the V&A P.30-1934, dated 1824.

'positive' palette 'antagonistic' and recommended that Cotman 'guard against an intemperance of bright colour'.[46] Hunt may have been referring to such elements as the rectangles and flashes of rich crimson pigment that appear tonally discordant with the sulphurous lemon hue of the architecture in *Abbatial House.* Yet he also admitted that the exhibition visitor would 'regret' the absence of Cotman's bright colours in the exhibition, 'for even this style affords its zest in the general entertainment ... allay[ing] the mind's constant thirst after variety', a lack of which was a frequent criticism of the annual watercolour shows. In their 'opposition of reds, blues and yellows', Cotman's works could stand 'out from all the pictures in the Exhibition'.[47]

Such mixed reactions continued into the 1830s. Reviewing the 1831 SPWC exhibition, the critic for *Arnold's Magazine* noted the 'incongruous' qualities of 'simplicity' and 'extravagance' in Cotman's submissions. His large watercolour *Hôtel de Ville, Ulm* from 1830 (Fig. 184) was found to be especially confounding, its everyday subject of a town hall and marketplace appearing at odds with the picture's golden-yellow and azure palette. By giving this market scene luxuriant colouring and relatively grand dimensions (50.6 x 70 cm), Cotman, the critic admitted, almost bid 'defiance to criticism.'[48]

Other reviews were more scathing. In 1828, Hunt described Cotman's continued application of 'strong contrasts and heat of colour'[49] as posing a direct 'contradiction to nature and truth', resulting in the 'greater part of his capital pictures ... [being] bad'.[50] A year later, the *Norfolk Chronicle* dismissed his colouring as 'too gaudy', lamenting 'the absence of that sweet grey tone which is so charming in nature',[51] whilst in 1836, the *West Kent Guardian* regarded Cotman's colourful and painterly style as 'extravagant'.[52] Such criticism recalled the traditional Academic discourse on colour as an untrustworthy and, consequentially, morally corrupting force. Throughout his *Discourses,* Reynolds had warned the painter against representing nature with an 'unharmonious mixture of colours', instead allowing its hues to become 'adapted to the eye, from brightness, from softness, from harmony, from resemblance; because these agree with their object, nature, and therefore are true.'[53] Pictures in which the object had been given an excess of colour

[46] *The Examiner*, 29 May 1825, 344.
[47] *The Examiner*, 29 May 1825, 344.
[48] *Arnold's Magazine of the Fine Arts*, vol. 1, no. 6. July 1831, 515.
[49] *The Examiner*, 21 May 1826, 323.
[50] *The Examiner*, 11 May 1828, 308.
[51] NC, 1 August 1829.
[52] *West Kent Guardian*, 30 April 1836.
[53] Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven and London, 1975), Discourse VII [1776], 126.

than that found in nature were believed to have direct psychological effects on both artists and viewers who, regardless of their social or cultural origins, were seduced into associating colour with ease of understanding and pleasure as opposed to learning and reason (the Academic virtues associated with drawing and line).

Caution against using 'unnatural' colours continued to be exercised in Academic circles well after Reynolds' death. From 1825, the RA's Professor of Painting, Thomas Phillips (1770-1845), cautioned against 'dangerous experiments' involving the addition of bright spectral highlights to an already warm colour scheme.[54] Cotman was a clear offender, his high-key colours (particularly his penchant for yellow) were seen to give a self-consciously artificial experience and were frequently read as a shorthand for the figure most associated with such 'dangerous experiments', J. M. W. Turner.[55] By 1830, Turner was identified as 'the most vicious example' of an artist whose 'colouring of late' provided 'a warrant for any extravaganzas in the lower classes [of artists].'[56] In his mid-fifties by this date, Turner's '"terribly tropical"'[57] palette was viewed as eccentric, unintelligible and excessive, not to mention financially and critically unsuccessful in more conservative circles, and therefore seemingly making him a rather peculiar model for Cotman who praised his contemporary's 'very extraordinary Pictures'.[58]

Yet for Cotman, an artist interminably caught up in the tension between his real world responsibilities and the artistic autonomy the art world expected from an artist, Turner could represent the ideal autonomous artist, one heedless of a wife and children and thus free to take artistic risks on a public stage. As the critics conceded, Turner's colouring was not so much 'for effect but for the sake of singularity.'[59] By associating himself with the kind of liberal independence embodied by Turner, therefore, Cotman's stark colour contrasts had a significance beyond a purely stylistic influence.

This is not to say that Cotman's stylistic links to Turner did not also have strategic motivations aimed at situating himself in relation to contemporary aesthetic influences. Indeed, just as a Tunerian palette appears to have influenced the character of Cotman's output, so did Turner's subject matter. This is perhaps seen most directly in Cotman's

[54] Thomas Phillips, *Lecture on the History and Principles of Painting*, 1833, Lecture VIII [1829], 362.
[55] Hunt accused Turner of starting '[t]he rage for hot yellow colouring ..., a disease ... that has infected the practice of our professors and amateurs in art' which, he continued, was 'observable' in Cotman's exhibition watercolours. *The Examiner*, 11 May 1828, 308.
[56] *Morning Chronicle*, 26 April 1830.
[57] Quoted in *Morning Chronicle*, 17 June 1833.
[58] JSC to JJC, 11 May 1837, ff.187-8, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.
[59] *Morning Chronicle*, 26 April 1830.

watercolours of Normandy, particularly *Dieppe from the Heights...* from 1823 (Fig. 172) which constitutes a significant departure from his previous compositions. Composed as a panoramic landscape, *Dieppe* shows the bay of this Norman port populated with boats surrounded by the curve of small domestic townhouses and, beyond, the white-cliff coastline. In the foreground, a couple of families gather on the top of the high cliff where we, the viewers, are also positioned, just off to the right and thus at the image's central foreground. The composition undoubtedly nods to Turner's own panoramic landscape watercolours from the late 1810s and early 1820s such as *Richmond Hill* (Fig. 185), as well as a plate from his financially and critically successful print series *Picturesque Views on the Southern Coast of England* (1814-24), *Torbay from Brixham* (Fig. 186). In these two scenes, Turner placed the viewer at the highest point on the same sightline as the horizon where figures both before us and off to the left give meaning to the high foreground as a spot for surveying the far-reaching prospect beyond. We are similarly positioned at the edge of a drop, the ground rushing away and down from us towards the middleground bay.

