

4. Validating the accuracy of Artworks

4.1. Introduction

Landscape painters generally create images that we can understand easily and appreciate. In addition, those more detailed artworks may be able to assist us in understanding how landscapes have changed over the centuries. England's rivers have been a significant source of inspiration for artists, particularly since the late eighteenth century, providing a wealth of artworks that can be examined and appraised in terms of improving our understanding of how they have been altered by natural physical processes and human intervention over time. Such works of art are of immediate interest to both those living adjacent to rivers and to visitors because they allow an immediate visual comparison to be made with the present-day situation.

Artworks do not just describe physical impacts of change or lack of it but they also illustrate both environmental change and the progression of coastal development particularly through the Victorian and Edwardian periods. In fact, works of art extending back to the late eighteenth century, long before the days of photography, may provide the only record of our changes over time, depending on the accuracy of the work concerned. Art can, therefore, form a useful benchmark when assessing the nature, scale and rate of landscape evolution.

In order to test the validity of the concept of using art to inform us about landscape change the author has developed a ranking system for the various types of artworks, which would allow the development of a list of those artists whose works prove to be consistently accurate in terms of their depictions. The objective of this was to develop a readily available tool for use by those professionals interested in increasing their knowledge of landscape issues, which would also support existing scientific approaches available for measuring environmental change. In order to achieve this, landscape art was considered against three criteria.

1. First, the accuracy and usefulness of the *artistic style of painting*; for example, caricaturist or genre works, picturesque *Grand Tour style* views, topographical paintings, drawings and prints.
2. The second category considered the *most advantageous medium* in terms of achieving detailed depictions of the landscape. Categories appraised included copper plate engravings, oil paintings, steel engravings and aquatints, lithographs, and watercolour drawings.
3. The third category considered the *value of the subject matter* depicted by the artists, and included, first, general countryside or coastal views, second, more detailed views of coasts, cliffs and the hinterland, and, third, a very detailed appreciation of the landscape aiding understanding of physical processes and the resulting features, vegetation, cultural heritage and development patterns.

After a coarse screening, works of art were considered against these ranking criteria and scores were assigned enabling a short-list to be prepared of those artists whose artworks can be considered to be useful in supporting understanding of change within the National Park.

4.1.1. Accuracy of Artistic Style

Varying artistic styles contribute to the level of detail that they can provide in terms of their portrayal of Exmoor National Park. Four style sub-categories were considered; namely *Genre works and Caricaturist Works*, *Picturesque Scenery*, *Topographical Paintings*, and, finally, *Topographical Works with a Pre-Raphaelite influence*.

1. For the *Caricaturist/Genre* category such as many of the watercolours by Thomas Rowlandson RA (1756-1827) the interest often focused more on human and social subjects although sometimes the artworks are located within fine landscape settings. Informative as they are as social records, often these works do not contain enough detail to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the state of the landscape prevailing at that time; in view of this, such works score **one point** out of a maximum of four points.



Figure 4.1: Thomas Rowlandson RA *West Cowes Landing, Mouth of the River Medina at Cowes, IW* Watercolour. c.1790

Courtesy: © Isle of Wight Heritage Service



Figure 4.2: Myles Birket Foster

Walberswick, Suffolk

Watercolour. c.1890

Although often painting genre subjects with topographical backdrops, such as this view with his family, Foster also painted exceptionally detailed landscapes and these are ranked more highly.

Courtesy: Sotheby's

2. The second category relates to views of *Picturesque Scenery* depicting landscapes including river valleys in the manner of those Italian landscapes observed by artists on the Grand Tour. Often picturesque views, such as those promoted by William Gilpin and produced by John White Abbott (1763-1851) were aesthetically pleasing, but the artists tended to exaggerate or otherwise adjust the landscapes, with scenery appearing more 'Alpine' and precipitous; the desire of the artist was to depict the local scenery in the manner of a classical landscape to satisfy the tastes of their patrons. Whilst the *Picturesque* style is less concerned with topographical accuracy, it can provide at least some indicators of the general nature of river scenery at the time. These artworks can, therefore, inform landscape study in a broad sense. For this reason, the *Picturesque* works scored **two points** out of the maximum of five points.



