

A Turner Chronology

(Early Years)



© *Dr John Gage, from his book:
"Turner: A Wonderful Range of Mind"*



1775

Joseph Mallord William Turner born to William Turner, barber and wig-maker and Mary Marshall at 21 Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London. His birth-date is still uncertain, but he maintained that it was 23 April, the Feast of St George, patron of England, and also Shakespeare's birthday.

1784-5

Turner with his maternal uncle and aunt at Brentford, Middlesex, attending John White's school and colouring engravings. First surviving drawings from nature, in and around Margate, on the Kent coast.

1786

Death of Turner's sister, Mary Ann, aged 8.

1787

First signed and dated watercolour, a copy of an engraving of Bacon's Tower, Oxford.

1788

? Working with the architectural draughtsman, Thomas Malton, and the architect, Thomas Hardwick.

1789

Sketching from nature while staying with his maternal uncle at Sunning well, near Oxford.

11th December: Admitted to the Plaister Academy of the Royal Academy Schools, under the sponsorship of J.F.Rigaud, R.A., and after a terms probation.

1790

First exhibit at the R.A., a watercolour of *'The Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth'*, commissioned by Hardwick to make a replica.

1791

Two watercolours at the R.A.

Colouring prints for engravers and print-sellers.

Sketching in and around Bristol, Bath and Malmsbury while staying with his father's friend, John Narraway, the purchaser of *'The Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth'*.

Studying perspective and copying a Gainsborough print.

1792

March: ? First contact with John Soane, the architect.
May: Two watercolours at the R.A.
25 June: Admitted to the R.A. Life Class.
July/August: Touring in North and central Wales.
? Earliest contact with the watercolourist W.F.Wells.

1793

27 March: Awarded 'Great Silver Palette' by the Society of Arts, for landscape drawing.
May: Three watercolours at the R.A.
First documented contact with Dr Thomas Monro
? First experiments with oil painting.
Begins to study etching techniques by this date.

1794

May: First engraving after a Turner drawing of Rochester, published in the Copper Plate Magazine. A large oil of *Rochester Castle* also seems to date from this year.
Five watercolours at the R.A., praised in St James's Chronicle and Morning Post.
First recorded activity as a drawing-master.
Sells three versions of Llanthony Abbey for 2.5 guineas each.
First Midland tour, chiefly to make drawings for engraving.
Met Thomas Girtin at Monro's evening 'Academy', making joint versions of designs by J.R.Cozens, Thomas Hearne and others.

1795

May: Eight watercolours at R.A.
Tours in Sth.Wales and the Isle of Wight produce commissions for engravers and several private collectors, including Viscount Malden and Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

1796

May: Ten watercolours at R.A., including *'Internal of a Cottage, a study at Ely'*, the first clear reference to an Old Master style. First exhibited oil, *'Fishermen at Sea off the Needles'*, praised by 'Anthony Pasquin' and sold for £10.
Sketching on the estate of William Lock of Norbury and in and around Brighton.

1797

May: Teaching drawing to Julia Bennett, later Lady Gordon. Two oils and four watercolours, including *'Trancept of Ewenny Priory, Glamorganshire'* at R.A.
Touring N. England, including Lake District; working at Harewood.

1798

November: Competes unsuccessfully for Associate Membership of R.A.
15 November: Buys large collection of figure-studies by C.R.Ryley.

1799

April: Recommended to Lord Elgin to make topographical drawings in Greece; disagreement over terms and plan dropped.
May: Goes to see Altieri Claudes at Beckford's London house. Four oils and seven watercolours at R.A.; sells water-colour of '*Caernarvon Castle*' to J.J. Angerstein for 40 guineas, 'much greater than Turner would have asked'.
July: Has orders for sixty drawings in hand.
August/September: Working for Beckford at Fonthill.
Autumn: Tour of Lancashire, sometimes in the company of Fuseli, and North Wales.
4 November: Elected Associate of R.A.; joins Academy Club; moves to 64, Harley Street, London, sharing with marine-painter, J.T.Serres.
First substantial essays in poetry, including glees of the type written by John Danby, whose widow, Sarah becomes Turner's mistress at this time. ?birth of Evalina, the first of Turner's three children by Sarah Danby.

1800

May: Two oils, '*The Fifth Plague of Egypt*' and '*Dolbadern Castle, North Wales*', whose verse-caption may be by Turner, shown at R.A. with six watercolours, five of them of Fonthill.
17 May: Dines with other Academicians at Fuseli's Milton Gallery.
Summer: Visits Fonthill; commissioned by Duke of Bridgewater to paint companion ('*Dutch Boats in a Gale: Fishermen endeavouring to put their Fish on Board*') to a Willem van de Velde II, 'A Rising Gale'.
27 December: Turner's mother admitted to the Bethlem Hospital for the insane, where Dr Thomas Monro is physician.