Why might Cotman have adhered so closely to Turner's panoramic compositions? During the early 1820s, Turner had exhibited many of his panoramic landscapes in London to critical acclaim, including at the Soho premises of the engraver, Bernard William Cooke (1778-1855), where both watercolours and prints for the *Southern Coast* series, the latter engraved by a syndicate of engravers led by Cooke, were shown in 1821.[60] Painted two years later, Cotman exhibited *Dieppe* in Norwich in 1824, the year after he moved back to his hometown and when he was clearly aiming to make his presence felt in the NSA's new exhibition room (he exhibited fifty-two works at that show).[61] Besides the formal similarities, the compositional resemblance of *Dieppe* to Turner's landscape exhibition watercolours might be interpreted as Cotman triangulating himself with the metropolis from Norwich through the artistic influence of Turner and giving the Norwich public a very current kind of landscape art. Certainly, I

[60] See Eric Shanes, *Turner: The Great Watercolours*, exh. cat. (London, 2001), 39. Cotman knew Cooke and his brother and fellow-engraver George Cooke (1781-1834) well, having stayed with them in London in the few weeks around his interview for King's in 1834. Letters written by Cotman to his family and Dawson Turner in that year reveal that they spent much time talking with the brothers about the state of the arts in Britain and while we can reasonably assume that Cotman would have known J. M. W. Turner's *Southern Coast* series, we might also speculate that he studied and discussed it at the Cooke's residence. In 1826, all eighty plates of the series were arranged geographically, bound in two volumes and published by the Arch brothers who, we recall, had published Cotman's *Antiquities of Normandy* just a few years earlier.

[61] The number of submissions to the 1824 NSA exhibition is in stark contrast to Cotman's showings whilst a resident of Yarmouth, save a few showings in 1812-15, 1818 and 1820-21 of largely printed material.

have found no comparable landscape watercolours (in terms of composition, treatment or palette) displayed by a Norwich-exhibiting artist during these years.

It is not just Cotman's landscape watercolours that show stark stylistic and subject influences from elsewhere; a number of his oils also indicate that he was looking at the state of the landscape genre to gauge what was popular, where he might be able to excel as well as what might be meaningful for him as an artist. His landscape oils from the 1820s and 1830s are characterised by their portrait format, noticeable surface textures, emphasis on greens, blues and browns, and proximate viewpoints to the natural motif – see *Silver Birches* (Fig. 177), *In the Bishop's Garden (Landscape)*, *The Mishap*, *The Drop Gate* and *The Silent Stream, Normandy* (Figs 187-190), some of which may have been exhibited at the NSA and, in its new form, the NSI, given the volume of submissions labelled 'Landscape' in the catalogues (the above titles were given posthumously by Norwich Castle Museum). These characteristics especially chime with oils by Richard Parkes Bonington. The small portrait-format oils Bonington painted just before his death in 1826, including *A Wooded Lane* and *In the Forest at Fontainebleau* (Figs 191 and 192), present us with close-up views of natural motifs and heightened textures of oil paint.[62] In *A Wooded Lane*, short swipes of the brush, smudges of paint, quick thick touches of yellow, white and light green, and copious scratching-out with a toothed tool animate the forest. We find strikingly similar textures in all of the abovementioned oils by Cotman. Yet unlike Cotman's oils, where stone boulders, tree trunks, walls, drop gates and streams, ponds or rivers erect barriers to our entry, Bonington gives us (quite literally) a clear pathway into *A Wooded Scene*. Not so in his *In the Forest at Fontainebleau*, however, where great grey rocks – and the painterly, textured marks that articulate them – almost fill our field of vision and foreground an up-front engagement with nature and materiality, an effect we also see in Cotman's paintings, particularly *Silver Birches* from c.1835.

Besides Bonington's, Cotman's landscape oils also recall the kind of paintings that Turner had produced in his early twenties, such as *A Beech Wood with Gypsies round a Campfire* from c.1799-1801 (Fig. 193) with its the similar portrait-format, small scale, green, blue and brown palette and emphasis on both materiality and naturalism. Again, referencing Turner, even (and perhaps especially) in his youth, could inject Cotman's subject matter with an energy. Going back to one's youthful productions was not unusual for artists in their later years. In 1833, Turner bought back dozens of his own

[62] I am grateful to Laurel Peterson for alerting me to these two oils.

early drawings from Dr Monro's posthumous sale as a direct bid to facilitate his own building of his legacy. Thus, while we may certainly read Cotman's landscape oils from the 1820s and 1830s as reminiscent of Turner's own youthful creations, we might also see them as referencing his own past. Indeed, the slight dimensions, naturalistic palette and compositional proximity to trees, leaves, grass, water, rocks and walls in Figures 177 and 187-190 bear a striking resemblance to his Greta watercolours produced some twenty-five to thirty years earlier, as if Cotman was seeking to find a new lease of life in a return to a moment in British art landscape painting where the emphasis had been on a heightened naturalism. Between 1803-6, Cotman had been very much a part of that moment, and throughout the 1820s and 1830s he included in his exhibited submissions landscape subjects of the Welsh, Surrey, Norfolk and Yorkshire locations he had visited in his late teens and early twenties.[63] Cotman's return to the subject matter, style and compositions of his youth, now heightened with a bolder palette, different medium and emphasis on materiality, might therefore indicate a continuing search right at the end of his career for a distinctive identity, one which might involve flexibility to contemporary influences but also a willingness to return to his origins. In other words, Cotman's late works show a strong engagement with external precedents but also with himself as a precedent; they reference the past as a reminder of his legacy as well as the need to remain relevant in the present.