Figure 4.3: John White Abbott

Lynmouth and the Lyn Valley

Watercolour.1811

Courtesy: The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery

3. The third and by far the largest category, *Topographical Art*, comprises landscape paintings, watercolour drawings and prints. This is a rich resource and most English rivers are well illustrated in this respect. There are, therefore, many works in this category that can inform us of what the scenery was like at the time they were painted. Therefore, such works were awarded **three points** out of a maximum score of four points.



Figure 4.4: William Gray *Yarmouth, Isle of Wight at the Mouth of the Western Yar* Watercolour. 1855.
Private Collection

Figure 4.5: Peter de Wint *Knaresborough on the River Nidd* Pencil & Watercolour. 1841
Courtesy: Christie's



4. The final ‘Artistic Style’ category comprises *Topographical Paintings, Drawings and Prints, which exhibit Pre-Raphaelite detail*. Artists including William Fraser Garden, Charles Robertson, George Arthur Fripp and Myles Birket Foster’s topographical scenes have provided us with some precise images of river scenery in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. On account of the detail and accuracy of the subjects, with artists seeking to depict nature in a very exact manner, these works form a particularly valuable resource, and were, therefore, awarded the maximum score of **four points**.



Figure 4.6: Myles Birket Foster

Rye, East Sussex

Watercolour. c.1870

Courtesy: Fine Art Photographic Library

Figure 4.7: William Fraser Garden

Hemingford Grey, Great Ouse

Watercolour. 1890

Courtesy: Chris Beetles Gallery, London



4.2.2. Most Advantageous Medium

The **second ranking category** considers the most advantageous medium used for illustrating topography. Four categories were identified – first, *Copper Plate Engravings*; second, *Oil Paintings*; third, *Oil Paintings exhibiting a Pre-Raphaelite Influence* together with *Aquatints and Steel Engravings*, and, finally, *Lithographs, fine Pencil and Watercolour Drawings*. By their nature each of these artistic techniques allow differing levels of detail to be achieved in the completed artwork.

1. Copper Plate Engravings

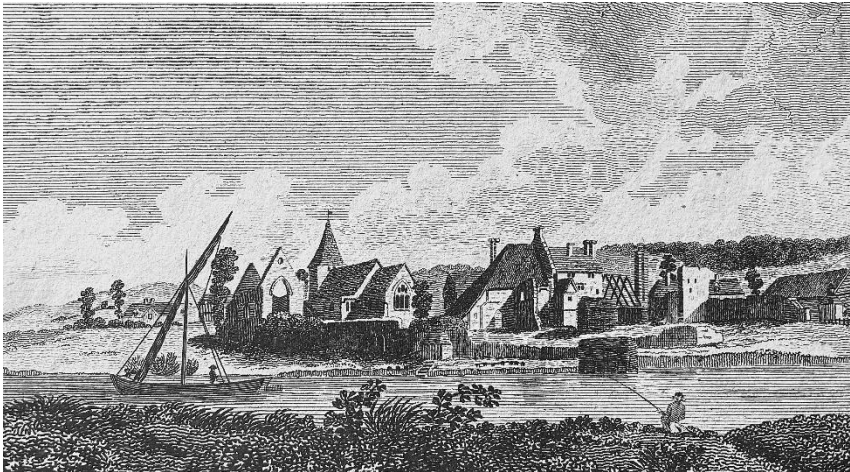


Figure 4.8: J. Hogg

*Calling House on the Medway,
Kent*

Copperplate engraving. c.1780

Although some publishers and artists achieved remarkable success with copper plate engravings, generally the softness of the copper plates meant that this technique was less suitable for recording fine detail. As a result, **copper plate engravings** were awarded a ranking score of **one point**. Some early engravers with an architectural training were able to successfully produce more detailed views of buildings and street scenes – these examples are awarded **two points**.