1801

March: Attends Fuseli's lecture on Painting at the R.A.
April/May: Buys group of 8 drawings of barges by Samuel Scott and large number of Rooker topographical drawings at Rooker Sale.
May: Two oils and four watercolours at the R.A. '*Dutch Boats in a Gale...*' praised by Benjamin West, Fuseli and Sir George Beaumont as superior to Rembrandt, and sold for 250 guineas.
June/August: Tour in Scotland, perhaps with Nicholas Smith of 42 Gower Street, London; returns through Lake District and Chester.

1802

12 February: Elected full Academician; 'W.Turner' becomes 'J.M.W.Turner'.
May: Three watercolours and three oils at the R.A., including '*Ships bearing up for anchorage*' acquired by the third Earl of Egremont, and '*Jason*', the first exhibited classical subject.
July/October: Visits France and Switzerland, probably with the sponsorship of the Earl of Yarborough and Walter Fawkes who may have accompanied him; some weeks spent in the Louvre; visits studios of David and Guérin.
November: Attends Girtin's funeral.
December: Applies to be a Visitor (instructor) in Academy Schools.
Presents a dozen silver desert spoons to the Academy.

1803

Member of Academy Council and of Hanging Committee (Jury).

February: Reported that 'had no pictures, gone as fast as he paints them, commissions for twenty years'.

February/March: Attending Fuseli's lectures on painting.

May: Two watercolours and five oils at R.A., including his first Claudian subject, '*Macon*'; Beaumont and several Academicians critical of his lack of finish.

First substantial review of Turner's work, by John Britton in *The British Press* (9 May).

August: Visits Truchsessian Gallery in London.

1804

Member of R.A. Council.

15 April: Death of Turner's mother, probably in Bethlem Hospital.

18 April: Turner's Private Gallery opened in Queen Anne Street, London.

May: Two oils and one watercolour at R.A.

1805

May: First record of Turner at Sion Ferry House, Isleworth.

May/July: '*The Shipwreck*' exhibited at Turner's gallery; acquired by Sir J. Leicester for £315; the first oil to be engraved and the first large single plate after Turner's work; impressions sold to some 130 subscribers. Other exhibits (unspecified) described by Hoppner as 'like a Green Stall, so rank, crude and disordered'.

22 December: Sketches '*Victory*' on return from Trafalgar to the Medway.

1806

February: Two oils at first exhibition of British Institution.

May: One oil and one watercolour at R.A.; first important sign of a Turner 'School' in the work of W. Havell and A.W.Callcott. '*Battle of Trafalgar*' among paintings at Turner gallery.

15 May: Last record of Turner at Sion Ferry House.

Summer: Staying with W.F.Wells; genesis of *Liber Studiorum*.

7 August: Congratulates Lord Elgin on the acquisition of the Parthenon Marbles.

Winter: Takes a house at 6 West End, Upper Mall, Hammersmith.

1807

20 April: Attends Opie's funeral.

May: Two oils at the R.A.

4 May: Buys a plot of building-land at Twickenham. Thames views shown at Turner Gallery; West calls them 'crude blotches'.

11 June: First number of *Liber Studiorum* published.

Oil-sketching from a boat on the Thames and the Wey.

A subscriber to John Opie's 'Lectures on Painting' (published 1809).

2 November: Elected Professor of Perspective at R.A..

First independent French notice of Turner in *Magazin Encyclopédique*.

1808

February: Two oils at British Institution (including '*Jason*').

May: '*The Unpaid Bill*' at R.A. Long review by John Landseer in Review of Publications of Art identifies twelve oils at Turner's gallery, together with Liber Studiorum drawings.

Summer: At Tabley, Cheshire with Sir J. Leicester; sketches on the River Dee in Wales; studies reflections for Perspective Lectures; ? visits Farnley Hall, home of Walter Fawkes.

First German notice, in J.D. Fiorillo, Geschichte der zeichnenden Künste, V.

1808

March: Helping Soane with the presentation of his Academy lectures on architecture.

May: Two watercolours and six oils shown at Turner Gallery, including '*Thompson's Aeolian Harp*'.

Four oils shown at R.A.

Summer: Visit to Petworth, Sussex, home of Lord Egremont.

August: Visit to Yorkshire; possibly with Fawkes at Farnley. ? Visits Egremont at Cockermouth Castle, Cumberland.

December: Shows plans for a new design for lighting R.A. Lecture Room. Visits Oxford in connection with works for engraving.