Of course, Cotman also needed to make a living. Unlike the works he submitted to the NSA in the 1800s and 1810s, almost all of his submissions to the Norwich exhibitions in the 1820s and 1830s were asterisked for sale. What was Cotman offering his potential customers in works like the above landscape oils? First to note is their small size. On the one hand, we might read their slight dimensions as indicating an insecurity about the market; that his local customers were not elite and were thus unlikely to spend on art. As we saw earlier, exhibiting artists of 1820s Norwich struggled to find an adequate spread of patrons for contemporary art. By keeping his art small, Cotman might therefore be sparing in his use of materials: he did not need to commit himself to a large canvas in order to achieve powerful surface effects. Instead, working on a small scale enabled him to use paint to an almost excessive degree, making him materially present without having to invest the time or money otherwise required in the execution of a large-scale painting, itself requiring a guaranteed sale to make the labour worthwhile. Working on small scale could make his products more affordable and thus more

[63] Among many others, these included unidentifiable works entitled *Study of Trees, Ashted Park, Surrey* and *Study of Trees, Rokeby, Yorkshire*, both exhibited at the NSA in 1824, and *Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire* at the first Norfolk and Norwich Art Union exhibition in 1839.

appealing to a local clientele, a small yet colourful and painterly work providing them with value for money.

We might nevertheless also read the small size of Cotman's works as strategy to provide his putative buyers with a special kind of experience. In a review of the NSA's 1824 exhibition, Cotman's eye-catching style and subject matter was seen to achieve a great deal in a small space. His oil, *Dutch Boats off Yarmouth, Prizes during the War* (Fig. 194), a self-consciously aestheticizing representation of Dutch and English boats landing on Yarmouth beach, was praised in particular as:

> a *multum in parvo* of cleverness for design, colouring, and management of light and shade; a most delectable "hit" of what all so wish but few have "the power" to produce, in marine painting ... which though "small in size" it attracts the admiration it excites...[64]

The bold composition depicting the vessels, their flags beating grandly in the wind, the glowing existence of the Nelson's Column beyond and the English flag placed compositionally beside it celebrates patriotic victories on English soil. The nationalistic subject matter and thick application of the russet-red, yellow and blue paint attracted an immediate buyer in John Brightwen (who also purchased *Dieppe*) who called the 'colour and handling masterly.'[65] The experience that a painting such as *Dutch Boats off Yarmouth* and the landscape oils illustrated in Figures 177 and 187-190 provided their viewers was thus about a powerful intimacy with the artworks themselves: they are small enough to invite their viewer to get close and engage with them as objects. That experience is enhanced by their distinctive materiality and bold palette, further allowing Cotman to identify himself as a painter fully invested in creating original, meaningful and experiential art.

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Personal investment in the cause of art emerged as a key issue for Cotman during the last decade of his career and led him to experiment with other types of subject matter. In 1836 he revealed to his son John that he was 'deeply interested' in combining 'brilliant' and 'warm' colours with devotional subject matter, an area which was wholly new to his

[64] NC, 14 August 1824. The painting was also exhibited in 1823 at the BI.
[65] John Brightwen to JSC, July 1825, Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.

oeuvre. The aim resulted in a number of paintings of religious subjects, but perhaps most intriguing in terms of their meaning and intended market are two small oils, *An Ecclesiastic* and *A Monk* (Figs 195 and 196), which reveal Cotman's keenness to emphasise his status as a liberal artist in his later years.[66] Each painting shows a lone male figure standing centrally and close to the picture plane. Neither engages with the viewer but appears to partake in deep contemplation of something beyond the paintings' physical boundaries. *An Ecclesiastic* presents the profile of a man adorned in white robes and substantial crimson and gold-patterned chasuble. He looks off to the left, presumably towards the altar of the church in whose aisle he seems to stand. Holding his right hand to his chest, the other clutches a bundle of bound papers, perhaps religious scriptures central to his faith. In contrast, Cotman's *Monk* casts his eyes down to the floor of what appears to be an open loggia before the painterly hint of a sunlit landscape. His calm stance, semi-closed eyes, soft facial features and gentle clasp of his staff and book give the scene an air of peace and quiet. For both figures, their contemplation of something unseen by us is deeply personal for them – a calling to a higher, almost unworldly cause to which they are devoted.

By the nineteenth century, the monk was as a key motif for artists.[67] He was a figure for contemplating the artist's role in the world, his lifestyle, identity and, crucially, his reasons for being an artist. In 1797, the German writers Wilhelm Wackenroder and Johann Ludwig Tieck produced the influential collection of essays, *Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk*, which portrayed the eponymous monk as an anti-Enlightenment enthusiast who regarded art as the most divine of human endeavours because of its ability to transmit the creator's spirit to the world. Throughout, Wackenroder and Tieck portrayed the artist's vocation as a divine calling from God and one not to be reckoned with. The 'art-loving monk' thus stood for the saintly, mystical life of an individual whose devotion to art could not be shaken. In an art world where the model for the older artist had become a contentious subject, the attributes of single-minded commitment to the vocation could be prized above the qualities of talent, spontaneity and facility chiefly associated with the younger artist. What mattered was less the art to which the artist was devoted than the very act of being devoted; it was a state of being. Indeed, Cotman does not show us the objects of his monks' devotion; it is the very state of their devotion that is the central theme. In turn, these small paintings imply that

[66] JSC to JJC, 31 October 1836, ff.156, 154, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.
[67] On the artist as monk during the early nineteenth century, see Beat Wyss, 'The Whispering Zeitgeist: Caspar David Fredrich', *Tate Etc.*, issue 14 (Autumn 2008) and online (1 September 2008) https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/whispering-zeitgeist, accessed January 2016.

something almost mystical exists beyond the image, as if that is where the creation of art takes place; it is not necessarily made iconographically identifiable within the work itself, but emerges out of the artist's investment in it.