2. Oil Paintings



Figure 4.9: T.S. Cooper & F.R. Lee

*Umberleigh Mill, River Taw,
Devon*

Oil. 1830

Courtesy: Christie's © 2022

Oil paintings were considered to be more helpful as they could provide a greater level of detail and were ranked with a **score of two points**. Oil paintings by Pre-Raphaelite artists and their Followers were ranked more highly scoring **four points** on account of their level of detail.

3. Steel plate and aquatint engravings were often published individually or as sets; others were contained in topographical books in the pre- Victorian period in particular. The British coast benefits from a wealth of such works, for example the aquatint views by William Daniell RA (Daniell & Ayton, 1814²), Thomas Allom and William H. Bartlett (Britton & Brayley, 1832³). In view of the richness of this resource and the fine detail that could be achieved **three points** were awarded for this category.



Figure 4.11: William Daniell RA

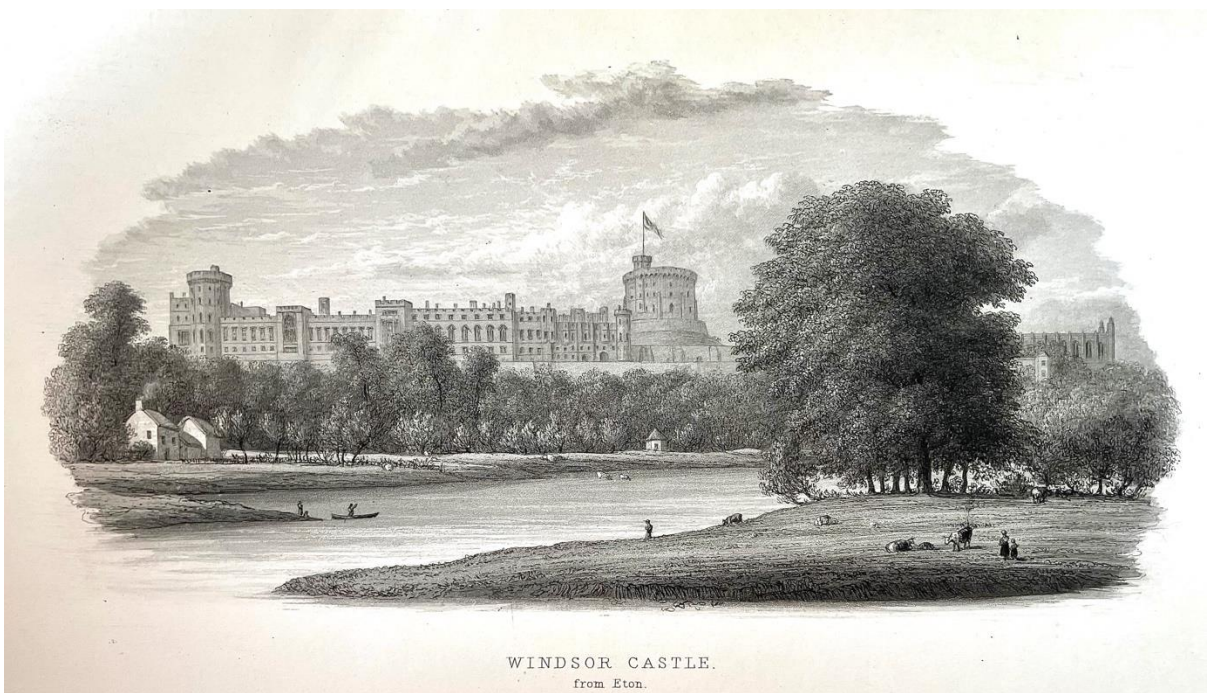
Christchurch

Aquatint. 1814.

Figure 4.12: William Westall

Windsor Castle from Eton

Steel plate engraving. 1828



4. Lithography was a technique capable of achieving extremely fine detail. There are excellent examples produced by prolific artists including J.M Heathcote, George Rowe, and William Spreat in the 1840s. The quality of some of the hand-coloured lithographs is comparable with that of watercolour drawings; as a result, lithographs achieve a ranking **score of five points, the same score as for watercolour drawings.**



Figure 4.12: J.M. Heathcote

Hartford on the Great Ouse

Lithograph. c.1845

Two examples of finely detailed lithographs.

