



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art as I originally planned it, but I found some lectures that I gave a few years ago. Rather than delete them I decided to use Claude, Heygen and ElevenLabs to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice and face to give them.

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23-01 TURNER AND TURNIPS: LANDSCAPE PAINTING AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

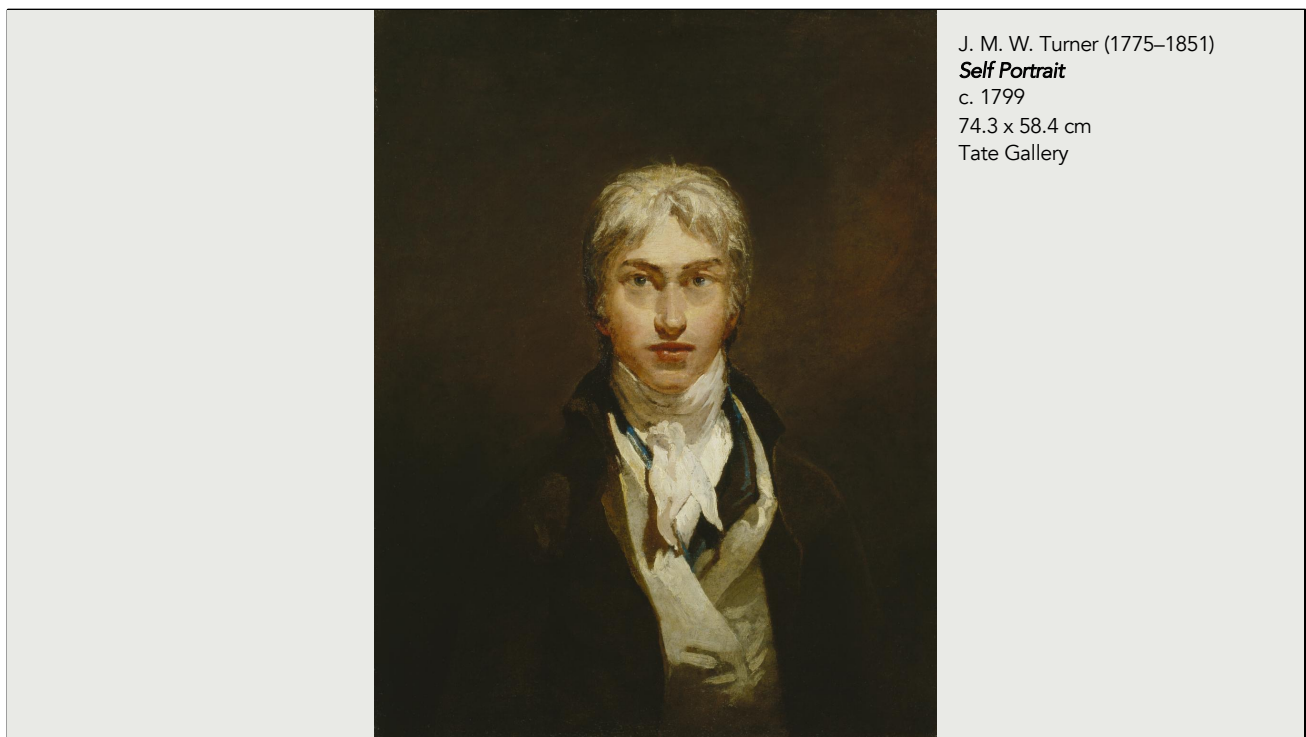
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J. M. W. Turner
(1775–1851)
Self Portrait
c. 1799



Turner is remembered for dissolving light and sublime atmosphere — but this talk places him firmly in the turbulent world he actually inhabited. I trace how British landscape painting encoded agricultural revolution, rural poverty, and social fracture. The countryside these artists constructed was never innocent, and Turner, above all, knew it.



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851)
Self Portrait
c. 1799
74.3 x 58.4 cm
Tate Gallery

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), Self Portrait, c. 1799, 74.3 x 58.4 cm, Tate Gallery

Joseph Mallord William Turner, born in 1775 and dying in 1851, is routinely cast as a painter of sublime, cloud-wreathed horizons and dissolving light — a Romantic dreamer remote from practical affairs. This talk challenges that reading directly. Turner worked through one of the most volatile periods in British history, and the landscape painting he helped to define was never as innocent as it looks. The portrait on screen is the only self-portrait Turner made. He was twenty-four, and the occasion behind it is significant: his election as an Associate of the **Royal Academy** in 1799, a decisive moment of institutional recognition for a young man from a Covent Garden barber's family. **Kenneth Clark**, in his 1949 study *Landscape into Art*, called landscape painting the "chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century." But the countryside that painters were busily inventing as an artistic subject was, at the same moment, a place of rick-burning, machine-breaking, and animal maiming. Rural England was being re-engineered by the **agricultural revolution**, and its workers were being impoverished in the process. This talk follows that tension — between the idyllic landscape artists constructed and the turbulent reality beneath it — from the **Napoleonic Wars** through to the **Chartist petitions** of 1848, when Britain came closer to revolution than at any point before or since.

Notes

Jospeh Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) is often regarded as a Romantic

painter of peaceful, idyllic landscapes but I want to show you that he tackled the complex social and political issues of the day. In particular, this talk is about revolution and change.

This is the only self-portrait he painted. He is 24 which marks an important step in his career—his election as an Associate of the Royal Academy.

But let me begin with turnips...

Notes

The art historian Kenneth Clark described landscape painting as the "chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century" yet the early nineteenth century was a time of deep social unrest in the countryside. Artists show us a peaceful, idyllic countryside while farmers had to deal with rick burning, the destruction of farm machinery and the maiming of animals on a daily basis. I show how one, little known, but pivotal painting by Turner foreshadows the representation of the reality of life in the countryside.

In the early nineteenth century, painting the British countryside was a new form of art that required artists to discover new symbols and create new conventions. This resulted in a plethora of types of landscape painting including topographic, pastoral, Romantic, picturesque and sublime. This artistic invention of the countryside took place when the land was being re-engineered and new farming practices introduced. These new practices resulted in rural poverty and, in due course, riots. This talk is about how artists, who were looking for ways to represent the land, dealt with or ignored what was going on down on the farm.

Background

The industrial revolution meant that there was a mass movement from the farm to the town. At the same time there was increasing pressure to grow more food and conditions for rural workers deteriorated. Also, from the turn of the nineteenth century there was a growing call for a radical reform of democracy and poverty. Reform took a long time coming and social pressures grew culminating in riots and the closest the country has come to political revolution. This talk is about landscape painting during this turbulent period and how the issues crept into their work until representation of social problems became a category of painting in its own right.

The French Revolution led to a war with France.

The agricultural revolution was driven by the need to grow more food particularly during the war with France when food imports were cut-off by

Napoleon. He tried to starve the country into submission.

The war ended with the Battle of Waterloo.

Following the war there were bad harvests and the Year without a Summer leading to riots and the Peterloo Massacre. This led to the Swing Riots and the Tolpuddle martyrs.

This unrest culminated in the Chartist Petitions which in 1848 came close to a British revolution.

A History of British Revolution

James Hargreaves, Spinning Jenny of 1765, Richard Arkwright's Water frame, 1768 and Edmund Cartwright's weaving machine of 1785.

Gordon Riots of 1780 began as an anti-Catholic protest against the 1778 Papist Act and escalated into riots and looting. The President of the Protestant Association, Lord George Gordon, inflamed the mob of 40,000 to 60,000. The army was called in and 285 people were shot dead, 200 wounded and 450 arrested. On the walls of Newgate prison was the proclamation that the inmates had been freed on the authority of 'His Majesty, King Mob'.

Napoleonic Wars, War of the First Coalition 1792-1797, War of the Second Coalition 1798-1802 headed by Napoleon from 1799, Treaty of Amiens, Third Coalition 1803-1815.

Speenhamland System, brought in in 1795 as an amendment to the Elizabethan Poor Law. Described as a 'universal system of pauperism' as it encouraged farmers and industrialists to pay below subsistence wages as the parish would make up the difference needed to keep workers alive. The payment was based on the number of children and the price of a gallon loaf and started at 3/- a week for a single man when bread was 1/- a loaf. It led to the introduction of the new Poor Law of 1834 and the workhouse.

The Radicals, in 1797 the Whig Charles James Fox called for 'radical reform' of the electoral system. Fox was a gambler and womaniser but a brilliant orator who opposed both William Pitt the Younger and George III, whom he regarded as a tyrant. He supported the American War of Independence and the French Revolution and was a well-known anti-slavery campaigner. Thomas Spence (1750-1814) advocated the common ownership of land, universal suffrage and the rights of children. He was the first to use the phrase the 'rights of man' and invented a phonetic spelling system so rich and poor would speak the same way.

Thomas Malthus argued in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) that helping the poor was counter-productive and would lead to earlier marriages and an increase in the number of the poor.

William Cobbett, 1802, published his *Political Register* with a weekly circulation of 40,000. He was a conservative who turned radical after witnessing the starvation in the countryside. He was a difficult man who hated the Jews and opposed the emancipation of slaves.

Peace of Amiens, 1802, lasted only one year but gave a break in the Napoleonic Wars.

Assassination of the Prime Minister Spencer Perceval on 11 May 1812 by John Bellingham, a merchant with a grievance against the government. Although not political it brought about a period of repression and harsh punishments.

Luddites 1811-17, weavers breaking machines to protest against unemployment and decreasing earnings, signed by the mythical 'King Ned Ludd'. They often disguised themselves as women. In 1812, 8 men and later 15 men were hanged.

Hampden Club, 1812, of prominent Whigs and moderate Radicals sought political reform.

Napoleonic Wars ended, 18 June 1815, followed by a brief boom in textile industry then chronic depression. Napoleon seized control in 1799, became emperor in 1804, failed to invade Russia in 1812, abdicated and was exiled in 1814 and returned in 1815 before his defeat at Waterloo on 18 June 1815.

Corn Laws, 1815, kept the price of corn artificially high so the average worker could not afford bread. They were not removed until 1846.

The Year without a Summer, 1816, following the Mount Tambora eruption on 10 April 1815 in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). The largest recorded eruption in human history.

Spa Fields meetings in Islington, Nov/Dec 1816, 10,000 people, first such mass meeting led to the 1817 Gagging Acts (the Treason Act and Seditious Meetings Act which controlled meetings of more than 50 people) and the Blanketeers march.

March of the Blanketeers 1817, Manchester, weavers, desperate state textile industry and suspension of Habeas Corpus, 5,000 marchers met at St Peter's Field. Each man carried a blanket and groups of 10 carried a page of a petition to London.

Pentridge Rising, 9/10 June 1817, 200-300 men, wanted to wipe out the national debt, 3 hanged.

Peterloo Massacre, 16 Aug 1819, cavalry charged 60,000-80,000 people 15 killed, 400-700 injured, which resulted in the Manchester Guardian and the Six Acts (which made any meeting for radical reform treasonable, speeded up court cases, radical newspapers were gagged, weapons could be seized and unauthorised military training was made illegal).

Cato Street Conspiracy, 1820, Arthur Thistlewood was hoodwinked by a government agent and a false notice in The Times into recruiting 27 men to kill the cabinet. They were caught, tried and hung, drawn and quartered for high treason. This punishment was later changed to hanging until dead before beheading and quartering and was not abolished until 1870. The death penalty for treason was not abolished until 1998.

Pauperism, during the 1820s Poor Law expenditure decreased, rural crime increased by 30%, mostly food thefts, and 1828, 1829 and 1830 were poor harvests. Many Victorians struggled to understand and explain poverty. Was it a result of personal misfortune, was it caused by social conditions beyond an individual's control, or was it the direct result of a person's character, their laziness and having too many children? Were the poor, therefore, 'deserving' or 'undeserving'? Who was responsible for those who became so poor that they could not maintain themselves

Election in 1830, brought about by George IV dying, highlighted the need for reform. In France there was a revolution and Charles X was replaced by Louis Philippe, the 'Citizen King'.

Swing Riots, 1830, agricultural workers did not disguise themselves but descended on farms in their hundreds demanding higher wages. 2,000 farm labourers were arrested and imprisoned and 19 were hung. Reform was needed but the Duke of Wellington, the Prime Minister thought the British system was ideal. His Tory government fell and Earl Grey's Whig government came into power. Grey's bill was rejected, the Whigs were re-elected, it was again opposed by the House of Lords leading to riots across the country and Dorset, Somerset and Leicestershire became ungovernable. Grey requested King William IV to create 100 new Whig peers, he refused and Grey resigned. William called on the Duke of Wellington but even he admitted the country was ungovernable and he resigned. The Great Reform Act was passed.

Tolpuddle Martyrs, in the early 1830s a group of six men formed a friendly society (which was now legal following the repeal of the Combination Act in

1824-5). They refused to work for less than 10s a week when the local rate was 7s a week. A local landowner wrote to Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, in 1834 invoking an obscure 1797 law prohibiting people from swearing oaths to each other. They were found guilty and transported to Australia. They became popular heroes, 800,000 signatures were collected and they were released in 1836 (James Hammett was released in 1837 as he had a previous conviction for theft). Four of the six returned to England and later emigrated to London, Ontario where they are buried.

Bristol, Queen Square Riots, 1831, following House of Lords rejection of Second Reform Bill, 500-600 young men over 3 days, looting, destruction, 4 killed, 86 wounded, 4 hanged.

Great Reform Act, 1832, allowed one in five adult males to vote, gave big cities MPs and removed rotten boroughs.