That investment is borne out most fully in Cotman's application of paint which in most areas of both compositions is richly coloured and thickly applied, almost clotted and congealed in appearance. The golden tones in *An Ecclesiastic* – in the curtains, pew ends and the ornate chasuble he wears – and the highly-textured surface – the paint fluid in some areas but more often densely applied with recognisable brushstrokes – invest the painting with a glowing gravitas. In *A Monk*, dull white paint is scumbled dryly across the blue sky contrasting with the fluidity of the brown-green paint which Cotman allowed to drip down from the monk's leathery cloak to form part of his undergarment and staff.[68] The emphasis on rich colour combined with a mix of painterly textures and techniques recalls that sense of how Cotman might make peace with his status as somebody whose income was predominantly generated through school teaching. Here, time has (seemingly) been put aside for the creation of 'Art'; it is material and precious, something to look forward to and invest oneself in.

Of course time in art can be deceptive. *An Ecclesiastic* and *A Monk* are small, painterly works requiring little preparation time, while both bear drying cracks indicating the premature application of paint before lower layers were allowed to dry fully. Indeed, Cotman claimed to John that he aimed to complete *An Ecclesiastic* in a fortnight alongside his other work in time for submission with its 'companion', *A Monk*, to the first exhibition of the newly-formed Bath Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts.[69] Their intended market is unclear. They were, he said, 'done as potboilers': quick, popular works compelled by the requirement of making a living. Be that as it may, Cotman's devotional subject matter and material investment could nonetheless allow him to reclaim these 'potboilers' as a virtue because they were the products of an individual whose fundamental character made being an artist more important than the kind or quality of the works he produced. This is a bold position which only a mature artist could conceivably take, having got beyond the problem of owning a reputation that could be lost as might be experienced by younger artists starting out on their careers. It might therefore account for

[68] This was an effect which Cotman's critics had previously picked up on, describing some of his works as looking as though they had been 'cut out in leather', *The Examiner*, 21 May 1826, 323.
[69] JSC to JJC, 31 October 1836, ff.156, 154, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL. The exhibition took place in Bath in December that year and accommodated 592 submissions from artists across the country. See the review in *The Art Union*, no. 4, 15 May 1839, 62.

the stylistic range in Cotman's oeuvre during his last decades, as it might too his apparent relinquishing of any ideological struggle with being a drawing teacher.

3. Reputation, legacy and the death of the artist

If we accept that the survival that Cotman engineered for himself in the 1820s and 1830s was as somebody who was devoted to the cause of art, then the preservation of that reputation was a crucial issue. As Cotman put it himself in 1827:

> Reputation, and consequently a fair standing amongst my friends is what I have worked hard for—desired, above all temporal thing...[70]

When moving to London in 1834 at the age of fifty-one, he intended to maintain the Cotman teaching business, and therefore name, in Norwich. This was predominantly done by his sons, Miles and, especially, John, both of whom were professional artists by the late 1820s. Initially John accompanied his father to London to help produce drawing-copies for the pupils at King's, though Cotman was at pains to point out to Dawson Turner that he should be a liberal artist first and foremost: 'John will have all the advantages of a London season for work & to see—And he will not be the Boy I take him for shd he keep the ∧glorious opportunity happily offered to him.'[71] John remained in London for only a year before he was back in Norwich working as an independent drawing master. Miles, who Cotman described as 'steadily keeping together the pupils of Norwich & otherwise acting as myself', swapped with his brother at Christmas 1834.[72] His involvement in his father's classes at King's led to his appointment as part-time Assistant Drawing Master, affording him a small wage and, like his father, the security of an official position to make work for exhibition (at the RA, BI, SPWC and the Society of British Artists, as well as provincial institutions in Norwich and Manchester) outside of school hours.[73] Cotman tutored Miles in his own style, or at least a style with which he had been associated in his younger years, again indicating that he was styling his own

[70] JC to DT, 10 November 1827, MC 2487/68/2, NRO.
[71] JSC to DT, 27 January 1834, MC 2487/42, NRO.
[72] JSC to DT, JSC to DT, 28 November 1834, MC 2487/50, NRO. Miles had been teaching drawing predominantly at the Norwich school of schoolmistress Mrs Beckwith. JSC to DT, 1 February 1834, MC 2487/44, NRO. 'I have fast recivd a most flattering & delight∧ful letter from Mrs Beckwith, who gives her school & interests to my Son - he has now ~~my~~ all my connextions, & much more'.
[73] JSC to King's College School Council, 10 November 1836, Secretary's In-correspondence, ICA/IC/C13, KCLA. A letter to Cotman dated 17 December 1836 granting his request exists in the Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.

family on a kind of Cotman brand: '...I have ordered a dozen Drawings of him small ones wishing them to be dashing, & sketch like to get him out of his hard dry & dam bad'.[74]

