

# JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER, R.A.

(London 1775 - London 1851)

## *The Bridge at Vernon, from Vernonnet*

pen and brown ink with pencil on blue paper  
13.6 x 19.2 cm (5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in)

**Provenance:** John Ruskin; A. J. Finberg; Dr. Charles Warren;  
with Andrew Wyld; Agnew's, London; The Fine Art Society as a *View of Angers*.

**Exhibited:** Cotswold Gallery, 1931, no. 6; Cotswold Gallery, 1932, no. 95;  
London, Royal Academy, *Turner Bicentenary Exhibition*, 1974-5, no. 150 (*As View of Angers*);  
London, Tate Gallery, *Turner on the Seine*, June-October 1999, no. 37 (illus. fig. 189, p. 204).

**Literature:** N. J. Alfrey, M.A. report, University of London, 1977, p. 20;  
Ian Warrell, *Turner on the Loire*, 1997, p. 209, no. 118;  
Ian Warrell, *Turner on the Seine*, 1999, cat. No. 37, p. 204, fig. 189.

**T**HIS SMALL AND EVOCATIVE PEN AND INK STUDY depicts the village of Vernon, which lies on the River Seine between Rouen and Paris, as seen from the *fauborg* of Vernonnet on the other side of the river. Rising above the turrets on the left is the Church of Nôtre Dame; to its right the Tour des Archives. In the left foreground a figure, standing on a bulwark flanking the gateway to the bridge points towards the River Seine. The river is conjured up by the paper itself, while shading in pencil and a little white heightening create reflections of the arches of the bridge. Below the bulwark a group of figures line the shore of the river: they appear to be bent and straining, and are perhaps hauling in fish. These figures are rendered with thick and summary strokes of the pen, becoming an almost abstract series of pen and ink notations. The bridge rises from the left foreground and spans the Seine, the outlines of the bridge and the village being delineated with the same thick, strong strokes of the pen. Mill wheels are suspended from its structure at its far end, harnessing the fast currents flowing through the narrow channels. Sunlight is evoked by the tone of the paper itself, while shadow on the bridge and buildings is conveyed by shading in pencil.

This drawing, dated by Ian Warrall to between 1827 and 1829, is a preparatory sketch made by Joseph Mallord William Turner, R.A., on his walking tour of the Seine, for a famous series of views in watercolour and gouache made on the same blue paper. John Ruskin (1819-1900), who owned *The Bridge at Vernon, from Vernonnet*, referred to these as Turner's 'blue drawings.' Turner's finished watercolour views were engraved by other artists to illustrate the book *Turner's Annual Tours: Wanderings by the Seine* compiled by Leitch Ritchie and published in two volumes, in 1834 and 1835. A previous volume, published in 1833, was devoted to views of the River Loire. For *Wanderings by the Seine* the illustration of Vernon

which was selected for engraving and publication was based on another of the artist's works, *Vernon* (fig. 1). This was one of Turner's finished watercolours on blue paper, a medium which he used devotedly from the late 1820s onwards. The eye is guided by the flow of the river, over the human activity on the right-hand side to the bridge in the background, a completely different perspective of Vernon to that in the present work. The other existing view of Vernon by Turner is a pen and ink drawing entitled *The Bridge at Vernon from the West*, which is stylistically close to the present drawing and is dated to the same period of c.1827 to 1829.<sup>1</sup>

As a young man, Turner took up the tradition of landscape painting in watercolour that had evolved in the eighteenth century, and developed it into a masterful art form. He went on to create an entirely new way of rendering the effects of light, water and atmosphere in oil paint as well as in watercolour, producing sublime visions of nature.



Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Vernon*, c.1833, Tate Britain (Figure 1)

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., *The Bridge at Vernon from the West and (upside down) a view of the Seine near Vernon?* Pen and ink fig. 186, p. 202 (T.B. CCLX 24).



(Actual Size)