New Poor Law, 1834, relief only given in workhouses whose conditions are designed to deter all but the starving. Based on the philosophy of Thomas Malthus (giving poor relief will only increase the problem), David Ricardo's 'iron law of wages' (wages fall to the minimum needed to sustain life) and Jeremy Bentham's belief that as people did what was most pleasant the poor would claim relief rather than work.

Chartism, 1830s and 40s, culminating in the multi-million signature petition to Parliament and the meeting on Kennington Common in 1848. The People's Charter was published in 1838 and called for six reforms, a vote for every man over 21, secret ballot, no property requirements for MPs, payment for MPs, equal size constituencies and annual elections.

For more information on the Swing Riots see 'Echoes of Old Country Life' (1892) for the reminiscences of someone who lived through the Swing Riots as a child. At night from his bedroom at Uxbridge School in 1831 he could see three or four blazing homesteads a night. He pointed out that the landowners of parishes would pull down cottages of their tenants to force them into a neighbouring parish so they would not have to pay the poor law. One man had to walk to the neighbouring parish every day and he calculated that in his working life he had walked three times round the earth. (I calculate this is 5 miles a day, every day, for 40 years). He mentions the disappearance of the old harvest home festival where labourers and landowners celebrated together.

People enjoyed the old elections in 'rotten boroughs' as the candidate paid an exorbitant amount for food and drink for the few voters. It could cost

thousands of pounds and many inn keepers were dishonest with the accounts. He shows accounts for £545 for 420 voters so 26s a head! When travelling in France he noticed that Frenchmen did not get as drunk on wine as Englishmen on beer. Englishmen expected to get so drunk they would fall over and feel terrible the next day.

References

John Ruskin, *Modern Painters III*, on landscape

Kenneth Clarke, *Landscape into Art*, 1949.

Michele L. Miller, 'J. M. W. Turner's Ploughing Up Turnips, near Slough: The Cultivation of Cultural Dissent', *The Art Bulletin*, 1995

John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, 1983

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/joseph-mallord-william-turner-558/six-ways-jmw-turner-painted-changing-world>



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

Ploughing up Turnips near Slough
1809

Tate Britain, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, 1809, Tate Britain, London

This painting is **Turner's** *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, exhibited at his own gallery in **1809**. At first glance it reads exactly as contemporary critics described it: a luminous sunrise burning through morning mist, with what one reviewer praised as "circumstantial rustic detail and poetically heightened atmospheric effects." **Windsor Castle** is visible in the background — the picture was originally catalogued simply as *Windsor* — and Turner priced it at two hundred pounds, his standard rate for a canvas of this size. We tend, as **Kenneth Clark** put it, to "assume that the appreciation of natural beauty and the painting of landscape is a normal and enduring part of our spiritual activity." It is not. Landscape painting only consolidated as a high-status genre in the nineteenth century, and it has never been neutral. The artist selects, assembles, and encodes — constructing a fictional story from culturally accepted signs rather than transcribing what lies before them. For over a hundred and seventy years this picture was read as purely pastoral. Then, in **1980**, **John Barrell** published *The Dark Side of the Landscape* and redirected attention to what had perhaps been too obvious to state at the time: farm workers are here producing food for a nation that **Napoleon** was actively trying to starve.

Notes

This is *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough* and it appears to be an idyllic landscape,

in fact it was described as a wonderful depiction of sunrise with the sun highlighting the morning mist and critics at the time noted the 'circumstantial rustic detail and poetically heightened atmospheric effects'.

We sometimes take landscapes for granted. As the art historian Kenneth Clark wrote we are "apt to assume that the appreciation of natural beauty and the painting of landscape is a normal and enduring part of our spiritual activity."

This is not the case. Landscape painting, like this, only became popular in the nineteenth century. Our landscapes are constructed from human activity just like landscape painting. Landscape painting is not the depiction of what lies before you, it involves the artist selecting and assembling a fictional story based on culturally accepted signs and symbols.

For over 170 years this painting was regarded as purely poetic, the term used was pastoral, but some forty years ago the art historian John Barrell published *The Dark Side of the Landscape* in which he pointed out the patriotic elements which may have been too obvious to mention at the time. It shows farm workers producing food for the nation at a time, 1809, when the nation was being starved by Napoleon.

I would now like to take you on a journey that involves one revolution leading to another and culminates in the British revolution that never happened.

Notes

However, to some extent these are modern distinctions. I would like you to consider what is meant by the word 'beauty'. What comes to mind when you think of beauty? At the time, as Kenneth Clark wrote, "Almost every Englishman when asked what he thought was meant by the word 'beauty' would begin to describe a landscape." And by landscape he would mean an English landscape and this was inseparable from a patriotic love of the countryside. Kenneth Clark also wrote, "landscape painting was an act of faith and in the early nineteenth century as values declined, faith in nature became a form of religion."

Formerly known as 'Windsor': the Castle is prominent in the background. The present title is that used in the catalogue of the 1809 exhibition in Turner's gallery.

This picture was priced at £200 in a note, probably of c. 1810, in Turner's 'Finance' sketchbook. As Evelyn Joll points out this was Turner's usual price for his standard 36" × 48" picture.

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John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840*, Cambridge University Press, 1983



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851)
Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight
1835
92.3 x 122.8 cm
National Gallery of Art

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835, 92.3 x 122.8 cm, National Gallery of Art

Barrell's intervention opens a wider question: if *Ploughing up Turnips* encodes the labour that feeds a nation at war, what did Turner make of the industrial forces transforming that nation from within? This painting *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, painted in 1835, pushes that question into sharper relief. It was commissioned by **Henry McConnel**, a Manchester textile manufacturer — precisely the kind of man whose wealth depended on the new industrial order Turner was depicting. Turner had been absorbing **Edward Gibbon's** *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published across six volumes from 1776, and Gibbon's cyclical view of history runs through Turner's mature work like a current. Britain in the 1830s stood perhaps seventy years short of its imperial peak, and Turner understood the arc: empires rise, and empires fall. What makes the **Keelmen** canvas so characteristic is its refusal to settle into a single reading. The moonlit smoke is simultaneously beautiful and suffocating — industrial energy and industrial pollution sharing the same luminous air. Turner absorbed both sides and trusted the viewer to hold that tension. As we will see, that moral openness is a structuring principle across his career, not an occasional feature of it.

Notes

We will begin with the industrial revolution which started in Britain round about 1760.

There is another level of meaning for this painting that we know from his poetry was always at the forefront of Turner's mind. This is *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight* and was commissioned by Henry McConnel, a Manchester textile manufacturer. The industrial revolution was a subject that fascinated Turner. He saw it would power the rise of the British Empire and he also saw that all empires rise and fall.

Edward Gibbon had published the six volumes of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (in 1776). At this time the British Empire was still some 70 years from the height of its power and Turner saw the rise but also saw that the British Empire, like all empires would eventually decline.

Turners combines a sense of awe and beauty with the dirt and grim of the industrial revolution so that the painting can be read negatively as industrial pollution destroying God's creation or positively as the energy and power leading to a new dawn for Britain. As we shall see, like many paintings by Turner, he presents both sides and let's the viewer decide.

References

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/highlights/turner-keelmen-heaving-in-coals-by-moonlight.html>

See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/alison-smith-the-sublime-in-crisis-landscape-painting-after-turner-r1109220>



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)
The Field of Waterloo
 1818
 147.3 x 238.8 cm
 Tate

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *The Field of Waterloo*, 1818, 147.3 x 238.8 cm, Tate

The moral openness we saw in *Keelmen* was not new in 1835 — it runs back to Turner's direct reckoning with the Napoleonic wars themselves. **The Field of Waterloo**, exhibited in 1818, is the clearest proof. Where Wordsworth, Southey, and Walter Scott all wrote celebratory verse in the wake of the battle, Turner refused the triumphalist script entirely. He shows no heroism, no glory — only bodies, from both sides, heaped together in the dark. For the Royal Academy catalogue he chose a line from **Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage***: "Rider and horse — friend, foe — in one red burial blent." Byron wrote those verses believing Napoleon deserved to win; Turner's position is more searching than that. He does not push an answer — he poses a question, and trusts that the question itself carries more force than any conclusion. To understand what made this painting so charged, we need the wider context. Britain had been at war with France almost continuously since 1792. After **Napoleon** established the **Continental System** in 1806, cutting British trade from European markets, the country faced genuine hunger. Maximising food production became a patriotic emergency — which is precisely what gives **Ploughing up Turnips** its urgency. **Fifty thousand** men died at Waterloo in a single day. Turner understood that the harvest and the battlefield were, ultimately, the same subject.

Notes

When Turner painted *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough* Britain had been at war with France since 1792 apart from a brief peace in 1802, called the Peace of Amiens. In 1803, Britain resumed war against France, this time against Emperor Napoleon. In 1806, following his overwhelming victory at Austerlitz, Napoleon established the Continental System to cut off trade with Britain. The result of not trading with Europe was disastrous and by 1809 Britain was isolated and was being starved into submission. Maximising food production was therefore a patriotic duty and critical to our survival.

This painting shows the deciding battle, *The Field of Waterloo*. However, Turner does not revel in the glory and heroism. He shows war's tragic consequences for the victims on both sides. In the catalogue he included this quote from the controversial anti-war poem by Byron called '*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*',

'Rider and horse—friend, foe,— in one red burial blent!'

He is showing that there are no victors in war, there are just the dead and injured. In this case 50,000 died in one day. He was the first British artist to paint what many regards as an anti-war painting (Goya did the same a few years before).

But let us return to Britain's response to being starved into submission.

Notes

While Wordsworth, Robert Southey and Walter Scott all produced celebratory poems in the wake of Waterloo, Byron conceived his verses as way of reminding the public of the terrible toll of victory, 50,000 died.

Byron was making a point in his poem, he thought Napoleon should have won but Turner is not so simplistic. Turner raises the question and asks us to come up with the answer. Sometimes asking a question is more powerful than pushing an answer.

Napoleon extended his political control over France until the Senate declared him Emperor of the French in 1804, launching the French Empire. Intractable differences with the British meant that the French were facing a Third Coalition by 1805. Napoleon shattered this coalition with decisive victories in the Ulm Campaign and a historic triumph at the Battle of Austerlitz, which led to the elimination of the Holy Roman Empire.

In October 1805, however, a Franco-Spanish fleet was destroyed at the Battle of Trafalgar, allowing Britain to impose a naval blockade of the French coasts. In retaliation, Napoleon established the Continental System in 1806 to cut off

European trade with Britain.

Hoping to extend the Continental System, Napoleon invaded Iberia and declared his brother Joseph the King of Spain in 1808. The Spanish and the Portuguese revolted with British support. The Peninsular War, noted for its brutal guerrilla warfare, lasted six years and culminated in an Allied victory.

By 1811, Napoleon ruled over 70 million people across an empire that had domination in Europe, which had not witnessed this level of political consolidation since the days of the Roman Empire. He maintained his strategic status through a series of alliances and family appointments. He created a new aristocracy in France while allowing the return of nobles who had been forced into exile by the Revolution.

Napoleon's Turkish officers wore a turban over a low cap, a short jacket over a long-sleeved shirt and a white heron or egret feather plume. An NCO wore a deep yellow turban.

François Pascal Simon, Baron Gérard (1770–1837), was a French painter born in Rome, where his father occupied a post in the house of the French ambassador. His mother was Italian. As a baron of the Empire, he is sometimes referred to as Baron Gérard.

Gérard became rich and famous for his portraits but he regretted abandoning his earlier ambition to become a great history painter. Perhaps, the high point of his struggle to become a great history painter is this Battle of Austerlitz (Bataille d'Austerlitz, 1810) which shows an imaginative breadth of invention and style.

General Rapp (1771-1821) is presenting to an Olympian Napoleon the standards taken from the enemy. The composition, although broad and balanced, is almost too complex and shows Gérard at the limits of his ability as a history painter. At Austerlitz, Rapp led the Guard Cavalry in a counterattack that crushed the Russian Imperial Guard at a crucial stage in the battle. Daring and courageous, Jean Rapp managed to survive two dozen wounds in his legendary career as one of the best of Napoleon Bonaparte's generals.



François Gérard (1770–1837)
*The Battle of Austerlitz, 2nd
 December 1805*
 1810
 510 × 958 cm
 Palace of Versailles, Musée de
 Trianon

François Gérard (1770–1837), *The Battle of Austerlitz, 2nd December 1805*, 1810, 510 × 958 cm, Palace of Versailles, Musée de Trianon

The harvest and the battlefield were the same subject — and **Ploughing Up Turnips Near Slough**, painted in **1809**, makes that connection visceral. By the time Turner put brush to canvas, Britain had been at war with France, with only the brief interruption of the **Peace of Amiens** in **1802**, for the better part of two decades. The resumption of hostilities in **1803** brought a new and more dangerous enemy: not merely the French Republic but **Napoleon Bonaparte**, Emperor of the French from **1804**. The scale of the threat was difficult to overstate. At **Austerlitz** in December **1805**, Napoleon shattered a combined Russian and Austrian force, a victory so total it dissolved the **Holy Roman Empire** — an institution founded by Charlemagne more than a thousand years earlier. Though **Trafalgar**, fought two months before, had removed the French navy as a direct threat, Napoleon's response was the **Continental System** of **1806**: a trade blockade designed to strangle the British economy. By **1809**, it was working. Britain was isolated, food was scarce, and every acre under cultivation carried the weight of national survival. Turner's muddy Slough field was not picturesque countryside — it was the front line of a different kind of war.

Notes

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Amiens. In 1803, Britain resumed war against France, this time against Emperor Napoleon. In 1805, although Napoleon's fleet had been defeated at Trafalgar four months previously his army defeated three nations at Austerlitz (now Czech Republic), perhaps his greatest victory. He defeated a larger Russian and Austrian army led by Tsar Alexander I and Holy Roman Emperor Francis II. The defeat led to the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, an empire which was founded by Charlemagne on 25 December 800, just over 1,000 years before.