Father and son also collaborated on the same works and submitted them jointly for exhibition, one being a large marine watercolour shown in April 1838 at the SPWC and in September 1839 at the Royal Institution in Manchester where it won a cash prize of 26*l* 5*s*.[75] The title given by Cotman was *The Wreck of the Houghton Pictures Consigned to the Empress Catherine of Russia, including the gorgeous landscape by Rubens of the Waggoner* (Fig. 197), although it appeared simply as 'A Sea View' in Manchester. Unlike his usually small exhibition watercolours, Cotman described *The Wreck* as a 'whacker', measuring '3 feet by 2 feet 5', with Miles painting the seascape while he took the foreground.[76]

Besides its scale, the picture's subject matter was also ambitious and it speaks to some of the themes of futurity and survival that have been touched upon here. The scene which opens up before us is one of maritime chaos at the hands of a choppy sea and stormy sky painted by Miles. Two ships appear to battle the waves, the one closest to the picture plane pitched at an alarming angle so that it appears to fall sideways towards the flotilla of small boats that attend it. Blocking our entry to this middleground scene is a wall of wreckage at the shoreline, including a mast, planks of wood, the dramatic presence of human remains and a semi-conscious figure group reminiscent of Rubens' famous image of the Deposition. To the right of this niche-like group lies a heap of objects whose presence can be explained as the valuable goods washed ashore from what is clearly the shipwreck of the main vessel. In a letter to John, Cotman called these goods 'pictures of vertu', taking care to note the inclusion of 'Rubens landscape of the waggoner—!!!!!'[77]

The watercolour's full title, together with the inclusion of this Old Master, invest the scene with a narrative of which the Cotmans' audience would have been aware. Following the huge sale of Sir Robert Walpole's picture collection at Houghton Hall to

[74] JSC to JJC, 13 November 1835, ff.120-3, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.
[75] The picture was apparently painted in response to a circular that Cotman had received from Manchester offering a prize 'for the best picture of a marine subject', JSC to James Bulwer, 23 July 1839. Cotman asked his Manchester-based son, Francis Walter, for information about the show, JSC to Francis Walter Cotman, 12 September 1839, both references quoted in Pidgley, *John Sell Cotman's Patrons and the Romantic Subject Picture in the 1820s and 1830s*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of East Anglia, 1975), f.n. 95 in notes to chapter 3. The prize and accompanying sum was announced in *The Art Union*, no. 29, 1 June 1841, 105.
[76] JSC to Francis Walter Cotman, 1838, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL, missing, quoted in Pidgley, *Cotman's Patrons and the Romantic Subject Picture*, endnote 97 to Chapter 3 (no page number given).
[77] JSC to JJC, April 1838, ff.203-4, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.

Catherine the Great in 1779, half the paintings (represented here by Rubens's landscape) were shipped on the frigate Natalia which suffered a shipwreck off the coast of Holland. While the collection was successfully transferred to another ship and reached the Russian Empress safely, the initial difficulties sparked widespread rumours that the entire collection had perished at sea.[78] The importance that Cotman affords this still life of objects is not only implied by the detail with which it is painted or its proximity to the viewer, but by its sheer size which exceeds that of the dramatic scene of human suffering to its right, not to mention the shipwreck beyond. The juxtaposition of the dead and dying humans with objects of 'virtu', one might propose, is about the survival of art over and above everything else.

The theme of art and its survival is continued elsewhere in Cotman's last exhibition watercolours, including the signed and dated *The Drawing Master* (Fig. 198), which he showed in 1839 at the first exhibition of Norfolk's new exhibiting society, the Norfolk and Norwich Art Union. The scene opens onto a stage-like setting with bellowing curtains framing the central action. That action is undertaken calmly and quietly by a seated group of three, possibly four (given the skin-coloured presence between the boy and the figure behind the older girl) art students who crowd around the far left corner of a long table where they appear to study a hefty folio, most probably containing drawings. To their right, the composition is bisected by a central pilaster which separates the dark arch behind them from a niche in which hang a number of Renaissance paintings depicting the life of Christ (including, again, an image of the Deposition). Before the hang and placed on the far right end of the table is another open portfolio accompanied by what appears to be a pot of paint brushes or pens. On the floor and in close proximity to the picture plane are strewn loose papers and more open folios as if to imply the material and messy nature of artistic practice.

Perched on the table next to the most centrally-situated boy towers a green-shaded lamp which casts its luminous hue over and around him. From the opposite side, an unidentified light source projects a beam of light obliquely onto the figure-group. The combination of artificial and natural light emphasises their concentrated activity around the folio. It also highlights the fact that no drawing master is present, or at least not the heroic figure of the drawing master we might expect to see given the work's exhibition title. With the students left to get on with their close, patient work around the

[78] See Thierry Morel et al, *Houghton Revisited: the Walpole Masterpieces from Catherine the Great's Hermitage*, exh. cat. (London, 2013), 40.

folio, the theme that emerges is less about active teaching than one about a nurturing form of education which enables art's future. That form of education is one that is steeped in a long history to which the presence of the Renaissance paintings attest. These devotional works, Cotman seems to imply, were created hundreds of years ago by pupils who carefully watched and learned from their master. To this end, it is significant that the niche is lit by an (unseen) light source while the arch behind the figure-group is left shrouded in velvety-black darkness, as if a future uncertainty exists about what kind of art is going to be produced from the table. Yet the drama of that ambiguity also indicates hope, a promise of a continuity between what has happened in art history and what will take place in the future. While we are not shown what that art will look like, the implication is that it is created by a shared process which will survive.