Figure 4.13: William Spreat

Lynmouth

Lithograph. c.1840s



5. Watercolour Drawings. There is an extensive resource of fine *watercolour drawings* covering most of England's rivers. The detail that may be achieved using this technique can provide a wealth of information on the changing forms of the landscapes, vegetation, land use and cultural heritage. **They, therefore, qualify for a ranking score of five points.** Those watercolours by Pre-Raphaelite artists and their Followers score a maximum ranking of **six points** on account of their often even more detailed contents.



Figure 4.14: Henry J. Kinnaird

Salisbury from the Meadows

Watercolour. c.1900

Courtesy: Woolley & Wallis

Figure 4.15: R.A.K. Marshall

Near Stockbridge

Watercolour. 1921

Courtesy: Woolley & Wallis



4.2.3. The Value of the Subject Matter

This third art ranking category is of prime importance to those interested in studying all aspects of the river landscape change. As a result, a **Weighting Factor of x2** was applied over three categories. First, *General Landscape Views*, which contribute to an overall appreciation of the physical and environmental character of the case study site scored **one point**. Second, *More detailed works* providing additional information on the physical features and river management score **two points**. Finally, the highest scoring category was for those *Works Providing a Detailed Appreciation* of many aspects of the case study site including the geology, geomorphology, environment and management scored **three points**. As a result of the weighting in this category, a maximum of **six points could be achieved**.

1. General topographical artworks



Figure 4.16: William Payne

Lynmouth

Watercolour. c.1820.

With kind permission of
Devon Archives & Local
Studies.



Figure 4.17: Charles Gregory

*The River Medina from
Whippingham, Isle of
Wight.*

Watercolour. 1864.

Private Collection.

2. More detailed artworks



Figure 4.18: Alfred R. Quinton

The Severn at Bridgenorth

Watercolour. c.1920

Courtesy: Salmon's

Figure 4.19: Alfred R. Quinton

East Farleigh on the Medway near Maidstone

Watercolour. 1925

Courtesy: Salmon's



3. Highly detailed artworks



Figure 4.20: Myles Birket Foster

The Thames at Wallingford

Watercolour. c.1870

Courtesy: Fine Art Photographic Library

Figure 4.21: William Fraser Garden

Hemingford Abbots from the Great Ouse

Watercolour. 1899

Courtesy: Chris Beetles Gallery, London.



4.2.4. Summary of Art Ranking

1. Accuracy of Artistic Style (Maximum 4 Points)

- 1.1. Genre/Caricature subjects 1 point
- 1.2. Picturesque landscapes 2 points
- 1.3. Topographical/River scenery 3 points
- 1.4. Topographical/River scenery with Pre-Raphaelite influence 4 points

2. Most advantageous medium for illustrating coastal change (Maximum 6 points)

- 2.1. Copper plate engravings 1 point
- 2.2. Oil paintings; architectural copper plate engravings 2 points
- 2.3. Steel plate engravings/Aquatints 3 points
- 2.4. Oil paintings by Pre-Raphaelites and Followers 4 points
- 2.5. Lithographs, Fine pencil and watercolour drawings 5 points
- 2.6. Watercolours by Pre-Raphaelites and their Followers 6 points

3. Value of the subject matter in supporting understanding of long-term river change (weighting x2 and Maximum score of 6 points)

- 3.1. General views which assist overall appreciation of the geomorphology and river setting 2 points
- 3.2. More detailed views of the river frontage and its wider catchment..... 4 points
- 3.3. Detailed appreciation of the river system including geology/geomorphology, natural environment 6 points

Compiling the scores for ranking artists and their works in terms of their accuracy

- 1. Accuracy of artistic style Maximum of 4 points
- 2. Most advantageous medium Maximum of 6 points
- 3. Value of subject matter Maximum of 6 points
- 4. Total maximum score 16 points

Notes:

- 1. Where an artist paints in more than one medium the score is based on the most commonly used medium for river art.