The following year, in 1806, following his overwhelming victory at Austerlitz, Napoleon established the Continental System to cut off trade with Britain. The result of not trading with Europe was disastrous and by 1809 Britain was isolated and was being starved into submission. Maximising food production was therefore critical to our survival.

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George Jones (1786-1869)
Interior of Turner's Gallery
 c.1852
 14 x 23 cm
 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

George Jones (1786-1869), *Interior of Turner's Gallery*, c.1852, 14 x 23 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Step inside **Turner's private gallery** on Queen Anne Street, and you are already inside an argument. Turner opened this space annually from **1804**, inviting, in his own words, "Dilettanti, Connoisseurs and Artists" — a deliberate act of independence from the Royal Academy's hanging committees, who could diminish a picture by placement alone. By April **1809**, eighteen paintings lined these walls, and Turner controlled exactly how each one was seen. He was thirty-three or thirty-four years old — he claimed his birthday was the **23rd of April**, aligning himself neatly with Saint George and Shakespeare, though the claim was never verified. What was verifiable was his status: elected a full **Royal Academician** in **1802**, having entered the **RA Schools** at fourteen and shown his first watercolour the following year. Benjamin West and Sir George Beaumont had already attacked his "crude blotches" and his luminous pale tones, calling him a "white painter" as a term of reproach. Yet Turner's ambitions ran far beyond their criticism. Just two years earlier, in **1807**, he had launched the **Liber Studiorum**, his systematic survey of landscape types — pastoral, architectural, marine, historical — consciously modelled on Claude Lorrain's own studio record, the **Liber Veritatis**. Turner was staking a claim for landscape as serious art. **Ploughing Up Turnips** was part of that claim.

Notes

It is April 1809 and we have just entered Joseph Mallord William Turner's (1775-1851) private gallery in outbuildings attached to his house on the corner of Harley Street and Queen Anne Street in West London, just north of Cavendish Square.

Turner was a well-established and leading artist of the day. He had been elected a Royal Academician in 1802 at the early age of 26. He never married and became increasingly eccentric as he grew older.

In 1809 the Napoleonic War was raging, the country be besieged by the French and there were food shortages.

Turner display 18 paintings that year. Let us look at one of them more closely ...

Notes

Joseph Mallord William Turner, RA (born between late April and early May, baptised 14 May 1775 – 19 December 1851) was an English Romanticist landscape painter. Turner claimed he was born on 23 April, which is both Saint George's Day and the supposed birthday of William Shakespeare, but this claim has never been verified. Turner was considered a controversial figure in his day, particularly the last 15 years of his life (aged 50 to 76), but is now regarded as the artist who elevated landscape painting to an eminence rivalling history painting. He left a vast legacy of work, including 550 oil paintings, more than 2,000 finished watercolours and 30,000 drawings.

Every year from 1804 to 1816 Turner opened his private gallery to 'Dilettanti, Connoisseurs and Artists' and in April 1809 this painting was one of 18 included in those shown in his gallery.

Turner moved from Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, where he was born, to lodgings on Harley Street in 1799, opening his own gallery in contiguous premises on Queen Anne Street in 1804; this he enlarged between 1819 and 1822. In 1805 he took a house at Isleworth, keeping a second home on the riverside at intervals for the rest of his life (Upper Mall, Hammersmith, from 1806 to 1811; Sandycombe Lodge, Twickenham, from 1813 to about 1825; Cheyne Walk, from about 1846 onward).

There was a watercolour artist called William Turner (1789-1862) who was called William Turner of Oxford to distinguish him.

Turner entered the RA School in 1789 aged 14 and his first painting (watercolour, A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth) was exhibited the

following year. He was made an ARA in 1799 aged 24, the youngest permitted age, and moved to a smart Harley Street address where he opened his own gallery and studio. Turner's private life was secretive, unsociable, and somewhat eccentric. In 1798 he began an affair, which was to last about 10 years, with Sarah Danby, a widow who probably bore him two children. In 1800 Turner's mother became hopelessly ill and was committed to a mental hospital. His father went to live with him and devoted the rest of his life to serving as his son's studio assistant and general agent. He became a RA in 1802. He was criticized even early on by Benjamin West (PRA) and Sir George Beaumont for his 'crude blotches' and was described as a 'white painter' because of his luminous pale tones. In 1807 Turner began his great enterprise of publishing a series of 100 plates known as the *Liber Studiorum*, inspired, in part, by Claude's own studio record, *Liber veritatis* (begun in 1635 and continued until his death in 1682). Turner's aim was to document the great variety and range of landscape including historical, architectural, mountainous, pastoral, and marine. The first part appeared in June 1807 and the last in 1819.



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

Ploughing up Turnips near Slough
1809

Tate Britain, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, 1809, Tate Britain, London

Kenneth Clark opened his **Slade lectures** with the claim that landscape painting was "the chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century" — and that observation is the right place to begin with this picture. Clark also noted that almost every Englishman asked to define beauty would describe a landscape, an English landscape, and that this response was inseparable from a patriotic love of the countryside. Landscape painting, he wrote, was "an act of faith." **Ploughing Up Turnips, near Slough**, priced at two hundred pounds in Turner's own Finance sketchbook, has been read through three distinct lenses across two centuries. For its first hundred and seventy-four years, critics treated it as a pure **pastoral** — praising what **Andrew Wilton** called Turner's "juxtaposition of circumstantial rustic detail and poetically heightened atmospheric effect." Then, in **1983**, **John Barrell's** *The Dark Side of the Landscape* drew attention to the painting's **patriotic** freight — the prominent silhouette of **Windsor Castle** in the background — elements perhaps too obvious to a contemporary audience to require comment. It was not until **1995** that **Michele Miller**, writing in **The Art Bulletin**, advanced a genuinely **political** reading, uncovering a radical and dissenting dimension that earlier critics had entirely passed over.

Notes

Kenneth Clark, in a series of lectures to the Slade School of Art, said that

landscape painting was the "chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century," with the result that in the following period people were "apt to assume that the appreciation of natural beauty and the painting of landscape is a normal and enduring part of our spiritual activity." This is not the case. The English countryside is mostly artificially created and landscape painting involves the artists selecting and assembling a fictional story based on culturally accepted symbols derived from this artificial creation.

But before we get too philosophical, what do we think of this landscape painting? It has gone through a series of interpretations over the last 200 and more years.

Pastoral: for the first 174 years it was seen by critics as a pure pastoral painting. Critics and art historians wrote about his "genuinely national homely realism" and a "juxtaposition of circumstantial rustic detail and poetically heightened atmospheric effect" (Andrew Wilton quoted by Michele Miller).

Patriotic: in 1983 John Barrell published *The Dark Side of the Landscape* in which he pointed out the patriotic elements which may have been too obvious to mention at the time.

Political: it was not until 1995 that another art historian, Michelle Miller, questioned these positive readings and noticed a much more radical, progressive and political interpretation.

Notes

However, to some extent these are modern distinctions. I would like you to consider what is meant by the word 'beauty'. What comes to mind when you think of beauty? At the time, as Kenneth Clark wrote, "Almost every Englishman when asked what he thought was meant by the word 'beauty' would begin to describe a landscape." And by landscape he would mean an English landscape and this was inseparable from a patriotic love of the countryside. Kenneth Clark also wrote, "landscape painting was an act of faith and in the early nineteenth century as values declined, faith in nature became a form of religion."

Formerly known as 'Windsor': the Castle is prominent in the background. The present title is that used in the catalogue of the 1809 exhibition in Turner's gallery.

This picture was priced at £200 in a note, probably of c. 1810, in Turner's 'Finance' sketchbook. As Evelyn Joll points out this was Turner's usual price for his standard 36" × 48" picture.

References

Michele L. Miller, 'J. M. W. Turner's Ploughing Up Turnips, near Slough: The Cultivation of Cultural Dissent', *The Art Bulletin*, 1995



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Windsor Castle from Salt Hill*, c.1807, 27.6 x 73.7 cm, Tate

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Windsor Castle from Salt Hill*, c.1807, 27.6 x 73.7 cm, Tate

Clark's claim that landscape was "an act of faith" takes on a very specific meaning when we look at exactly where Turner chose to stand and what he chose to show. The preparatory studies place him at **Salt Hill**, and from there the eye travels across what is now the **M4 corridor** toward **Eton** and **Windsor Castle**, roughly two miles distant. Salt Hill was no anonymous viewpoint. Its **Castle Inn**, named for that very prospect of Windsor, was celebrated enough that in **1814** the Prince Regent hosted a breakfast there for the King of Prussia. Turner's audience would have known the spot intimately. So why does the title say *near Slough* rather than *from Salt Hill*? The answer lies in what Turner is doing with genre. This is a **Georgic** painting — rooted in the tradition of Virgil's poem about labour, husbandry, and wresting abundance from resistant earth. The Tate reads it as a celebration of **progressive agriculture** beneath the benign gaze of **Farmer George III**, whose castle presides over the fields. That framing matters because Turner painted this in **1809**, deep into the **Napoleonic Wars**, when Britain had been fighting France almost continuously since **1793**. Feeding the nation was not a pastoral fantasy — it was a military and political imperative.

Notes

Let us return to this painting to talk about food production.

But first, where is it set? We know that Turner made extensive preparatory work

including this view from Salt Hill. In modern terms we are looking towards the M4 motorway towards the Thames, Eton College and Windsor Castle. The motorway is three-quarters of a mile from Salt Hill and Windsor Castle about two miles away.

Salt Hill was a well known landmark as there was a famous inn there, called Castle Inn, named for its view of Windsor Castle and the Inn and its view were so well known that in 1814 the Prince Regent hosted a breakfast there for the King of Prussia and his three sons.

But Turner did not call this painting 'A View of Windsor Castle from Salt Hill'. Why did he put "near Slough".

Notes

Turner is suggesting that this area around Windsor Castle, which we see in the background, is Arcadia, the Eden of classical Greece. The Tate write, 'the painting has been seen as a celebration of progressive agriculture in an Arcadian English setting, beneath the benign gaze of 'Farmer' George III.' But why was 'progressive agriculture' important?

It was painted in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1809, Britain had been at war with France on and off since 1793.

It is Romantic painting of the pastoral or bucolic type, a Georgic, and such paintings were very popular in the eighteenth century. The poem describes man's struggle against a hostile natural world and how hard work and animal husbandry can overcome setbacks. In the eighteenth century the agricultural revolution enabled farmers to increase the productivity of the land and produce more food. As we shall see extremely important at the time Turner painted this work.



Joseph Mallord William Turner
Ploughing up Turnips near Slough
 Detail
 1809
 Tate Britain, London

Going to Market, 1786

The title of the painting points somewhere deeper than a Berkshire hamlet. **Slough** was, in **1809**, barely a village — a scatter of cottages that would remain insignificant until the railway arrived in **1836**. But the word itself carries enormous cultural weight. In **John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress** of **1678**, the most widely read English book after the Bible, the **Slough of Despond** is a boggy place that cannot be mended. Help tells Christian that the King's labourers have worked on it for sixteen hundred years and still it resists them. Turner's audience would have heard that echo immediately. The land around Windsor was genuinely boggy and resistant. The heavy **four-horse Berkshire plough** visible in the field was considered old-fashioned and inefficient by **1808**, and yet even this lumbering instrument has broken down. The turnip harvest amounts to a single small wheelbarrow against a field overrun with weeds — and turnips, as **Arthur Young** warned in the **Board of Agriculture** report of **1794**, do more injury than good in the wrong soil, and this was exactly the wrong soil. The painting's own landscape, then, literalises Bunyan's image: the King's labourers working ground that will not yield.

Notes

Slough

At the time Slough was a very small hamlet with a few cottages until the railway came in 1836.

Let us think out of the box. The word 'slough' has another meaning it is a muddy

or boggy place. The most famous slough is the Slough of Despond in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which was the most popular book after the Bible. In the book the slough is a place that cannot be mended. Help explains to Christian that the King's labourers have been working on it for sixteen hundred years but it remains the Slough of Despond. Christian enters the Slough of Despond with Pliable who soon abandon's him. Christian is pulled out by Help who tells him the swamp is made out of the decadence, scum, and filth of sin.

The area around Windsor was boggy and not fully drained. We can see a heavy four-horse Berkshire plough which in 1808 was considered old-fashioned and inefficient. Yet even this heavy plough has broken down. Like the Slough of Despond this turnip field resists the efforts of the King's labourers.

Turnips

I will leave those thoughts with you and turn to turnips.

The harvest we can see consists of one small wheelbarrow of turnips alongside a large area of weeds. Turnips were not a miracle crop and prefer light sandy soils and do not grow well in boggy soils. They also have low nutritional value. In the right soil they are an excellent preparation but in the wrong soil they 'will do more injury to the land than the turnips are worth' (1794, Board of Agriculture, Arthur Young). In addition, if cows are fed turnips it gives a bad taste to the milk, they are better fed to sheep and this area was known for its marino sheep.

Viewers at the time would have understood everything I have been telling you. They would also have known that turnips were associated with hunger. They were used to feed livestock and as human food they implied extreme desperation. Many writers at the time use turnips as the example of extreme poverty in *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (Henry Fielding, 1749) Squire Western says 'the ... rats have eat up all our corn, and left us nothing but turnips to feed upon'.

