

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

J M W TURNER AND THE *CROOK OF LUNE*

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Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) is one of Britain's best known painters. Perhaps his most recognisable works are *Rain, Steam and Speed – the Great Western Railway* and *The Fighting Temeraire.*

Though a Londoner by birth and art training, he travelled widely in Britain and Europe. He frequently sketched buildings and landscapes and was fascinated by trying to depict the effects of natural light in storms, sunsets and at sea. His output was prodigious, 550 oil paintings, 2000 watercolours and some 30,000 sketches on paper. His works can be found in many art galleries but the largest collection is now housed in the Tate Britain in London.

During his travels around Britain Turner visited the Lancaster area in 1797 and 1816. He sketched (graphite on paper) several buildings, including views of the then recently-opened Lancaster Canal Aqueduct at Halton, the Castle and Priory Church, and views of the town seen from afar and different viewpoints.

His watercolour of the *Crook of Lune, Looking towards Hornby Castle* shows a local beauty spot that was already well known and often visited by early-nineteenth-century travellers pursuing the Romantic ideal. Thomas Gray, the poet, had enthused about this view and it had been included in guide books such as Thomas West's *A Guide to the Lakes* (3rd edition, 1784).

Turner came to the area in 1816 as part of a tour of northern England. His pencil sketch became a water colour study (in the Tate Gallery) and then around 1818 the final water colour (in the Courtauld Gallery).

Many of his northern sketches were reproduced as black-and-white engravings in the 1820s and again in later decades. He also drew several other pencil sketches of the area looking in different directions around the Crook of Lune.

It is not possible to replicate in a modern photograph the exact view Turner painted over 200 years ago because so many trees have grown tall along both sides of the road in the foreground, the A683, and extensively around his viewpoint, which is now a large caravan park and hotel.

The paint colours we see today in this watercolour may have altered over time and sky colours in 1816 were unusual due to the amount of volcanic ash in the atmosphere from the massive eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815.

However, Turner rarely focused on documentary accuracy in his painting of landscapes. Watercolour is better for impressions and moods than for the precise depiction of a landscape. This is also demonstrated by his paintings of the crossing of 'Lancaster Sands' (Morecambe Bay).



A similar view in 2018 from Google Earth, the caravan park and Turner's viewpoint in the foreground and looking north-east up the Lune valley.
(Source: Google Earth, gratefully acknowledged)

Text – Gordon Clark
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2014; revised 2022) www.lancastercivicsociety.uk
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434



Crook of Lune, Looking towards Hornby Castle, 1816–18
(Source: The Courtauld (The Samuel Courtauld Trust) London, gratefully acknowledged, via https://artuk.org)



Engraving in 1821 from the original watercolour. Engraver J Archer. Published in *History of Richmondshire*. (Source: Tate Gallery, gratefully acknowledged)

Which do you prefer – the watercolour painting or the printed engraving?