It is hoped that readers will have found this explanation of the ranking system for assessing the accuracy of artworks to support our understanding of river change of practical value. The objectives are to save time-consuming research in the future and to improve confidence in the use of fine art as a tool to assist problem-solving when studying long-term change or lack of change.

ARTISTS RANKING TABLE

Artist	Dates	Accuracy of Artistic Style	Most Advantageous Medium	Value of Subject	Total Score
John Brett	1830-1902	4	6	6	16
Myles Birket Foster	1825-1899	4	6	6	16
Arthur A. Fraser	1861-1904	4	6	6	16
Robert W. Fraser	1872-1930	4	6	6	16
William F. Garden	1856-1921	4	6	6	16
W. Turner of Oxford	1789-1862	4	6	6	16
Charles Robertson	1844-1892	4	6	6	16
John Absolom	1815-1895	3	5	6	14
Alfred H. Cooper	1864-1929	3	5	6	14
James F. Danby	1793-1861	3	5	6	14
William Daniell	1769-1837	3	5	6	14
Edward Duncan	1803-1882	4	6	4	14
Sir Alfred East	1848-1913	3	5	6	14
Joseph Farrington	1747-1821	3	5	6	14
George A. Fripp	1813-1896	4	4	6	14
Henry Gastineau	1797-1879	3	5	6	14
Thomas Girtin	1775-1803	3	5	6	14
Henry J. Kinnaird	Fl.1880-1920	3	5	6	14
Robert A.K. Marshall	1849-1926	3	5	6	14
Francis Nicholson	1753-1844	3	5	6	14
Harold S. Palmer	1854-1933	3	5	6	14
Alfred R. Quinton	1853-1934	3	5	6	14
George Rowe	1799-1864	3	5	6	14
William Spreat	Fl.1820-1850	3	5	6	14
Rev. J. Swete	1752-1821	3	5	6	14
Robert Mann	Fl.1869-1892	3	4	6	13
Edmund J. Niemann	1813-1876	3	4	6	13
John W. Abbott	1763-1857	3	5	4	12
David Bates	1840-1921	3	5	4	12
David Cox	1783-1859	3	5	4	12
Charles Gregory	1810-1896	3	5	4	12
Frederick E. J. Goff	1855-1931	3	5	4	12
Ernest W. Haslehust	1866-1949	3	5	4	12

Artist	Dates	Accuracy of Artistic Style	Most Advantageous Medium	Value of Subject	Total Score
Henry J. Moule	1825-1904	3	5	4	12
William J. Müller	1812-1845	3	5	4	12
Paul Sandby	1725-1809	3	5	4	12
John 'W.' Smith	1749-1831	3	5	4	12
Francis Towne	1740-1816	3	5	4	12
J.M.W. Turner (early works)	1775-1851	3	5	4	12
Walter F. Tyndale	1855-1943	3	5	4	12
John Varley	1778-1842	3	5	4	12
William Westall	1781-1850	3	3	6	12
Peter de Wint	1784-1849	3	5	4	12
Alfred de Breanski	1852-1928	3	2	6	11
John M. Carrick	1833-1896	3	4	4	11
George V. Cole	1833-1893	3	2	6	11
John S. Cotman	1782-1842	3	4	4	11
Theodore H. Fielding	1781-1851	3	5	3	11
Alfred A. Glendening	Fl.1870-1879	3	2	6	11
Benjamin W. Leader	1831-1923	3	4	4	11
William Mellor	1851-1931	3	2	6	11
Anthony V.C. Fielding	1787-1855	3	5	2	10
William Havell	1782-1857	3	5	2	10
Thomas Rowlandson	1756-1827	3	5	2	10
Henry Dawson	1811-1878	3	4	2	9
Robert Gallon	1845-1925	3	2	4	9
Thomas Hearne	1744-1817	2	5	2	9
Samuel Owen	1768-1857	2	3	4	9
William Payne	1760-1830	3	2	4	9
William L. Wyllie	Fl.1871-1898	3	2	4	9

References

1. Koff, S. R. 1999. *The Role of Arts in Undergraduate Education*. Journal of General Education 48:9-16.
2. Daniell, W. & Ayton, R. 1814. *A Voyage Round Great Britain*. Private Press. London.
3. Britton, J. & Brayley, E. W. 1832. *Devonshire and Cornwall Illustrated*. Fisher et al. London