This cartoon "Going to Market" (1786) makes the point. George III was known as 'Farmer George' and his admirable farming activities in the Great Park at Windsor, on land reclaimed from marsh, were a favourite subject of ridicule. They were usually associated with insinuations of miserliness. Although the term 'Farmer George' was at first mocking his interest in the mundane and homely it later portrayed him as a man of the people compared to his profligate son George IV. George III was passionately

interested in agriculture and its revolutionary new methods and science. And in this context turnips had a positive association. They were a part of how we won the war. So let's step back in time to find out why...

Notes

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*; Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream (1678)

'Farmer George'

In the distance we see Windsor Castle, one of George III's palaces (the Regency was still two years in the future), who was known as 'Farmer George'. During the late 1780s he had converted large parts of Windsor and Richmond into farms that used the latest agricultural techniques.

The women are sitting on part of a harrow and one of the men next to the broken plough is carrying a seedlip, both indicators of progressive agriculture and that the field will be replanted with another crop as soon as the turnips have been gathered.

The King was associated with turnips in a negative way. Popular rumour was that George I had been hoeing turnips in his garden when he heard of Queen Anne's death (1714). Satirical cartoons (pop-up 3) like this one linked George III to turnips. A farm-yard scene with Windsor Castle on a hill in the background. George III, wearing a smock frock, his Garter ribbon hanging down his leg, and holding a pitchfork, gives orders to two guardsmen who are taking his carrots and turnips to market. Outside a farm-building (left) Queen Charlotte scatters corn to chickens.

The famous James Gillray cartoon of the future George IV "A Voluptuary Under The Horrors of Digestion" is a few years later in 1792. This is about the time that the reputation of George III was being reappraised positively when compared to the profligacy of his son.

Enclosures

The main food of the poor was bread and in 1815 the Government passed Corn Laws to protect British farmers. The Corn Laws imposed import duties and prohibitions that resulted in a high, fixed price for wheat which increased the price of a bread. At the same time land was being enclosed in the name of improved agricultural productivity. Four crop rotation enabled fields to be productive all the time, they no longer needed to lie fallow. However, the poor needed the common land to eke out their existence. It enabled them to grow crops and even keep a cow for milk and cheese. The last wave of

enclosures was mostly in the South East - Kent and Sussex and later Essex - and it led to what became known as the Swing Riots.

Over a period of hundreds of years common land had slowly been taken away by enclosing it. It was a major issue in the Tudor period and enclosures were constructed by the lord of the manor to create large fields to graze more sheep as our main export was wool. The final and most contentious wave of enclosures was later, between 1750 and 1850 and was justified by improving productivity. In this period one sixth of England was enclosed and this took the ability to grow food away from a large part of the population.

Despite the new agriculture, wheat production fell during the war, mostly because of bad weather and in Buckinghamshire it fell after enclosure because enclosed fields were used to pasture livestock, an inefficient way to use the land. It seems many farmers were not maximising food production but maximising their profits, not the same thing at all. For example, farmers would enclosed fields to produce grain to feed cattle to produce meat for the monied classes as this was more profitable than selling grain to make bread for the poor.

Spoilt Milk

The most important drink for the worker was not alcohol but milk. Because meat was too expensive milk was a critical supplement to their diet. Before the enclosures a family might own a cow and be self-sufficient in milk but with the common land gone they became dependent on earning a wage. The area around Windsor was famous for Merino sheep not cattle yet Turner shows us the cows that previously farm workers would have owned to provide milk and cheese for their families. When being fattened for market cattle require half their weight in turnips each day but sheep only one eighth. Also when cows are fed milk it tends to spoil the taste of the milk. Note that Turnips shows the cow's udder hanging directly over the turnips. Merino sheep came originally from Spain, although the modern variety was bred in Australia. George III was well known as a breeder of the Marino sheep which was important as it has the finest wool.

The Bottle

At this time the poor were often blamed for their circumstances and one thing that distinguished the deserving from the undeserving poor was idleness and drunkenness. It is significant that a bottle is located in the middle of the brightest patch of land and the overseer's legs, the wheelbarrow handles and its shadow and the large weed all seem to point to the bottle. There is a

tankard incongruously placed on the wheelbarrow which might be a play on words as the 'tankard' is a type of turnip. Farm workers would often be partly paid in ale but drunkenness was a problem so Turner is drawing our attention to the issue but without making a moral point.

Class Differences

Class differences are indicated by the lone figure in the white coat on the raised ground who has just dismounted from the white horse at the left. This juxtaposition of workers with a higher social class is unusual and it highlights the fact that they are working on another man's land as paid labour.

Enclosing common land also had the effect of forcing workers to find employment as they could no longer grow their own food. Farmers were stopping annual contracts for labour and starting to introduce a system of weekly or daily contracts so the farmer only paid the worker when the work was needed.

Weeds

The harvest we can see consists of a small wheelbarrow of turnips alongside a large area of weeds. Notice the weeds vertically align with the broken plough and the palace. Turner tends to link important connected details using vertical alignment.

Women Workers

During the war the shortage of men meant that women worked the fields, known as the 'petticoat harvests'. It has even been suggested that the development of farm machinery was a result of farmers' dissatisfaction with the productivity of the women compared with the men (Women, Work, and Wages in England, 1600-1850, Michael Roberts, ed. Penelope Lane). We see one of the women is nursing showing the farmer is desperate for labour and the women for work.

Thomas Malthus

There were many philosophical treatises dealing with the political and social issues of the poor but the most influential was Thomas Malthus's (1766-1834) *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). He argued that the population would always grow faster than food production and so poverty and starvation were inevitable (the Iron Law of Population). The book resulted in the first census of 1801 and the general belief that the existence of the poor was the result of the country being over populated. The 1801 census estimated the population of England and Wales to be 8.9 million, and that of Scotland was

1.6 million. Hindsight shows that increasing wealth resulting from the industrial revolution, when distributed to the poor, results in small family sizes and so it acts as a brake on population growth. In addition, the agricultural revolution has resulted in dramatic increases in farm productivity.

Other Notes

There are few representations of turnips, there is Constable's Flailing Turnip-heads and Gainsborough's Going to Market but generally they are poorly represented. Perhaps because they have little beauty or because they were a relatively new crop and did not represent timeless continuity but a new technique. In fact turnips were not a new crop but had been grown at least since the seventeenth century and in the Near East 4,000 years ago. It was grown as a human food in the southern states of America and the roots were eaten by the landowner and the turnip tops by the slaves (cooked like spinach).

Turner has made the castle more prominent than it would be from the site and for a while it was known as 'Windsor'.

Turnip tops are rich in calcium, four times more than kale or cabbage or broccoli. Also vitamin K and C.

The Domestic Encyclopedia or, a Dictionary of Facts, and Useful Knowledge (1802) points out that feeding cows on turnips or rape will taint the milk. Solutions are to avoid feeding the cows the turnip tops or to process the milk using boiling water to clean the churn of pout the cream over boiling water. There is something called 'turnip butter' which has a bad taste. In 1693 when corn was dear bread was made from turnips, 'turnip-bread' by boiling, them mashing and mixing with flour 50:50.

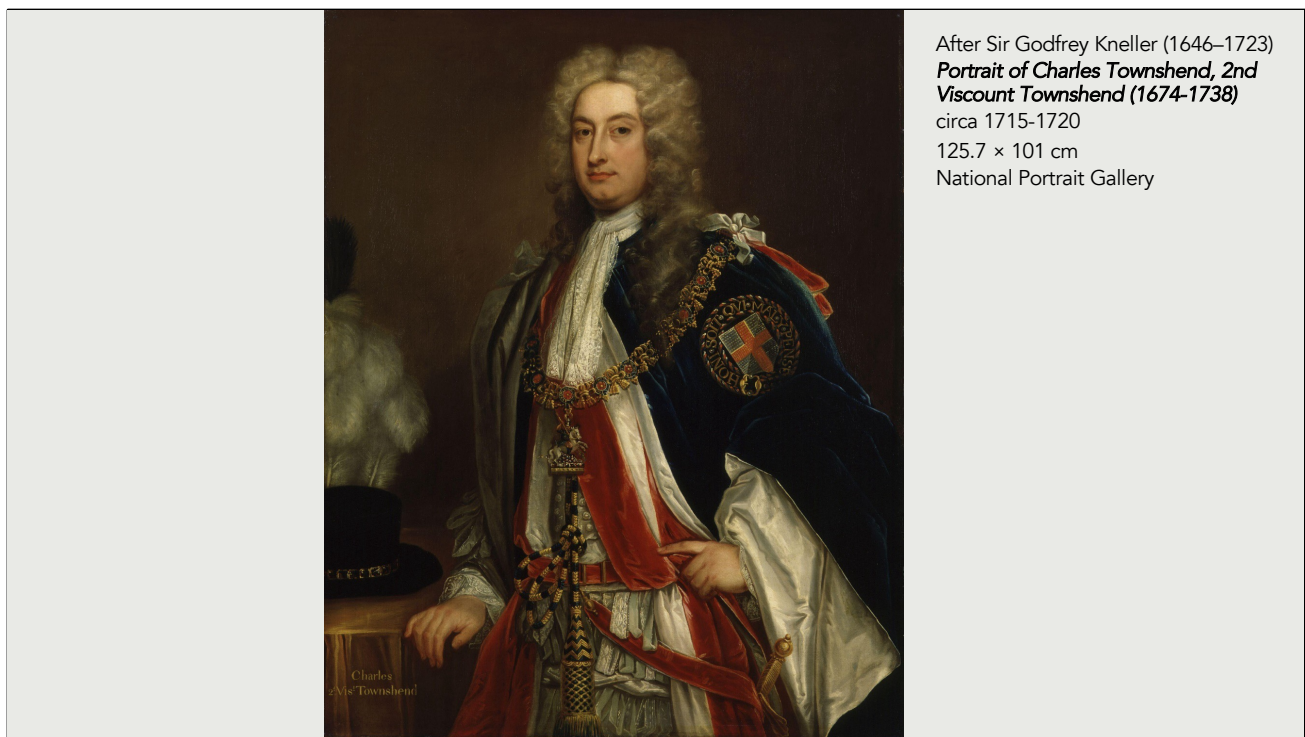
Charlock is a noxious (poisonous) weed that can grow with turnips and it has similar shaped leaves but sheep enjoy it if they graze a field when it is young.

In the medieval period peasants had a number of rights which included the right to pasture cattle, horses and sheep, another was turbary – the right to take turfs for fuel and estovers – the right to take sufficient wood for the commoner's house.

References

The Complete Farmer Or a General Dictionary of Husbandry In All Its Branches, Containing the Various Methods of Cultivating and Improving Every Species of Land ... The 4. Ed. Improved and Enlarged, 1793. "To take of the rankness of cream produced from turneps, the Norfolk dairy-women

sometimes scald their cream ... putting a quart of boiling water into each pail of milk before it be set, is a more effectual and less wasteful remedy."



After Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723), Portrait of Charles Townshend, 2nd Viscount Townshend (1674-1738), circa 1715-1720, 125.7 × 101 cm, National Portrait Gallery

The ground that would not yield in Turner's painting was not always so stubborn. The revolution that made English soil genuinely productive has one emblematic figure: **Charles Townshend**, the second Viscount Townshend of Raynham, who retired from politics in **1730** and turned his full attention to his Norfolk estate. His name became inseparable from a single vegetable, earning him the nickname **Turnip Townshend** for championing the **Norfolk four-course rotation** — wheat, turnips, barley, and clover cycling through the same ground year after year, keeping it perpetually in work rather than lying fallow. The genius of the system is biological. Clover fixes atmospheric nitrogen through bacteria in its root nodules, feeding the soil. Turnips and clover feed livestock through winter, meaning cattle no longer needed to be slaughtered every autumn. The manure those animals produced went back into the fields. Productivity surged: wheat exports rose from roughly eleven million quarters in **1705** to ninety-five million by **1765**. But the system carried a social cost. Common land had to be **enclosed** — fenced and consolidated — to stop one farmer's cattle straying onto another's turnip crop. The peasants who had worked the old strip fields lost their means of subsistence, and many were left to beg.

Notes

Crop rotation started in ancient Egypt with two-crop rotation but this required the land to lie unused (fallow). It was believed that fallow land regained its fertility for religious reasons but we now know it is because nitrates in the atmosphere settle on the land and re-fertilise it.

This is Charles 'Turnip' Townshend (1674-1738) who introduced four-crop rotation into Britain from Holland. This allowed fertility to be maintained with much less fallow land. This involved growing wheat, turnips, barley and clover in rotation. Clover fixes atmospheric nitrogen and re-fertilises the land. Clover and turnips are good fodder crops for livestock, which in turn improve the soil by their manure. This dramatically improved productivity and enabled cattle to be kept over winter rather than needing to slaughter them in the autumn and preserve the meat.

However, four-crop rotation meant an end to common land which had to be enclosed to prevent one farmer's cows from eating another farmer's turnips.

Between 1750 and 1850, the English population nearly tripled, with an estimated increase from 5.7 million to 16.6 million, and all these people had to be fed from the domestic food supply. The turnip was our secret weapon to win the war as it enabled food or animal fodder to be produced continually on the same land. The turnip became a symbol of progressive agriculture.

Notes

Townshend promoted adoption of the Norfolk four course system, involving rotation of turnips, barley, clover and wheat crops. He was an enthusiastic advocate of growing turnips as a field crop, for livestock feed.

From medieval times, peasants had used a system of three-year strip rotation of crops. At first each strip was about one acre and a peasant had about 30. Later they were further divided as the population increased.

