

JAMES POLLARD

(London 1792 - London 1867)

Going to the Derby, the Spread Eagle, Epsom

signed J. Pollard and dated '18**' (lower right)
oil on canvas
40.6 x 50.8 cm (16 x 20 in)

Provenance: Private Collection, Vancouver.

Literature: N.C. Selway, *The Golden Age of Coaching and Sport, England*, 1972 p. 31, no. 120.

THIS ENERGETIC SCENE DEPICTS THE PUBLIC rushing through the streets to get to the Epsom Derby. The Derby was considered to be one of the most prestigious flat thoroughbred horse races in the world. Crowded with figures, the composition possesses a vivid sense of motion. The carriage horses are speeding down the street in a manner reminiscent of the racehorses themselves, while the turbulent clouds in the sky emphasise this sense of movement. Men are crowded on top of the roof of a carriage and in the hustle and bustle one man has even fallen to the ground, leaving him in grave danger of being trampled. The slightly stilted and stylised way in which the moving horses are painted demonstrates the lack of understanding of the mechanics of a horse's gait at that time. Indeed, artists had great difficulty in depicting a horse in motion until the advent of photography allowed for more technical examination of the anatomical movements of their legs.

James Pollard articulately reflects the diversity of social classes present at this type of English day out; horse racing having great appeal across all classes of society. The painting is reminiscent of William Hogarth's work, in the amount of detail that has been included, and its representation of society's habits of that time. In the background of the picture is the Spread Eagle pub, a seventeenth-century coaching inn which still exists today.

Around the middle of the eighteenth century, horse racing became the first regulated sport in Britain, thanks to the formation of the Jockey Club. Before this time most horse races took the format of 'match races', these were contested by just two horses and run over much longer distances than flat racing today. The Derby is one of the five British Classic Races and is the second leg of the English Triple Crown, preceded by the 2,000 Guineas and followed by the St. Leger. It was in 1661 that the first recorded race meeting held on the Epsom Downs took place, the tradition continued until the summer of 1779. In that year one of today's greatest sporting spectacles was established, when Edward Smith Stanley, the 12th Earl of Derby, organised a race for himself and his friends to race their three-year-old fillies over one and a half miles. He named it 'The Oaks' after his estate, the race became so successful that the following

year a new one was added for colts and fillies. The title of this race was decided after the Earl of Derby and Sir Charles Bunbury, a leading racing figure of the day and friend of the Earl's, flipped a coin, and so began the inaugural run of the 'Derby'.

Pollard was a painter and etcher. The son of Robert Pollard, his early career was spent in the shadow of his father, for whom he worked as an etcher of miscellaneous sporting subjects, before establishing himself as a sporting painter in his own, during the early 1820s. A typical example of his work is *The Start of the St. Leger* 1830, see fig. 1. Following a commission from the King's print seller, Edward Orme, for an inn signboard showing a coach and horses, Pollard began to specialise in coaching scenes. The most memorable of his productions are those that feature urban settings, which were notable for their topographical accuracy.



James Pollard,
The Start of the St. Leger, 1830, Private Collection (Figure 1)