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On 24 July 1842, Cotman died quite suddenly at home at the age of sixty. The event was not dramatic and, it would seem, relatively unmeaningful within the artistic community. Despite his attempts to remind the art world of what 'Cotman-the-artist' looked like with the striking artistic examples discussed above, the large auction of his work in Norwich in June 1843 fetched only mediocre prices.[79] Moreover, no obituaries appeared in the press, not even in his hometown, nor was he mentioned in the prime venues for biographies of recently departed artists such as Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843-60) or the Redgrave's *Century of Painters of the English School* (1866), which gave him only a passing mention in relation to Varley. That Cotman's death went largely unremarked indicates that his contemporaries found it hard to grasp the significance of his identity and career. What do we do with Cotman's death? And how was his career constructed in its immediate wake?

It is not known precisely how Cotman died, although his death certificate states 'natural decay'.[80] As mentioned previously, Cotman had complained of exhaustion and poor eyesight which was frequently painful and sometimes incapacitating. These conditions

[79] See Christie & Manson, *A Catalogue of the Interesting Library ... and Books of Prints, including Copies of The Normandy and Norfolk, of John Sell Cotman, Esq. Deceased...* (Norwich, 6-7 June 1843). MEC to JJC, 26 May 1843, ff.245-6, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL: 'The auction was <u>not</u> a good one I mean of drawings & Pictures acc^{ds} to catalogue sent you. the whole not fetching more than £200 ... Christies expect the books & prints will fetch more but I can't <u>say</u> I am very sanguine though I <u>hope they will</u>'.

[80] Copy of Register of Death, requested by James Reeve on 19 October 1876, contained in the Reeve Collection Cotman Correspondence, BM.

have contributed to a sense amongst Cotman's biographers that he suffered from some mental illness or problem which ultimately led to his demise, not, as I would argue, the effects of a busy and sometimes very stressful working life which required constant movement, deliberation and maintenance. Given the lack of evidence around the cause, it is unproductive to dwell on the physiological death as an interpretable event. Nevertheless, the un-dramatic circumstances around Cotman's demise as well as his unremarkable age – sixty: not young but not elderly and, as Cotman put it himself in 1838, 'though not the oldest person in the world, still I feel I am not the youngest'[81] – may be two factors in why his death went relatively unremarked in the public sphere. Artists who died very young – like Girtin or Bonington who were 'snatched' from the art world in their midst – or very old – the reflective gentleman artist at eighty who was respected by his younger peers, like J. M. W. Turner in the 1840s – customarily warranted an obituary which, by extension, automatically wrote them into the history of British art then beginning to be formalised in publications like that of the Redgraves. The artist who committed suicide, Hayden being the most infamous example, or who was seen to have worked himself to death, obeyed another model; the cause of death was intriguing and scandalous enough to attract a good readership whilst also playing to the current myth of the artist as an emotional, creative and unpredictable force close to his own mortality. In the wake of their death, such artists' works could be understood in relation to the dramatic cause of their demise. It may, therefore, have been Cotman's age and the unexceptional way in which he died that obscured his presence in the public mind in the aftermath of his death.

Obscurity itself may be another factor in trying to account for the lack of interest in Cotman's passing in 1842. Besides the benefits that Cotman's position as a Professor at a respected London school could bring, the job undoubtedly made it difficult for him to feed and maintain the social connections with other professional artists and patrons that was expected of an artist living and working in the capital. Indeed, the letters Cotman wrote from London during the 1830s show that on more than one occasion his school workload was large enough to keep him from 'doing anything but for the College', with his 'vacations ...[being]... always my most labouring part of $\wedge^{my}$ engagement' with the job.[82] Moreover, unlike those artists who lacked a salaried, regular position, Cotman's salary meant that he did not need to do the kind of networking he had undertaken in his

[81] JSC to JJC, 22 September 1838, ff.209-10, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.
[82] JSC to DT, 28 November 1834, MC 2487/50, NRO and JSC to H Smith, 11 July 1838, ICA/IC/C15, King's College Archive.

younger years in order to gain access into particular patrons' homes and milieus. No longer needing to put himself out there in the same way nevertheless meant that personal anecdotes were less likely to be told about him; his life was less accidental, changeable and public. What would people say about the late John Sell Cotman, a drawing professor at King's College School?

Another factor that may have diminished the presence of Cotman's immediate legacy was his construction of a collective familial artistic identity. He had five teenage and adult children by the time he moved to London in 1834, four of whom were artists. As we have seen, Cotman attempted to turn the situation to his advantage: John keeping the Cotman name and reputation going in Norwich while Miles, Ann and Alfred produced drawings-copies for his pupils at King's where Miles became Assistant Drawing Master (subsequently taking over his father's role following his death). And, as we have seen, Cotman collaborated with his son on exhibition submissions. His family was no longer, therefore, just a source of expenditure, as he had bemoaned during his years of working on *Antiquities of Normandy*; now they had come together to feed directly into the business of their father's art. In other words, the relationship between teaching, family and work that Cotman constructed for himself during this period was perhaps a more inward-facing, centrifugal construction of an artistic identity. While surrounding himself with like-minded, reliable colleagues could help him to deal with the fragility of being in an artistic network (the NSA's demise a very recent memory) as well as providing him with a replacement for a patronage base so that extensive travelling around the country was no longer necessary, this more self-reflexive identity may also have meant that Cotman's own individual story could not be easily recounted after his death.