Between the 15th and 18th centuries there was a gradual increase in the amount of land being enclosed. Enclosed literally meant that a field was surrounded by a fence or a hedge. It also meant that the enclosed field was worked as a complete unit and no longer divided into strips. The reasons for the increase in land enclosure were varied. In the Tudor period it was partly to enclose land to graze sheep. In the 17th and 18th centuries it resulted from the introduction of new farming techniques. The new landlords, either noblemen or the new landed gentry, turned the peasants off their land or cut their wages or only guaranteed work a week at a time as needed. Enclosure left many people without their strips and so without the means to grow food.

This resulted in them being evicted and most were forced to beg in order to survive.

Charles Townshend became the 2nd Viscount Townshend of Raynham in 1687. He became Secretary of State in the reign of George I. When he retired from politics in 1730 he turned his attention to his estate in Norfolk and introduced a new type of crop rotation which was already practised in Holland. It rotated crops on a four-year basis and used turnips and clover as two of the crops in the rotation.

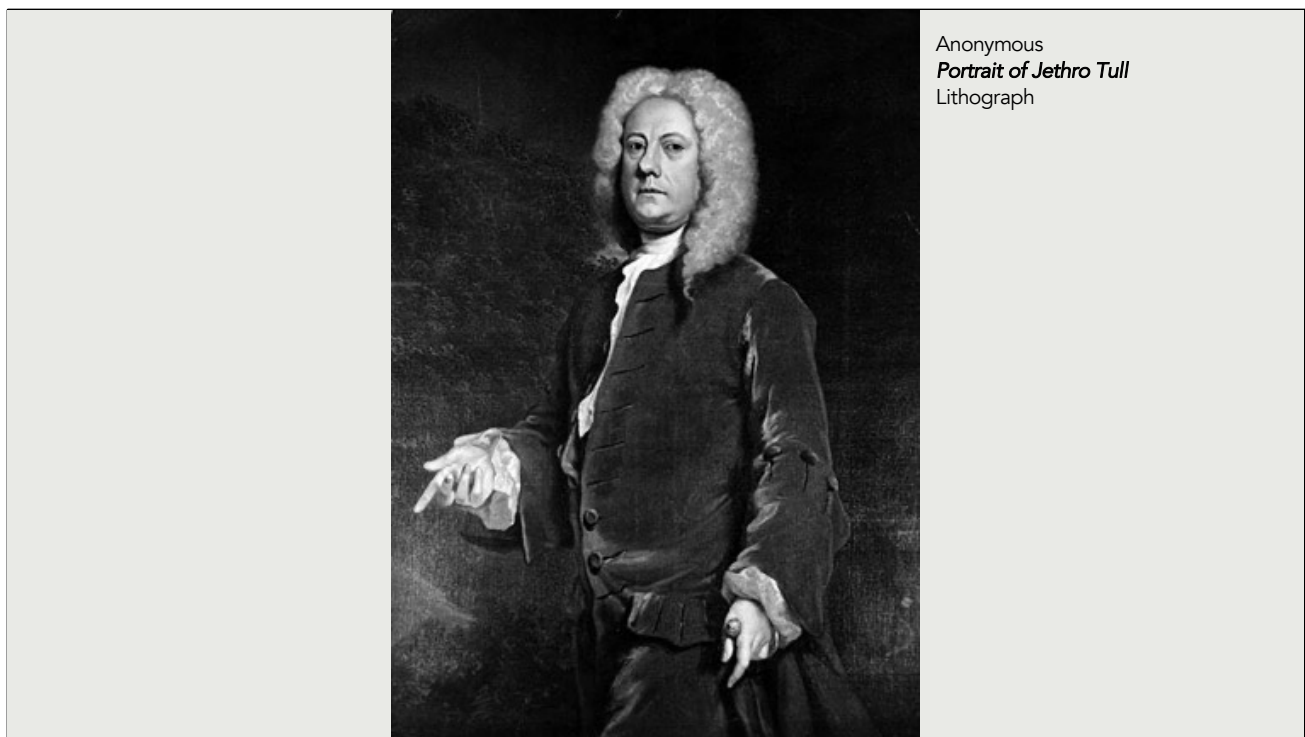
Turnips were not a new crop to English farming because they had been grown in East Anglia for use as cattle feed, fodder for livestock, during the winter months, since the 1660's. However, this was the first time they had been used in crop rotation. Charles Townshend was later to be known as "Turnip" Townshend because of his use of this crop in the four year rotation system.

Clover is a plant which is able to add nitrogen compounds to the soil because its roots have special structures, called root nodules, attached to them. Inside these nodules are found symbiotic bacteria which feed by fixing atmospheric nitrogen and producing nitrates (nitrogen-containing salts). The clover, which is more nutritious than grass, was used for grazing the livestock. In turn, the livestock produced manure which could be ploughed back into the soil.

The gradual enclosure of land, together with the four-year rotation system, had two major effects on agriculture. The first was that the harvest increased in yield. In 1705, England exported 11.5 million quarters of wheat. In 60 years, by 1765, wheat export had risen to 95 million quarters. The second effect was that livestock, which no longer needed to be slaughtered before the winter months, increased in both quantity and quality.

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<http://www.saburchill.com/history/chapters/IR/003f.html>



Anonymous, Portrait of Jethro Tull

Enclosure was not the only price paid for progress. The fields themselves were being transformed by machinery, and the name most associated with that shift is **Jethro Tull**, who developed his mechanical seed drill in **1701**. Before it, seed was broadcast by hand — scattered loosely across the surface, much of it wasted or eaten by birds. Tull's drill deposited seeds at a consistent depth in neat rows, making weeding between them practical and improving germination rates considerably. The trouble was that Tull's original machine was expensive and chronically unreliable, and quality drills did not reach farmers in any number until the mid-eighteenth century. His reputation, however, outran his hardware, and he lodged in the popular imagination as the man who brought mechanism to the soil. Machinery was only one thread. **Arthur Young**, the agricultural writer and propagandist of improvement, catalogued a whole ecosystem of change across his **Annals of Agriculture** in the **1780s and 1790s**: improved ploughs derived from Dutch designs, systematic manuring, selective livestock breeding, land drainage, and the slow development of a national market knitted together by canals and better roads. Young estimated that total agricultural output very nearly tripled between **1700** and **1870**, with British yields for a period running some eighty per cent above Continental levels.

Notes

There was a lot more going on down on the farm. There was increased

mechanisation. Jethro Tull invented an improved seed drill in 1701. It was a mechanical seeder which distributed seeds evenly across a plot of land and at the correct depth. Tull's seed drill was very expensive and not very reliable and therefore did not have much of an impact. Good quality seed drills were not produced until the mid-18th century. However, it is Tull's name that has lived on as one of the key innovators that introduced machinery that led to the agricultural revolution.

However, all of this innovation came at a price. Farmers needed fewer farm workers and wages fell. At the same time common land, which had been used by farm workers to grow food for their families was being taken away by enclosure acts.

The Agricultural Revolution resulted from not just crop rotation but also improved farm machinery, increasing use of manure and fertilizers, the Dutch swing (wheel-less) plough, enclosures, better road, canals and later rail transport, land reclamation and drainage, an increase in the number of capitalist farmers, selective breeding of livestock and the development of a national market. It is estimated that total agricultural output grew 2.7-fold between 1700 and 1870 and output per worker at a similar rate. For a time British farm yields were 80% higher than Continental yields (although still lower than those in China). The figures have been calculated by historians like **Eric Jones**, **Kenneth Pomeranz**, and economist **Robert C. Allen**.

The Agricultural Revolution in Britain proved to be a major turning point in history, allowing population to far exceed earlier peaks and sustain the country's rise to industrial pre-eminence. Towards the end of the 19th century, the substantial gains in British agricultural productivity were rapidly offset by competition from cheaper imports, made possible by the exploitation of new lands and advances in transportation, refrigeration, and other technologies.



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

Ploughing up Turnips near Slough
1809

Detail

Tate Britain, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, 1809, Tate Britain, London

Young's portrait of agricultural triumph sets up a revealing tension with what Turner actually painted. **J. M. W. Turner's** *Ploughing up Turnips, near Slough* was first exhibited in **1809**, at the height of the Napoleonic Wars, when the French blockade had closed European ports to British imports and home-grown food had become a matter of national survival. The patriotic reading was immediate and obvious: Windsor Castle on the horizon stands for monarchy, the spires of Eton for education and the aristocracy, and the labouring figures in the foreground for the productive workforce sustaining the war effort. **John Barrell**, in *The Dark Side of the Landscape* published in **1983**, was the first to make that argument systematically, reading the painting as a celebration of progressive English agriculture and the class order underpinning it. The Tate's own caption still largely follows Barrell's line. But look at the centre of the composition. There is a broken plough. There are weeds. There is a bottle of beer or wine, abandoned mid-field. These are not the signs of a thriving war machine. Wages were falling, enclosures were displacing communities, and the rural poor were bearing the cost of the very productivity being celebrated. Turner may be showing us a system already fracturing — and if so, he was prescient, because when the wars ended, conditions for agricultural labourers deteriorated sharply.

Notes

The caption to the painting in the Tate read "As well as its distant view of Windsor Castle, this picture of a turnip harvest depicts current efforts to maximise yields and increase the food supply to serve the needs of a wartime economy".

That is certainly one interpretation but in that case why, near the centre of the painting, is there a broken plough, weeds and a bottle of beer or wine? Falling wages and enclosures meant it was not a good time for agricultural workers. Is Turner showing us that the whole system was breaking down? If so, he was far sighted because at the end of the war things got worse, much worse.

Notes

The painting was first exhibited in 1809 at the height of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815, started when Napoleon seized power in 1799 apart from the one year Peace of Amiens in 1802). In 1805 Nelson beat the French fleet at Trafalgar and in response the French blockaded European ports to stop food being imported into England. It therefore became critical for England to grow all its own food and agricultural productivity became critical for the war effort. The painting would therefore have been seen as patriotically supporting the war.

The art historian John Barrell, in *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, was the first to point out its celebration of progressive English agriculture. It was during the Napoleonic Wars and the French had blockaded our ports so we depended on farmers to produce our food. In this light we see the Royal Palace at Windsor, representing monarchy, part of Eton school representing education and the aristocracy and in the foreground the labourers working to produce the food needed by everyone during the war. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of increased agricultural productivity resulting from new scientific agricultural practices. Barrell drew attention to the labourers and the celebration of progressive English agriculture that was helping us win the war against France.

References

John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, 1983



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

Ploughing up Turnips near Slough
1809

Tate Britain, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, 1809, Tate Britain, London

Those fractures in the composition resist any single reading, and that resistance is precisely what makes the painting so historically rich. *Ploughing up Turnips* holds **patriotism and critique** in genuine, unresolved tension. The broken plough and the abandoned bottle do not cancel the Windsor horizon — they complicate it. The beauty of the light and the harshness of the labour exist simultaneously, without either term winning out. Power confronts poverty; agricultural advance sits alongside displacement; industry and idleness share the same field. This ambiguity was not unique to Turner. **John Constable**, painting the Suffolk countryside in the same decades, faced identical interpretive pressures. His labourers, too, have been read as both celebration and elegy. What distinguishes Turner here is the sheer compositional restlessness — the way the eye is pulled between the golden atmospheric distance and the difficult, muddy foreground. **John Barrell's** reading remains useful, but it cannot be the whole story, and Barrell himself acknowledged that ideological readings must contend with what the paint actually does. Art history earns its keep precisely at this point: not by delivering verdicts, but by showing how images carry the contradictions of their moment — beauty and ugliness, triumph and fracture — without resolving them neatly.

Notes

Like any great painting it is not propaganda, the clues are ambiguous. One of the

joys of art history is discovering these clues that open up a world of social history but one of the frustrations is that, like the real world, there is no simple answer, no single interpretation, it is neither patriotic nor unpatriotic, it is shows beauty and ugliness, power confronting poverty, agricultural advances and their negative impact, hard work and idleness, patriotism and the causes of revolution. I believe it is these levels of meaning and this ambiguity that make it a masterpiece.



Humphry Repton (1752-1818), *Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture (before and after illustrations of Hare Street cottage)*, 1816

That tension between beauty and hardship, between the polished prospect and the difficult foreground, finds a precise parallel in two illustrations published in **1816** by **Humphry Repton**, the landscape designer who coined the very term "landscape gardener." Repton was the last great practitioner in the tradition of **Capability Brown**, and these before-and-after views — his trademark device, reproduced in his famous **Red Books** — show the front of his modest cottage at Hare Street near Romford in Essex. Look carefully at the before image. There is a beggar: one eye patch, one arm missing, a wooden leg. He is unmistakably a veteran of the **Napoleonic Wars**, which ended at **Waterloo in 1815**. Mutilated soldiers were returning to find ruined harvests, no work, and the newly passed **Corn Laws** pushing the price of bread beyond their reach. In the after view, he has vanished. Repton has appropriated a strip of the village green, enclosed it with flowering shrubs, and screened the road entirely. He called this power over the visible landscape "**appropriation**" — the exclusive enjoyment of a view, including, in his own words, "the power of refusing that others should share our pleasure." That small hedge is a miniature enclosure, and it stands as a precise metaphor for the **one-sixth of England** enclosed between 1750 and 1850.

Notes

These two illustrations from 1816 show the impact of the war with France on the

poor.

These drawings are from *Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture* by Humphry Repton the landscape designer. He has here applied his ideas to his cottage in Hare Street near Romford, Essex. He drew these before and after view in the plans he provided to his clients and this became his trademark.

I would like to draw your attention to the beggar as he is the first person we have seen connected directly with political events. The Napoleonic Wars ended with Waterloo in 1815 and after the war many soldiers returned to find a poor harvest, expensive food and no work. The beggar with an eye patch, an arm missing and a wooden leg was a familiar sight and here he is shown as an undesirable to be removed. Note that in his redesigned garden Repton has actually carried out a mini-enclosure of the village green.

