

GEORGE MORLAND

(London 1763 - London 1804)

Travellers Returning Home

signed and dated 'G. Morland 1795' (lower right)

pencil

16.5 x 21 cm (6½ x 8¼ in)

Provenance: Lord Overstone.

Literature: G. Redford, *Descriptive Catalogue of Works of Art at Overstone Park, Lockinge House and Carlton Gardens*, 1878 (Lord Overstone's collection), no. 181 (5 drawings);

L. Parris, *The Loyd Collection of Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures*, 1967, no. 108, p. 42.

THIS PENCIL DRAWING BY GEORGE MORLAND shows two travellers nearing a thatched cottage. The image is one of isolation, set in a rugged landscape. There are no other signs of human life apart from the two figures and the single dwelling, and the deep recession of the drawing emphasises the remoteness of the setting. The cottage is set against a towering rock face, which sets the tone of this slightly wild landscape.

The scene is typical of Morland's work, with its characteristic depiction of rustic peasant life; his *Carters with a Load of Slate*, another representative example of his *oeuvre*, draws several similarities in its setting and composition to *Travellers Returning Home* (fig. 1). Once again, the motif of a thatched cottage on the right-hand side looms in the shadows of a cliff, providing a backdrop for the work; in front, a path leads off into the mountainous distance. Although the work does not have the same feeling of desolate isolation as *Travellers Returning Home*, the landscape nevertheless feels remote and untamed, the side of the road and the thatching are overgrown with moss and lichen, and dark clouds hover above. It is another image of anonymous rural life.

Morland turned his hand to more rural subject matter from 1791, and whilst some of his works would often highlight the distinctions between the classes, *Travellers Returning Home* instead appears to represent an almost idyllic paradigm of rural society, concealing the turmoil within Morland's life at the time of its execution. By 1789, Morland was in serious debt, his mounting arrears had accelerated to such an extent that from 1794, the year before he produced *Travellers Returning Home*, he had begun moving from home to home in an effort to evade his collectors. His return to London in 1793 also spelled the start of great difficulties within his marriage, with Morland often leaving for periods of time, choosing on occasion to seek the company of gypsies.

Born in 1763, Morland was a precocious talent, first exhibiting at the Royal Academy at the age of ten. Morland was an apprentice under his father but his chief employment during this period lay in copying and forging paintings, particularly seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes. As

soon as his apprenticeship was over, Morland escaped the confines and respectability of the family home and embarked on a life of prodigality. He valued his independence in both his life and work, preferring to sell finished work to dealers rather than undertaking commissions, and he even declined an invitation to supply Carlton House with 'a room of pictures' for the Prince of Wales (later George IV). Morland's lifestyle meant that he was often in debt and in 1789 he is thought to have made the first of several trips to the Isle of Wight in order to evade his creditors. The rest of his life was spent in various stages of debt and alcoholism, and he spent some time in prison. Despite the unrest in his personal life he worked at an astonishing rate and it is thought that in the last eight years of his life he produced eight hundred pictures.



George Morland, *Carters with a Load of Slate*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figure 1)



(Actual Size)