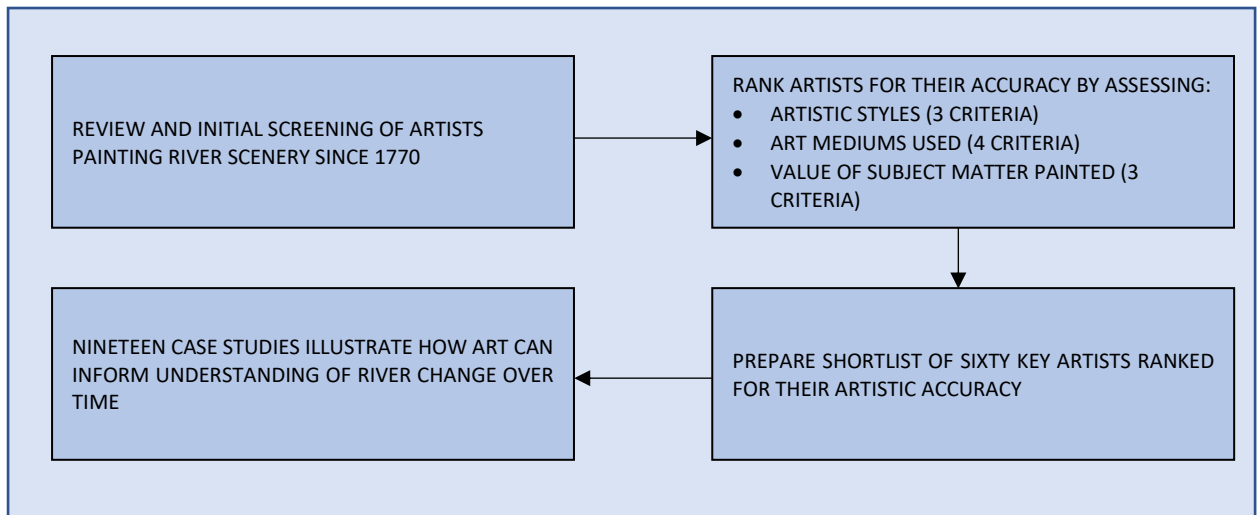


FIGURE 4.23: SUMMARY FLOW CHART OF METHODOLOGY FOR RANKING AND UTILISING ARTWORKS TO INFORM STUDY OF CHANGE WITHIN ENGLISH RIVERS SYSTEMS.



Figure 4.24: Alfred Robert Quinton

Rye from the Rother

Watercolour.c.1920

Courtesy: Salmon's

5. English Rivers Case Study Sites

LANDSCAPE ART IN SUPPORT OF RIVER MANAGEMENT IN ENGLAND

A. South-West River Basin

Case Study 1 – River Dart

Case Study 2 – River Exe

Case Study 3 – Somerset Levels

Case Study 4 – Dorset Stour

B. South-East River Basin

Case Study 5 – Western Yar, IW

Case Study 6 – Eastern Yar, IW

Case Study 7 – Sussex Rother

Case Study 8 – River Arun

Case Study 9 – Medway

C. Thames River Basin

Case Study 10 – The Thames (from Abingdon to Windsor)

D. Anglian River Basin

Case Study 11 – Great Ouse

Case Study 12 – River Bure

Case Study 13 – River Blyth

E. Severn River Basin

Case Study 14 – River Severn

Case Study 15 – River Wye

F. Humber River Basin

Case Study 16 – River Wharfe

Case Study 17 – River Ure

Case Study 18 – River Tees

G. North-West River Basin

Case Study 19 – River Eden

Key Roles of the Case Studies:

- To raise awareness of the extent and potential of the art resource;
- To illustrate physical, environmental and cultural heritage change, or lack of change, within river systems over time;
- To provide a new source of data in full colour, tested for accuracy for a wide cross-section of users;
- To help gain insight of past river management practice;
- To illustrate the potential of historical artworks as valuable tools for stakeholder engagement.