It is the year after the war had ended, mutilated soldiers were returning home and the Corn Laws were introduced massively increasing the price of bread.

Notes

In the late eighteenth century Capability Brown was viciously attacked by those promoting the picturesque as his smooth curving landscapes were thought to be 'bare and bald' and lacking rough and irregular picturesque detail (1794, Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price attacked 'Capability' Brown).

Humphry Repton initially defended Capability Brown although as his career progressed he grew his designs became more and more picturesque.

Looking at the after view we see that Repton has bought the village green and extended his garden.

Repton wrote about 'appropriation' which is an exclusive visual command over the landscape. This exclusive right includes 'the power of refusing that others should share our pleasure'. We all want 'something we can call our own...our own Home'. Notice that before the people on the coach and the beggar are looking and after they are concealed and excluded.

Repton's small garden is a metaphor for the widespread enclosures that were taking place across the countryside.

Although they were a major issue in Tudor times the final and most contentious wave of enclosures was between 1750 and 1850 and was justified by improving productivity. In this period one sixth of England was enclosed and this took the ability to grow food away from a large part of the

population. The smallholders and commoners became dependent on poor relief and had to buy food. The old soldier may be begging because his right to grow food for himself has been taken away. I talk more about enclosures later as they were one of the causes of the Swing Riots.

Key point: Repton's showed how to create a picturesque landscape and his purchase of the village green is a metaphor for the enclosures taking place and the idea of buying and owning a landscape of our own cut off from the political turmoil.

Humphry Repton

Humphry Repton coined the term 'landscape gardener' and created picturesque gardens.

Humphry Repton was the last great landscape designer of the eighteenth century often regarded as a successor to Capability Brown. He is best known for Blaise Castle near Bristol, the themed gardens at Woburn Abbey, the 'home lawn' at Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire and the central gardens in Russell Square.

At first he defended Brown's rolling vistas he later added more rugged 'picturesque elements'. Repton also introduced the innovation of his 'Red Books'. These contained before and after watercolours views of the clients garden and Repton sold these as his business rather than carrying out all the work as a contractor like Brown. As a result Repton's ideas were often only partly implemented and he made little money compared with Brown.

Repton believed that gardens should be designed like paintings with a foreground, middleground and background. The foreground is for the art, ornamental planting, the middleground like a Capability Brown park and the background should be wild and 'natural'.

He was a designer not a contractor like Capability Brown so many of his designs were never implemented or were modified. This is his advice based on how he modified his own cottage. It is a before and after picture which he specialised in.

He wrote about how his cottage faced a green often covered by cattle, pigs or geese and how he appropriated 25 yards of garden by taking the green and surrounding it with flowering shrubs and evergreens.

He kept it open so that he could see the village scene unlike many owners of property as he enjoyed mankind and movement. But he hid the butcher's shop in preference to a basket of roses and he points out that a very small

object may hid an offensive object that is ten times larger. The hedge hides the dirt of the road and prevents him being seen.

He concludes by saying that he has 'lived to reach that period when improvements of house and garden is more delightful to me than parks, forests, landscapes or distant prospects' (page 605).

He ends his book and his life with the words 'Allons mes amis, il faut cultiver nos jardins' [Come along, my friends, and let us cultivate our gardens.] (Voltaire, *Candide*, Chapter 30: Candide buys a small farm and finds working the farm satisfying at last.)

Repton's Cottage

These engravings are from one of Repton's books describing how he applied picturesque ideas to the landscape. They show the front garden of his modest cottage at Hare Street near Romford in Essex.

Notice the people on the coach and the beggar are looking. Repton writes about 'appropriation' which is command over the landscape visible from a window that denotes it is private property. The exclusive right of enjoyment is part of the charm 'with the power of refusing that others should share our pleasure'. We all want 'something we can call our own...our own Home'.

He wrote about how his cottage faced a green often covered by cattle, pigs or geese and how he appropriated 25 yards of garden by taking the green and surrounding it with flowering shrubs and evergreens. He kept it open so that he could see the village scene unlike many owners of property as he enjoyed mankind and movement. But he hid the butcher's shop in preference to a basket of roses and he points out that a very small object may hid an offensive object that is ten times larger. The hedge hides the dirt of the road and prevents him being seen. He concludes by saying that he has 'lived to reach that period when improvements of house and garden is more delightful to me than parks, forests, landscapes or distant prospects' (page 605).



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

Lancaster Sands

1816

280.5 × 394.6 cm

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Lancaster Sands*, 1816, 280.5 × 394.6 cm, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Repton's vanishing beggar brings us directly into the crisis year that followed **Waterloo**, because **1816** was catastrophic in ways that went far beyond politics or enclosure. In April **1815**, **Mount Tambora** in what is now Indonesia erupted with a violence almost without precedent in recorded history — ejecting roughly twenty-four cubic miles of ash into the upper atmosphere. That ash circled the globe, cutting sunlight sufficiently to lower average temperatures by nearly half a degree across the northern hemisphere. The result was "**The Year Without a Summer**": snow fell in June, frost blackened crops in July and August, and harvests failed from China to the Americas. In Britain and Ireland, the cold and unrelenting rain compounded the misery already inflicted by the **Corn Laws**. Riots broke out. Typhus spread through a malnourished population, killing around **65,000** people. **Turner** was there. This is **Lancaster Sands**, the notoriously treacherous crossing of **Morecambe Bay** — a route haunted by sudden tides, quicksands, and sea-fogs. Look for the thin twigs of laurel pushed into the sand: they are the only markers of the safe path across. Everything else in the composition — the grey, diffused light, the flat, featureless expanse — speaks to a landscape stripped of warmth and certainty. Turner is not decorating disaster; he is documenting it.

Notes

On top of all that 1816 was a terrible harvest as it "The Year without a Summer".

This is Lancaster Sands, in Morecambe Bay that year. It was a dangerous crossing with unexpected tides, quicksands and fogs. The twigs of laurel are the only indication of the safe crossing route.

The cause of all the rain and lack of sun was a natural disaster, a massive eruption of Mount Tambora in what is now Indonesia sent 24 cubic miles of ash into the upper atmosphere. The ash circulated round the world reducing sunlight and this reduced average global temperatures by about half a degree (between 0.4 and 0.7°C). This temperature drop was disastrous and resulted in famine across the world from China to the Americas.

In Europe low temperatures combined with heavy rains and there was snow in June and frost in July and August. It became known, as I said, as 'The Year Without a Summer'. The crops were destroyed, there were riots in the streets and in Britain and Ireland typhus spread through the malnourished nation and 65,000 died. This is Turner's record of that terrible summer.



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851)
Chichester Canal
1828
65 x 134 cm
Tate, London

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), Chichester Canal, 1828, 65 x 134 cm, Tate, London

Lancaster Sands showed us Turner reading disaster in a bleached, frozen landscape. **Chichester Canal**, painted in **1828** and commissioned by **George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont**, shows us the other side of that same atmospheric catastrophe — written not in cold grey light, but in fire. The canal itself belongs to the great expansion of Britain's inland waterway network, which by its peak stretched nearly **4,000 miles** and transformed the economics of heavy industry. The vessel moving silently through the picture is almost certainly a collier brig — commerce dressed in tranquillity. But Turner's real subject here is the sky. The research of **Christos Zerefos** and his colleagues, published in the early 2000s, demonstrated through systematic analysis that landscapes painted in the decades following major volcanic eruptions show measurably redder, more saturated sunsets. The **Tambora** ash that circled the globe after **1815** scattered short-wave light and intensified the orange and crimson end of the spectrum at dusk. Turner's blazing horizon, which can look like romantic licence, is in fact atmospheric optics accurately observed. The painter who documented famine in grey also documented its cause in gold — the same catastrophe, rendered in two entirely different registers of light.

Notes

This is Chichester Canal. The canal system was built during the eighteenth century before the railways as a means of transport. Britain was the first country to develop

a nationwide canal system which at its peak was nearly 4,000 miles long. It dramatically reduced the cost of moving goods particularly heavy goods such as coal and iron. This enabled goods or raw materials from one area of the country to be transported relatively cheaply to be exported, consumed or used in another part. This tied the country together to create one large manufacturing unit.

But I am showing this work for another reason—the brilliant sunsets Turner painted. In 1815 there was a massive eruption of Mount Tambora in what is now Indonesia sent 24 cubic miles of ash into the upper atmosphere. This reduced average global temperatures by between 0.4 and 0.7°C and this resulted in famine across the world from China to the Americas. In Europe low temperatures combined with heavy rains and there was snow in June and frost in July and August. It became known as 'The Year Without a Summer'. The crops were destroyed, there were riots in the streets and in Britain and Ireland typhus spread through the malnourished nation and 65,000 died.

A study of landscapes painted before and after the eruption show that artists recorded brighter red and yellow sunsets because of the ash that remained in the atmosphere for years. So Turner's bright red sunsets and yellow shrubbery are an accurate scientific record of that period.

Notes

"Chichester Canal is a painting by the English Romantic landscape painter, water-colourist and printmaker J. M. W. Turner. It was painted in 1828 and was commissioned by George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont. It is now in the Tate Collection.

The work depicts the Chichester Canal in Sussex, southern England. The ship is probably a collier brig, as this serene scene had commercial purpose. Its brilliant colours may have been influenced by atmospheric ash from the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia (see also Year Without a Summer)."

References

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J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851)
Leeds
 1816
 29.2 x 43.2 cm
 Yale Center for British Art

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), Leeds, 1816, 29.2 x 43.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art

That volcanic light over Chichester gives way here to something earthier — the smoke and industry of the English North. In **1816**, Turner toured Yorkshire gathering material for **Thomas Dunham Whitaker's** **History of Yorkshire**. He visited **Leeds**, then the hub of the nation's wool and flax industries, making meticulous graphite sketches on the ground before elaborating them into a finished watercolour back in London. The result is one of the most remarkable images of the **Industrial Revolution** in British art. Turner viewed the city from **Beeston Hill**, about a mile and a half to the south, deploying the conventions of the prospect panorama — a genre long used to celebrate urban prosperity. **Stephen Daniels** has argued that Turner drew on two earlier sources: **Samuel Buck's** engraved prospect of Leeds from **1720**, and John Dyer's allegorical poem **The Fleece**, which charts wool manufacture as a vision of Britain united through labour. Turner places **John Marshall's** flax mill at the compositional centre, and populates the foreground with carefully differentiated figures — tentermen hanging cloth to dry, masons, milk carriers, a millworker carrying a roll of cloth. The drawing was never engraved for Whitaker's book, its industrial subject almost certainly too modern for that conservative publication. Turner saw not grime, but the future.

Notes

Of all the British landscape artists of the Romantic period, Turner was the most fascinated by modernity, and many of his images chronicle technological advances

Turner toured Yorkshire in 1816 to sketch the area in preparation for illustrating Thomas Whitaker's 'The History of Yorkshire'. Leeds was the centre of the nation's wool and flax industries and Turner shows it spread out before us from Beeston Hill, now a crowded suburb. He places the great flax mill at the centre and we see men hanging cloth out to dry, masons mending a wall, milk carriers, and a millworker carrying a roll of cloth.

The detail in this drawing suggests Turner intended to include it in the book but it was never included suggesting that the conservative author considered it too industrial for inclusion. Turner saw it not as a dirty industrial scene but the future opening up before his eyes.

Notes

Industrial Revolution - Factories

"Of all the British landscape artists of the Romantic period, Turner was the most fascinated by modernity, and many of his images chronicle technological advances. While touring Yorkshire in 1816 to gather material for Thomas Dunham Whitaker's 'The History of Yorkshire', Turner visited Leeds, the hub of the nation's wool and flax industries, and made meticulous graphite sketches of the city, which he elaborated into this watercolour on his return to London. Turner's remarkable drawing celebrates the economic success and resilience of Leeds—and by extension, that of Britain—in the immediate aftermath of the wars with Napoleon. As Stephen Daniels has noted in his penetrating analysis of the watercolour, to which this entry is indebted, Turner's image is a complex and richly allusive portrayal of a rapidly developing industrial city, an amalgam of sources rather than a straightforward topographical record (Daniels, 1986, 1993).

The watercolour, which depicts the city from Beeston Hill, about a mile and half south of the city, draws on the conventions of the prospect or panorama, a well-established genre for representing urban development and prosperity. Daniels has suggested convincingly that Turner used two eighteenth-century sources, Samuel Buck's 1720 engraved prospect of Leeds and an allegorical poem by John Dyer, 'The Fleece', which details the processes of wool manufacture and offers a vision of Britain united through labour. With similar patriotic intention, though perhaps not without ambivalence, Turner mapped the smoky industrial landscape of Leeds, placing John Marshall's flax mill at

the centre of his composition and carefully differentiating its figures' occupations—tentermen hanging cloth to dry, masons, milk carriers, and a millworker carrying a roll of cloth. It is likely that Turner intended 'Leeds' to be engraved for Whitaker's publication, but it was not included, perhaps because its industrial subject matter was considered unsuitable for this somewhat conservative publication. The watercolour was published in 1823, translated, appropriately, into the modern medium of lithography. "

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Joseph Mallord William Turner
(1775–1851)

*Life-boat and Manby Apparatus
Going off a stranded Vessel making
Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress*
1831

oil painting
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Life-boat and Manby Apparatus Going off a stranded Vessel making Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress*, 1831, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

That forward-looking industrial energy Turner found in Leeds had a counterpart in his fascination with the technology of survival at sea. **George Manby** was a Norfolk man, a school friend of Nelson, and barrack master at Great Yarmouth when, in **1807**, he watched the naval vessel **Snipe** founder within sixty yards of the shore. He could hear the sailors' cries above the storm. The following morning over a hundred corpses were washed ashore. Manby borrowed a military mortar from the Board of Ordnance and devised a method of firing a rescue line out to a stricken vessel. The system worked in earnest for the first time on **12 February 1808**, when the brig **Elizabeth** went aground at Yarmouth — a success that brought him widespread fame. By **1831**, the year Turner exhibited this picture at the **Royal Academy**, Manby had been elected a Fellow of the **Royal Society**, and his apparatus was everywhere celebrated as the seaman's best friend. Turner's painting shows the mortar's discharge as a small, almost gentle puff — yet it is the hinge on which life turns. Turner knew **Michael Faraday**, **Humphry Davy**, and **Mary Somerville** personally, and this work belongs to that habit of mind: art made alert to the cutting edge of the present.