This is not to say that Cotman was a reclusive or lone artist during these years. He had close friends in the London artist community, particularly Samuel Prout, George Cattermole and his old associate, Varley. He attended and exhibited with artist societies and gatherings, such as the SPWC, the Graphic Society and, once, in 1834, held a conversazione at his lodgings in Charlotte Street, his guests being J. R. Lewis and his brother Charles George Lewis, Cattermole, James Duffield Harding, David Cox, James Stark from Norwich, Edward William Cooke and the amateurs Mr Harriot, James Bulwer and John Maw.[83] He had attained references from Turner, Callcott and Wilkins for his interview at King's and had since lived in the artists' quarters of Fitzrovia and Russell Square. As we saw, too, he actively responded to contemporary artistic trends in his

[83] JSC to DT, 25 February 1834, MC 2487/45, NRO.

work. However, the twenty-eight years that Cotman had spend in Norfolk seem to have left him under the radar of a metropolitan reading public, despite the Norwich art world's links with London and the publication of his *Antiquities of Normandy* through a London publisher. As Cotman himself had put it to his son in 1838, 'If you wish to be an Artist, you must leave Norwich. for nothing can be done for you there'.[84] Moreover, the school work that populated Cotman's working week for eight years following his move to London meant that he was unable to hold court in the same way that artists who lacked a regular, salaried position could. This inability to integrate himself systematically into the liberal artistic scene in London therefore seems to have impeded his bequest of an immediate and biographically-clear legacy.

But perhaps the most profound likely cause for Cotman' lack of posthumous commemoration was the difficulty that his art seemed to pose to his contemporaries seeking to map an artist's creative output clearly onto his life. Five months after Cotman passed away, John Varley died, not much older than his friend at the age of sixty-four. Unlike Cotman, Varley was an artist who was seen to warrant an obituary. According to the write-up in *The Art Union*, it was his dedication to art that had killed him. While taking a sketch of what was to be his very last subject, the cedar trees in Chelsea Botanic Gardens, he had caught a 'severe cold' from the 'dampness of the ground' which 'terminated in his death.' Varley had remained in London for the duration of his career adopting a style which remained largely consistent throughout his life and affiliating himself with well-known artistic networks, including the various guises of the SPWC. Such societal connections were commented upon in his obituary: 'his talent as an artist, social qualities, and liberality in imparting information to his brother artists securing him always a welcome as a visitor.' Rather than schoolboys, moreover, Varley had forged networks amongst the rising generation of watercolourists as their drawing master, helping 'well-known names, as Linnell, Turner (of Oxford), Wm. Hart, F. O. Finch' enter the art world. He had also long been a regular and popular exhibitor in London and his artwork (almost all watercolours) had undergone very little change, unlike Cotman who had gone for long periods without exhibiting and whose output was exceptionally changeable and highly distributed in its style, technique, material, subject matter and market. The reliable quality of Varley's work was picked up in his obituary: 'In all that Varley has done, there is an uncompromising severity of treatment, an unflinching assertion of character, which make us respect even his manner for his onesness of purpose' making few men 'better known in our water-colour school of Art'. In other

[84] JSC to JJC, 30 April 1838, ff.203-4, ADD MSS 37029-33, BL.

words, Varley's life and works could clearly be mapped onto each other with stability, coherence and recognisable shape.

Varley's reliable and networked status meant that 'some singular stories are recorded of him', especially about his 'mania' for astrology, an eccentricity which gave him further personal flare and intrigue. The story that made it into his obituary concerned none other than his friend Cotman at a time when he was thought to be dying in Norwich:

> Once, when his friend Cotman ws ill, in Norwich, Varley happening to be in town, called upon him ... Varley was introduced to the sick chamber, and addressed his friend, "Why, Cotman, you are not such a fool as to think you are going to die. Impossible! No such thing. I tell you there are ten years for you yet to come." The prediction as usual, operated to its fulfilment, and Cotman did recover.[85]

Not even painted as an artist, Cotman is here the provincial invalid whose fate had been correctly predicted by the astrologically savvy London artist. By the end of his life, then, Varley's rootedness in the core social networks of the London art world, his identifiable artwork, perceived liberal character and extraordinary personal interests meant that there was a clear sense of what his posthumous reputation was, itself making for an interesting and comprehensive read in the form of an obituary. The reason why Cotman may not have got the Varley treatment is because his life and art were characterised by fragmentation, distribution, disjuncture and fugitive kinds of practice. The relationship between his life and art therefore resisted the ability to be clearly summed up.

***

The trail of Cotman would then go cold for a while. By the close of the nineteenth century, however, the fragmented identity that had done little for his legacy in the immediate aftermath of his death was precisely the kind of quality that appeared meaningful to a number of art critics and curators.[86] In 1903, the British Museum Prints and Drawings curator, Laurence Binyon, was able to appreciate the fragmentation, distribution and disjuncture of Cotman's life, career and artworks because of the ideology of struggle within the modernist conception of the artist not current at the time of

[85] 'Obituary. Mr. John Varley', *The Art Union*, vol. 5, 1843, 9-10.
[86] On how Cotman re-entered the atmosphere of British art history at the turn of the twentieth century in Britain, see Jessica Feather, *The Formation of a Modern Taste in Watercolour: Critics, Curators, and Collectors c.1890-1912*,unpublished PhD thesis (University of Reading, 1995).

Cotman's death. In his essay, 'The Life and Work of John Sell Cotman' which appeared as part of a special issue of *The Studio*, Binyon portrayed Cotman as an artistic innovator whose varied output was underappreciated and misunderstood in his lifetime. The artist's works (particularly his early watercolours) were read in relation to his perceived personal character – 'his high-strung febrile nature, liable to fits of extreme depression' but which 'responded easily to happy influences' – in ways that were later picked up by Sydney Kitson in the 1930s and, later, by Miklos Rajnai at the bicentenary of Cotman's birth in 1982, as we saw at the beginning of his thesis.[87]

We now possess a greater critical capacity to appreciate those themes of fragmentation, distribution and disjuncture and their effects and possibilities which, as this thesis has demonstrated, leads to another way of reading the life and works of a single artist. Thanks to sociological, materialist and psychoanalytically-inflected methodologies which enable us to consider art as the product of careers, networks, strategies and personal dispositions, we can now understand Cotman's life and art in ways that are very different from those adopted in the twentieth century or, indeed, at his death in 1842.

