

Friends of the Canterbury Museums

23 October 95

Dear Mr Williamson

As someone who cares about this area, I know you will be interested in a fascinating, newly discovered view of Canterbury's race-course on Barham Downs depicted by Thomas Rowlandson.

The picture was sold at auction earlier this year for £20,000. The London dealer who bought it is willing to let it come to Canterbury's Museums at only a modest profit; and the Friends (a registered charity) are raising the sum of £5,000 which remains to be found after the Museum's successful applications for grant-aid to the Victoria & Albert Museum's purchase fund and the National Art Collections Fund.

The race-course (which was at the top of Bridge Hill and on the way to Bishopsbourne) had a long existence throughout the 18th century and up to 1879.

The site and memory of the course have now gone, and it may be that this picture is the only record of what was once a popular part of Canterbury's social calendar.

For example:

- * Mozart, staying at Bourne Place on his way home, attended these races in 1765.
- * Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra in 1814 "Henry [brother] is very well and has given me an account of the Canterbury Races, which seem to have been as pleasant as one could wish."
- * The Prince of Wales entered his horse Barbarossa and won the King's Plate here in 1806.
- * Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys from Hardwick House recorded in her diary a visit in 1798 "The ladies in general went into the stand, which we were told is an excellent one, one room enclosed, and an open balcony for those who chose to stand out. So pretty a course I never saw 'tis on Barham Downs; the view pretty, and many gentlemen's seats around there."

The Friends hope that you will agree that this fascinating record of Canterbury's race-course belongs in the city's museums - and that you will want to help.

Please do consider making a donation, payable to The Friends of Canterbury Museums. Thank you for taking time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Reddie

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