Notes

There were many scientific innovations and Turner took a great interest in science

and knew the leading scientists of the day such as Richard Owen, Michael Faraday, Humphry Davy and Mrs Mary Somerville.

This painting *Life-boat and Manby Apparatus Going off a stranded Vessel making Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress* (V&A, 1831) shows an invention by George Manby. It looks like a shipwreck but Turner shows a puff of air that has fired a rope out to a shipwreck. 1831 Manby was elected to the Royal Society and was in the news. Turner liked to reflect the latest technology particularly anything that had been in the news.

Manby saw a shipwreck at Great Yarmouth. It was so close to the shore he could hear their cries above the roar of the storm and the next day 144 corpses were washed up. Manby decided to solve the problem. His invention had everyone talking about Manby and the view was, 'The entire coast will be guarded' and that it was 'The seaman's best friend'. Although there were problems, particularly when it was used by those who were untrained many sailors were saved by his device.

The Manby Mortar fires a thin, flexible line using a standard mortar, later replaced by a rocket. The line is spread on the shore to stop tangles and it hooks onto the vessel. This thin line is then used to pull a thick hawser out to the ship and this rope enables a rescue boat to reach the vessel or later to carry a Breeches buoy (like a zip wire).

Notes

"The inventor George William Manby (1765-1854) was a Norfolk man, and a school-fellow and friend of Nelson. His younger brother Thomas also joined the Navy and rose to rear-admiral but George was trained for the artillery at the Royal Academy, Woolwich, though he instead became a captain in the Cambridgeshire Militia. From 1803 he was barrack master at Great Yarmouth where in 1807 he saw a small naval vessel, the 'Snipe', wrecked within sixty yards of the shore with huge loss of life. It occurred to him that rescue in such a case required a rapid physical link with the shore, so he borrowed a small military mortar from the Board of Ordnance and devised a means of using it to fire a rescue-line from the shore. It was first attempted in earnest, and successfully, when the brig 'Elizabeth' was wrecked at Yarmouth on 12 February 1808, just as Manby was first promoting his invention's official approval: this was rapid, bringing him widespread fame and various awards."

[1]

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George Frederic Watts (1817-1904)
Irish Famine
1850
Watts Gallery, Compton

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), *Irish Famine*, 1850, Watts Gallery, Compton

From the cutting edge of industrial modernity, we turn now to one of the nineteenth century's most catastrophic human disasters. The **Great Famine** of **1845 to 1852** killed over a million people in Ireland and forced roughly two million more to emigrate, shrinking the island's population by nearly a third at precisely the moment when almost every other European nation was growing rapidly. The population fell from around eight million to five and a half million. The immediate cause was ***Phytophthora infestans***, the potato blight, which destroyed the crop that the rural poor depended on almost entirely. Yet, as the Irish nationalist **John Mitchel** put it with devastating concision: "The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine." Grain and butter continued to be exported from Ireland throughout, a fact that has led **Terry Eagleton** to describe the disaster as, in his words, "the greatest social disaster of nineteenth-century Europe." The famine was brought to British public attention largely through **James Mahoney**, a Cork-based artist commissioned by the **Illustrated London News** in early **1847** to tour the stricken countryside. His illustrations were unflinching. Yet very few painters engaged with the subject directly. One who did was **George Frederic Watts**, whose single painting on the theme, **Irish Famine**, stands almost alone in the Victorian exhibition record as a direct artistic confrontation with the catastrophe.

Notes

The 1840s were known as the 'Hungry Forties' because of poor harvests but the situation in Ireland, which was then part of the United Kingdom, became much, much worse.

More than a million people died of starvation and disease in the Great Famine between 1845 and 1852 and about one and a half million people emigrated reducing the population by about a third (8 million to 5.5 million).

The Irish population depended on potatoes as they gave the highest yield of food per acre. The potato blight destroyed the crop from 1845 onwards and the famine was reported in The Illustrated London News throughout. James Mahoney was an artist living in Cork, Ireland. In early 1847 he was asked by the Illustrated London News to tour the surrounding countryside and report on what he saw. The resulting articles and illustrations did much to alert the British public of the crisis.

Terry Eagleton, a former professor of English at Oxford, called the Irish Famine "the greatest social disaster of 19th century Europe, an event with something of the characteristics of a low-level nuclear attack." Between 1845 and 1855 the Irish population of almost 8.2 million shrank by a third. Starvation and disease killed 1.1 million of us, and 2 million emigrated. At the end of the famine one out of every three people was gone, leaving the survivors reeling from the sheer scale of the loss. It was as bad as the worst famines we see in Africa today and the real outrage was that enough grain was being exported from Ireland throughout the famine to feed the entire population. At this time the whole of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom yet the Government allowed grain and butter exports to continue. This is why the famine is regarded by many today as direct or indirect genocide.

John Mitchel (1815-1875), Irish nationalist and author, wrote the famous line: 'The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine.'

The famine led to a failed uprising in 1848 and eventually to an independent Ireland.

Following the Great Famine was what is called the Great Silence when grandparents refused to discuss it with their grandchildren. The Great Famine was associated with shame, bitterness and revolution. The rural Irish countryside still contains ruined cottages, workhouses and burial plots from that period.

Few painters tackled the subject, for example, the Irish artist George Victor

du Noyer (1817-1869) who was commissioned to paint realistic views of locations all over Ireland never depicted the famine. One of the best known who did was George Frederic Watts albeit only in this one picture, Irish Famine.

Notes

After the Great Famine (1845-1852), Irish independence was inevitable. More than 1 million of Ireland's 8 million people perished of starvation or disease. Another 1.5 million (some say 2 million) Irish emigrated. The population of Ireland was reduced by nearly a half, this at a time that the population of nearly all other European populations were rapidly expanding. As nothing before in Irish history, it created a burning hatred toward the English, both among those who survived in Ireland and the immigrants who fanned out around the world.

Phytophthora infestans or potato blight is still a major problem worldwide and potatoes are the third most important food crop worldwide. In 2012 the potatoes lost to blight would have fed 80 million people.

One Quaker (Joseph Crosfield) wrote in 1846 that he saw:

heart-rending scene [of] poor wretches in the last stages of famine imploring to be received into the [work]house...Some of the children were worn to skeletons, their features sharpened with hunger, and their limbs wasted almost to the bone..

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904) was a popular English Victorian painter and sculptor, perhaps the most popular. He wrote that he painted ideas not things. In 1847 he returned from Florence and painted the massive fresco in the Great Hall of Lincoln's Inn. Between 1848 and 1850 he painted four social realist pictures. All had melancholy themes, the others are Found Drowned, Under the Dry Arch (an old woman kneels and leans against an arch) and Song of the Shirt (also known as The Seamstress, a woman sits holding a shirt in her lap and holds her head in her other hand). In 1850 he met the Prinseps and helped them secure a lease on Little Holland House and moved in and lived with them for the next 21 years.

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Royal Collection

William Edward Kilburn (1818–1891), Chartist rally, Kennington Common, 10 April 1848, Royal Collection

The famine that devastated Ireland was unfolding at precisely the moment when working-class Britain was reaching its own moment of political crisis. **Chartism**, the first mass working-class movement in British history, had been gathering force since **1838**, when the radical **William Lovett** drafted the People's Charter, a document built around six demands: universal manhood suffrage, the secret ballot, equal constituencies, no property qualification for MPs, payment of MPs, and annual elections. The movement's defining confrontation came on **10 April 1848**, when an enormous crowd — somewhere between twenty thousand and fifty thousand people — gathered on **Kennington Common** in south London. They carried a petition bearing millions of signatures, intended for Parliament. The government mobilised special constables, soldiers, and artillery. Among the special constables, extraordinarily, stood **Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte**, the future Napoleon the Third. The bridges were held, the organisers backed down, and the petition was handed in by cab. When Commons clerks examined it, they found only one point nine million valid signatures, and the forged names of Queen Victoria and the Duke of Wellington. The movement never fully recovered. Two young artists who watched from the crowd that morning — **John Everett Millais** and **William Holman Hunt** — would found the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** just months later.

Notes

All the changes I have described led to a movement called Chartism which started in about 1838. This was founded a charter of six reforms and the belief that a new type of politics would arise that was truly democratic and would change society and alleviate all these problems.

On 10 April 1838 an enormous crowd gathered on Kennington Common. They had a petition with millions of signatures that they intended to take to Downing Street. The back streets were full of special constables and the army. The army had cannons prepared to open fire. Any small incident or skirmish could have resulted in a riot and many deaths but in the event the rally was peaceful and afterwards the crowd melted away and by two o'clock the crowd was gone and only a few boys playing ball games remained. There were skirmishes on Blackfriars Bridge (1769) and many arrests were made and at one point sabres were drawn by the cavalry but the violence was contained.

Notes

Chartists had six reforms: a vote for every man over 21 (not undergoing punishment for a crime), a secret ballot, no property qualification for MPs, payment of MPs, equal size constituencies and annual elections to stop bribery and intimidation.

The Chartists organised petitions signed by millions of working people. The largest and most important was in 1848 and led to this gathering on Monday 10 April 1848 when an enormous crowd gathered on Kennington Common. The petition with six million signatures was handed in to Downing Street and a disaster and possible revolution was avoided by hair's breadth.

In the morning people started to arrive by train and walk from all over London and they gathered on Kennington Common. The organiser, Feargus O'Connor an MP said there were 300,000 but the Government said it was only 15,000. Historians generally agree there were about 20,000 to 50,000. It was a peaceful demonstration and the organisers intended to hand in the petition a 5.7 million signatures to Parliament. About 50,000 (some historians say 170,000) special constables and soldiers were prepared to do battle to prevent the demonstration from crossing back over the Thames. The special constables included Gladstone, Robert Peel and, most strangely, Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the future Napoleon III. Waterloo Bridge and Charing Cross Bridge were toll bridges and the special constables enjoyed the afternoon lounging and 'enjoying the pleasures of a pipe' (from Illustrated

London News). The rally's orator and rebel rouser, Feargus O'Connor, MP, was told that his followers could not cross the river and the bridges were well protected so he humiliatingly allowed the petition to be taken to the new Palace of Westminster.

On a personal note, just over 70 years after this event, both my father and my mother were born just beyond the large houses on the left.

The Kennington Common demonstration was watched by the artists John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt and six months later (an evening in early September, 9th was Saturday) they founded the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood with Dante Gabriel Rossetti (who was living with Hunt) in Millais's parents house at 83 Gower Street. On the 20 August they met to examine Lasinio's engravings of the Campo Santo frescoes at Pisa. James Collinson, Frederic George Stephens, poet and critic William Michael Rossetti, and sculptor Thomas Woolner joined to form a seven-member-strong brotherhood. Mr. Hunt says—and he must be correct—that the word *Præraphaelites* "had first been used as a term of contempt by our enemies". Rossetti added 'Brotherhood' which he preferred to 'clique' or 'association'.

...

Voting. Second Reform Act (1867) doubled the male franchise to about one third of adult males. Women did not gain the same voting rights as men until 1928.

Waterloo Station. 11 July 1848, three months later, Waterloo Bridge station opened. It was designed by William Tite and built over marshy ground. Waterloo Station was intended as a temporary station to be extended into the City and so sub-stations were created in a ramshackle way and it became the butt of music hall jokes. At one point there were three stations, South (now platforms 1 and 2, nicknamed Cyprus station), Central and North (nicknamed Khartoum Station) with overlapping platform numbers. The line for Waterloo East went above one of the platforms (2 now 4). The entire station was rebuilt and opened in 1922. From 1897 there was an adjoining Necropolis Company station that ran trains to Brookwood Cemetery bearing coffins for 2/6 but it was destroyed in World War II. More people go in and out of Waterloo station each year than the entire population of the UK (96 million).

Kennington Common was a sacred place of national assembly from ancient times (sharp bend in the River Effra, strategic mound or tumulus now levelled, fork in main road from London Bridge). It was the South London equivalent of

Tyburn (now Marble Arch). Kennington Park was created in 1854, the first park in south London, to prevent it being used again for large meetings.

The photograph was taken from the top of the Horns Tavern where Feargus O'Connor met the police. Looking across to the 'Oil of Vitriol Manufactory' (Sulphuric acid). 'A manufactory for oil of vitriol, on the east side of Kennington Common, occupies three acres of ground; and between that and the Kent-road are, a smelting-house for lead and antimony, a tannary, a manufactory for glue, another for tobacco-pipes, with manufactories for floorcloth and for carriages.'

William Kilburn opened his portrait studio on London's Regent Street in 1846. He was commissioned to make daguerreotype portraits of the Royal Family between 1846 and 1852 as the Royal Photographer, and was awarded a prize medal for his photographs at the 1851 Great Exhibition. The Chartists who took their name from Magna Carta were the first British national working class movement. Their meetings had a carnival-like atmosphere.