[87] Binyon, 'The Life and Work of John Sell Cotman', *The Studio* (1903), 1.

Conclusion

Survival in the British Art World:

> I feel I have a horse that will carry me nearer the temple of fame than ever I was. To be sure he is full of curvettes & strays often in right angles to my discomfitture.[88]
>
> Cotman to Francis Cholmeley, 1811

> In early life I made myself a pedestal on which I determined to stand by my own exertions. it was too lofty a one, for I fell from it. I also made a code of laws by which I was determined to act, I have abused many of them. & in the many stood gratitude. which I thought I could give could have broken.[89]
>
> Cotman to Dawson Turner, 1834

At various points in his life, Cotman wrote down his musings on the state and experience of his career. As these two quotes indicate – one made during his late twenties; the other in his early fifties – the path of professional survival was rocky, multidirectional and attended by rules that were simultaneously adhered to, broken and adapted. Throughout this thesis we have followed Cotman from Norwich to London, to Yorkshire, back to Norwich, to Great Yarmouth and to Normandy, back to Norwich again and finally to London. The ways he ricocheted around these different locations and the social spaces within them have highlighted issues to do with mobility, competition and identity, changes in the relationship between patronage, the market and style, the problems and possibilities of status involved in different kinds of artistic strategies, and the question of how an artist of Cotman's social profile negotiated his personal and professional survival in the British art world. Survival is at once about the past (as the past tense of the second excerpt attests), the present (as per the present tense of the first excerpt) and the future (the survival of one's legacy, as we saw in the previous chapter), all of which are inescapably experienced within one's own lifetime. As such, this thesis has shown how the survival that Cotman attempted to engineer for himself, both personally and professionally, was about learning from his past, conceiving of new strategies for the present and laying the ground for the futurity of his art and identity, while always trying to balance his own aspirations and artworks with the various ideologies that had grown up around the identity of the artist during his lifetime.

[88] JSC to FC, 5 March 1811, ZQG XII 12/1/1040, NYRO.
[89] JSC to DT, 28 November 1834, MC 2487/50, NRO.

In writing a monographic study which focuses on an artist's life and career, and how his artwork was a product of those two things, some readers may accuse me of reviving a traditional model of art history. Certainly, the monographic approach I have pursued is somewhat controversial within postmodern methodological practice. However, my main aim throughout has been to achieve a new and critically-engaged way of looking at an artist and the intersection between his life and art in ways that mark a stark departure from the traditional model of the artist monograph. This has meant that my research has drawn upon well established methods of art history, in particular those of the social history of art with its emphasis on analysing the material conditions and ideological character of art production. Yet I have not adhered to a purely materialist approach which, as outlined in the Introduction, tends to consider the artist as a vehicle for broader structures and ideas which runs the risk of undervaluing artists' origins, agency, subjectivity and their personal lived experience, all of which feature strongly in my account. Whilst I have taken care to show how social structures and ideas played a significant role in shaping Cotman's identity, decisions, practices and output, I have been keen to conjure the social and the personal in order to offer a more rounded and critically-sympathetic way of approaching an artist by considering his career as having been formed of and influenced by lived experience. In so doing, I have argued that alongside and in relation to social context, lived experience both informed and inflected Cotman's artistic oeuvre. I have urged that we should not search that oeuvre for objective truths about the artist's character, as Binyon, Kitson and Rajnai did with Cotman in the twentieth century. Yet I have shown that we might occasionally detect in Cotman's artworks the visual effects of internal dispositions, perceptions and experiences of his own life as it was played out within the context of the British art world.

Why, though, is my argument about an artist's career path relevant now?

> Those working in the creative sector cannot simply rely on old working patterns associated with art worlds, they have to find new ways of 'working' the new cultural economy, which increasingly means holding down three or four 'projects' at once. This becomes a necessity as, in a crowded and competitive field, charges to the client fall (to pick up the business), and consequently to make ends meet the 'cultural entrepreneur' must be running several jobs at once.[90]

[90] McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 19-20.

Published this year, in 2016, Angela McRobbie's book *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* speaks to the contemporary relevance of my study which has aimed to reveal the modernity and multiplicity of an early nineteenth-century artist's career. Indeed, we could be forgiven for mistaking much of McRobbie's extract about contemporary creative types as an assertion about the realities and experiences of those working within the British art world of Cotman's lifetime. McRobbie's book examines the realities of the creative career in the present moment of austerity where self-invention and entrepreneurialism are encouraged, particularly amongst Britain's middle-class youths, as an alternative to unemployment. Including excerpts from interviews with artists, fashion designers and other creative types, McRobbie emphasises the endemic uncertainty that such individuals experience of a (usually independent) working life within the strictures of Britain's creative economy, including long and insecure working stints, relatively low or no pay, lack of workplace benefits and unfixed working locations, all of which necessitate the development of survival strategies.

Yet while she emphasises the struggle involved in negotiating work in today's art world, McRobbie also shows that there is a seductive power to pursuing a creative career because of its ties to a fulfilling sense of self, the pleasure of creating and 'the wish to lead a self-directed life in regard to work and career.'[91] Again, it is the notion of autonomy that is identified as the key reason for why so many enter a creative career despite an awareness of the multiple obstacles to doing so. For those with status aspirations, being an artist can potentially pay off symbolically in ways like no other career. Cotman's career and its artistic effects are emblematic of an early moment in this phenomenon; there are clearly parallels between the artist's experiences of the early nineteenth-century art world and that of today. Survival in the British art world, then, is perhaps not as new as some may think.

[91] McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 38.

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