Petition. The petition was boasted to have 5,700,000 signatures but House of Commons clerks said the petition was 'only' 1.9 million valid signatures but they did not have time to count them all. Some of the names were amusing or forged. The Chartists were a source of fun for the media and it discredited the petition as it included falsely signed names of Queen Victoria, Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington and names such as Mr Punch, Pugnose and No Cheese.

O'Connor never recovered from the indignity of it all and went insane four years later as the result of syphilis. He never married, but had a number of relationships and, it is believed, fathered several children. He is said to have drunk a bottle of brandy a day. Early historians attributed the failure of the Chartist movement to O'Connor but more recently he has been reassessed in a more favourable light. He died in 1855 and is buried at Kensal Green Cemetery.

Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was wealthy and lived in London from 1838, attempted a coup in France in 1840 and was imprisoned in France, escaped to London in 1846, returned to Paris after the February revolution but went back to London on 2 March and returned to Paris on 24 September after receiving more votes than any other candidate in Paris. He was therefore in London during the June Days Uprising in Paris and so could not be associated with it. On 2 December 1848 Louis Napoleon was elected President of the Second Republic largely on peasant support. Exactly four

years later he suspended the elected assembly and established the Second French Empire which lasted until 1871.

Ireland. The Act of Union of 1800 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801. Opposition during the nineteenth century was mainly Roman Catholic. Charles Parnell campaigned for autonomy within the Union or 'Home Rule'. The Home Rule Bill of 1914 excluded the six counties of Ulster. Ireland became independent in 1921.

Chartism was a working-class movement for political reform in the United Kingdom that erupted from 1838 to 1857 and was strongest in 1839, 1842 and 1848². It was launched in 1838 by a series of large-scale meetings in Birmingham, Glasgow and the north of England¹. The aim of the Chartists was to gain political rights and influence for the working classes³. The movement was named after the People's Charter, a bill drafted by the London radical William Lovett in May 1838⁴. The charter contained six demands: universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, vote by ballot, annually elected Parliaments, payment of members of Parliament, and abolition of property qualifications for MPs⁴.

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Source: Conversation with Bing, 21/03/2023

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Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)
Last of England
 1855
 Birmingham Museum and Art
 Gallery, Birmingham

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Last of England*, 1855, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham

Millais and Hunt were in that Kennington crowd in April 1848, and within months they had founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. **Ford Madox Brown** was never formally one of the seven, but he was among their closest allies, and his painting ***The Last of England*** is the definitive image of the emigration crisis that was reshaping mid-Victorian Britain. The immediate trigger was personal. In **1852**, the sculptor **Thomas Woolner**, one of the Brotherhood, emigrated to Australia after failing to find sufficient work in Britain. Brown was so moved that he began the painting that same year. He had also contemplated emigrating himself. Emigration peaked in **1852**, with **350,000** people leaving Britain in a single year, drawn partly by the **Australian gold rush** that began in Victoria in 1851 and the Californian rush from 1848 onwards. Brown modelled the central couple on himself and his wife **Emma**. The child eating the apple was his daughter **Catherine**; the infant's hand, his son **Oliver's**. He worked outdoors in freezing conditions to achieve the cold light he wanted, noting in his diary that the ribbons of the bonnet alone took four weeks. The painting exists in two versions — Birmingham's grey cape, and Cambridge's red — both in the circular **tondo** format, the porthole shape reinforcing the sense of departure.

Notes

The situation was so bad that millions emigrated to find a better life.

As I mentioned, 1.5 million people emigrated from Ireland but many people were emigrating from England to find a better life not just hungry farm workers but also the middle-class. One positive reason was the gold rush in Australia in 1851 and the Californian gold rush from 1848 to 1855.

In *Last of England* by Ford Madox Brown we see a middle-class couple with a baby.

The man was modelled on Brown himself and the woman on his wife Emma. The model for the fair-haired child eating the apple was Brown's daughter Catherine (Cathy) born in 1850. The hand of the baby was supposedly modelled by their second child, their son Oliver.

Although Brown was never officially one of the seven Pre-Raphaelites they were all close friends. In 1852 one of the group, the sculptor Thomas Woolner (1825-1892) was forced through lack of work to emigrate to Australia and this is thought to have inspired this painting. Woolner returned after a year and became a successful sculptor and was elected to the Royal Academy in 1875.

The social disruption of the 1850s was not immigration but emigration.

Emigration was at a peak in 1852 and 350,000 people left that year.

Like the Impressionists Brown painted the scene outside in his garden and in his diary Brown noted that the '...ribbons of the bonnet took me 4 weeks to paint.' Brown loved to pose on the coldest days with snow on the ground in order to achieve the right degree of blue skin. According to his biographer 'He was the first painter in England, if not the world to attempt to render light exactly as it appeared to him.' (biography, Ford Madox Brown)

Notes

There are two versions, one in the Fitzwilliam Cambridge (1860, red cape) and the other in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (grey cape). A small watercolour replica of the Birmingham version is in the Tate. There is also a fully worked study and a detailed compositional drawing.

All are in the form of a tondo, or round panel. The circular, porthole theme is reinforced by all the circular elements of the painting.

Brown himself considered emigrating to India to find a better life.

Another trigger was the discovery of gold in Australia (Victoria gold rush was 1851 onwards) and California (1848 onwards). The work was extremely arduous and most made little money from gold although a few, such as Samuel Brannan in California, made a fortune from selling equipment to the

miners. However, 1,900 tons of gold were mined in Victoria in the nineteenth century paying off the national debt and helping to create the British Empire. Through his brutal honesty of vision and acute representation of light and colour he presents us with a universal theme of loss, travel, fortitude, love and despair hinting at Mary and Joseph and their flight out of Egypt.

On completion it sold for £150 to dealer David White. In 1859, *The Last Sight of England* as it was then known was sold by Benjamin Windus to Ernest Gambart for 325 guineas.

Brown's courtship was unconventional, when he started the painting in 1852 he had been living with Emma for three years, Catherine was born in 1850 and they married in 1853.

It was voted Britain's eight favourite painting in a BBC poll.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)
An English Autumn Afternoon
 1852-3
 Birmingham Museums and Art
 Gallery, Birmingham

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *An English Autumn Afternoon*, 1852-3,
 Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham

The relative prosperity Brown's painting anticipates was already beginning to arrive. By the early **1850s**, harvests had recovered, the economy was expanding, and a concept that had barely existed for most people — **leisure** — was becoming a social reality. The railways were the engine of that change, carrying London workers to Margate or Southend for a day out, and carrying the middle classes onto **Hampstead Heath** on a Sunday afternoon. It is in that context that Brown painted **An English Autumn Afternoon**, completed across two autumns and finished in **1855**. He worked from the first floor of his Hampstead flat, looking north across the Heath towards **Highgate**, and he described the result as a "literal transcript of the scenery around London at three o'clock in the afternoon in late October." That phrase is everything. Not a composed Claudian landscape, not a moral allegory — a specific place, a specific hour. When **John Ruskin** saw it at the **British Institute**, he asked Brown what had possessed him to choose such an ugly subject. Brown replied: "Because it lay out of a back window." The answer was contemptuous and deliberate. Brown had followed Ruskin's own instruction — to go to nature "rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, scorning nothing" — and found beauty in the ordinary.

Notes

By the 1850s social conditions were beginning to change, harvests improved, the

economy improved, conditions slowly improved and we enter a more modern period particularly for the middle class. The concept of leisure was created and the railways enabled far more people to get into the countryside as a pleasurable, leisure activity.

At the beginning of the century the countryside was visited by a few wealthy people looking for the picturesque. By mid-century workers in London could afford to travel to Margate or Southend for a day out.

There were still many social issues and the Crimean War was about to start in October 1853 but British society had come through a disastrous period but was about to enjoy a period of relative prosperity.

Art had also come a long way. At the beginning of the century it was dominated by the Royal Academy and the ideal landscape was based on copying the style of the Old Masters such as Claude and Poussin. By mid-century the Pre-Raphaelites had dramatically changed things with their 'truth to nature', bright colours and acceptance of the beauty of the everyday, modern world.

Ford Madox Brown was an artist ahead of his time and ahead of John Ruskin. Ruskin's advice to artists was to paint a scene, 'rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, scorning nothing' but after seeing this painting exhibited at the British Institute in 1855 Ruskin commented:

What made you take such a very ugly subject? It was a pity, for there was some nice painting in it.

Brown replied contemptuously: 'Because it lay out of a back window.'

Perhaps he meant that if we follow Ruskin's advice and go to nature scorning nothing then we see all nature is beautiful.

Ruskin wanted paintings to teach us a moral lesson but Brown celebrates the ordinary and unpretentious.

Notes

The painting is also concerned with the democratisation of leisure.

The couple are an ordinary middle-class couple taking pleasure in the open land and Brown would often walk across the Heath to visit Emma in Hendon.

Many of the 'modern' subjects Brown chose to paint were inspired by places

and events from his own life but Ruskin looked for scenic beauty or historical associations.

Brown described this as a literal transcript of the scenery around London at 3:00pm in late October. It was his largest and most ambitious painting painted from the first floor window of his flat in Hampstead looking across the Heath to Highgate. He painted it over two autumns and finished it the following year. He painted a 'literal transcript' rather than the 'scenic effectiveness' of a Claudian landscape. He has a high horizon, strong colours in the distance, he has two competing areas of attention and a horizontal band of foliage with no repoussoir or framing device. The oval shape mimics the human visual field but the two figures looking over the scene is a traditional device to lead the viewers eye into the picture.

It was originally called An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead – Scenery in 1853, a very specific time and place and by dropping the that designator he turned it into a generalized scene about landscape and leisure.



Joseph Mallord William Turner
(1775–1851)

*The Fighting Temeraire tugged to
her last Berth to be broken up*
1839

National Gallery, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up*, 1839, National Gallery, London

Brown's defiant answer to Ruskin — beauty found in an ordinary back window — opens a wider question about what British painters of this era chose to look at, and why. **J. M. W. Turner** had spent decades asking the same question, though his answers were anything but ordinary. **The Fighting Temeraire**, painted in **1839**, when Turner was sixty-four, shows a ship that had fought alongside HMS Victory at the **Battle of Trafalgar** in **1805** being towed to the breakers' yard. Turner romanticised the scene deliberately: the masts had already been removed, two tugs did the work rather than one, and the directional light is his invention entirely. Because the Thames runs east at that point, the blazing sky is not a sunset but a sunrise — the old order moving into the light of a new age, not away from it. The great warship is rendered in white and grey, almost spectral, drawn by a black steam tug — a vessel so new that Turner's use of the word "**tugged**" is, according to the **Oxford English Dictionary**, the first recorded instance of the term. Turner never sold the painting. He called it his "**darling**" and left it to the nation. In a **2005 BBC poll**, the public voted it Britain's greatest painting.

Notes

In summary, Turner was born at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1830) and this had brought factories, steam power, gas lamps, affordable consumer goods, and an rapidly growing middle class.

By 1839, when Turner was 64, there was a real feeling that the world was changing fundamentally and changing forever. But there were many terrible consequences, standards of living fell for most people, child labour was normal and women had few rights.

The Temeraire was the ship that came to the aid of the Victory in the battle of Trafalgar (1805). It was retired in 1812 and became a prison ship and storage depot and was decommissioned in 1838. She was towed 55 miles up river to London to be broken into scrap.

Sailing ships were being replaced by steam and steel so this can be seen as the sun setting at the end of a great era. On the other hand the tugboat is steam and is heralding a great new era of unlimited power and prosperity and we are actually facing east so it is the dawn of a new age.

Notes

This is regarded by Turner and critics as one of his greatest painting. In 2005 voted Britain's "greatest painting" (BBC poll). He never sold it and bequeathed it to the nation.

The scene is Romanticized. The masts had been removed, it was pulled by two tugs not one and Turner has added a sunset, or, from the direction, a sunrise.

The great ship is painted in white, grey and brown and looks like a ghost ship that is pulled by a much smaller but stronger black tugboat. Tugboats were so new there was not even a word for them and Turner's use of the word 'tugged' is the first ever recorded use according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

Turner used light and loose brushstrokes to invoke an elusive feeling of old age and nostalgia.

Turner modified from a poem by Thomas Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England":

The flag which braved the battle and the breeze
No long owns her

This was literally true: Temeraire flies a white flag instead of the British flag, indicating it has been sold by the military to a private company.



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851)

The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up
1839, National Gallery, London

23-01 TURNER AND TURNIPS: LANDSCAPE PAINTING AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION

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Turner never sold *The Fighting Temeraire* because it meant too much to him — and that instinct to hold onto what mattered connects directly to how he thought about the English land. **Kenneth Clark** declared that landscape painting was the chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century, and British art makes the strongest possible case for that claim. The countryside Turner and his contemporaries painted was not the stable, timeless thing it appeared. The **agricultural revolution**, the enclosures, the **Hungry Forties**, the workhouse and the emigrant ship had transformed rural life beyond recognition. At the century's opening, roughly three quarters of the population lived in the country; by its close, three quarters lived in towns. That inversion made the landscape a site of nostalgia, nationalism, and — for a very few artists — quiet protest. Turner was among the first but his hints at agricultural unease went largely unread for nearly two centuries. That, precisely, is what makes his rural work so remarkable: the social charge was embedded so naturally into the image that it took scholarship a very long time to see it. Across this talk we have moved from Napoleonic necessity to near revolution and emigration, watching British artists slowly catch up with Turner and find the courage to paint what was actually happening on the land.

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you will join me again soon. Don't forget to subscribe.



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