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University
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Unveiling the Sketching Society (1799-1851)

Luke A Dowle

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
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School of Culture and Creative Arts

College of History of Art

University of Glasgow

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Abstract

In 1799, a group of young London-based artists founded a new Sketching Society. It was still in existence some fifty years or so later. Up until now, the Society has principally been of interest to scholars only inasmuch as the names of Thomas Girtin and John Sell Cotman can be attached to its earliest activities and meetings. However, this has been to the neglect of the far better documented and longer-lived iteration of the group that was overseen by the brothers Alfred Edward Chalon and John James Chalon. This thesis will therefore look to reassess the development of the Sketching Society, paying particular attention to its later, currently under-appreciated history under the Chalons in order to explore the place and wider importance of such affiliations in the art world of the early nineteenth century. This will mean looking at continuities in the aims and organisation of the Society over time, but also how the changing priorities of the increasingly better connected and established members of the Chalon-led group distinguish it from that pool of artists who first met around the turn of the century.

Beginning with a brief history of the clubs associated with Girtin and Cotman, the thesis will then go on to examine the make-up of the Chalon group. Subsequent chapters discuss the actual activities of this later group, exploring the literary or thematic prompts employed at their regular evening meetings and reconstructing select sessions. They will then consider the public-facing aspects of the Society's life, in the form of a series of publications and exhibitions it organised to promote its activities. All told, a survey of what might be termed the long history of the Sketching Society is revealing of the significance of such collaborative and communal activities in making and sustaining a career in the capital's art world.

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A special thank you goes to my wife, Maryanne. You have been a continuous support and I could not have done this project without you.

Finally, I hope that the members of the Sketching Society would be satisfied with their portrayal in this work as, for many decades, they have been ignored and referred to purely within footnotes. My interest in the Sketching Society has been influenced by the legacy of my ancestor, Clarkson Stanfield, and I hope that this study provides the beginning of a wealth of literature that will continue to unveil this important club that he was part of.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work recorded in this thesis is entirely my own, except where otherwise stated, and that it is also of my own composition.

I further declare that no part of this work has been submitted as part of any other degree.

Luke Dowle

University of Glasgow September 2019

Chapter 1 - Introduction

On an early summer's evening in 1799, a group of ambitious, young artists met together as 'The Brothers', forming what has become known with posterity as the Sketching Society. This was in effect an extension of an already existing, informal 'Academy' that met in the house of the royal physician, enthusiastic amateur draughtsman and collector Dr. Thomas Monro. But, whereas the so-called 'Monro School' was largely given over to making copies after other artists, such as John Robert Cozens, this new group would have the freedom to choose to paint and draw a theme suitable for a 'Historic Landscape'.¹ According to an account of the group written some four decades later, this freedom, combined with the artists' evidently elevated ambitions, led to a 'cultivation of their Art' with a measure of 'social intercourse' which was to characterise the Sketching Society throughout its ultimately lengthy existence.² Indeed, Louis Francia, a founding member, commemorated the start of the group on the back of the drawing he made that night (Fig. 1), with no idea that a variant of this club would still be going more than fifty years later. The inscription is even more interesting in regard to where the meeting took place:

This drawing was made on Monday May the 20th, 1799, at the room of Robert Ker Porter of No. 16 Great Newport Street, Leicester Square, in the very painting room that formerly was Sir Joshuah [sic] Reynold's, and since has been Dr. Samuel Johnson's; and for the first time on the above day convened a small and select society of Young Painters under the title (as I give it) of the Brothers; met for the purpose of establishing by practice a school of Historic Landscape, the subjects being designs from poetick passages.

Ls. Francia

The Society consists of - Worthington, J.Cs. Denham-Treasr., Rt. Kr. Porter, Ts. Girtin, Ts. Underwood, Ge. Samuel & Ls. Francia, Secrety [sic].³

¹ Thomas Girtin, Louis Francia and Thomas Underwood all worked directly with Monro, see Chapter 2.

² The quote is from a publication on the Sketching Society by A.E. Chalon et al., *Evening Sketches* (London, 1840), unpaginated, with the lithographs completed by Maxim and Paul Gauci.

³ This inscription is on the back of the drawing by Francia and is referred to extensively in David Winter, 'Girtin's Sketching Club', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.2 (February 1974), pp.123-149.

The intriguing reference to the group's use of the former room of Reynolds, and later Dr. Johnson, helps to place the new sketching club in the light of these illustrious names. Although there is some doubt as to whether the room really was used by either of them, the intention - along with the desire of 'establishing by practice a School of Historic Landscape' - is suggestive of the group's lofty ambition to follow the tenets of Reynolds' Discourses on 'High Art' and advocacy of painting in the 'Grand Style.'⁴ But, if they were to elevate the lowly genre of landscape in this way, they would have to contend with Reynolds' scepticism too. Using the example of Richard Wilson, the Royal Academy's (RA) president had been famously dismissive of attempts to incorporate historicising allusions or grand narratives in landscape art. While he had praised Wilson as an 'ingenious Academician', Reynolds had thought him 'guilty, like many of his predecessors, of introducing gods and goddesses,' or other 'ideal beings, into scenes which were by no means prepared to receive such personages. His landscapes were in reality too near common nature to admit supernatural objects.'⁵ For Reynolds, Wilson's ambitions were inevitably compromised by this attachment to 'common nature'.⁶ To counter this, you would need 'a mind thrown back two thousand years, and as it were naturalised in antiquity, like that of Nicolo Poussin.'⁷ The example of Poussin held some hope for the nascent Sketching Society that their aim was achievable, but the early signs were not promising. While David Winter points out that the group's elevated notion of aligning itself with Reynolds and Johnson fell short of starting a great national school, Greg Smith has argued that many of the early drawings were 'not very prepossessing.'⁸ Nevertheless, despite these assessments of the original group's failings, this thesis will argue that in its now lesser-known later manifestations the Sketching Society did come close to achieving the original aim set out by Francia and so concomitantly also Reynolds' vision of 'High Art.' They met this aim by expanding or loosening their attachment to the cause of

⁴ Winter, 1974, pp.124-125; and Greg Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760-1824* (London, 2002a), p.179.

⁵ See Joshua Reynolds, 'XIV Discourse', in Robert R Wark (ed), *Sir Joshua Reynolds. Discourses on Art*, 3rd ed. (New Haven and London, 1997), p.255.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p.256.

⁸ Winter, 1974, p.149; and Smith, 2002a, p.179. The school of landscape had different principles to Reynolds' Discourses and was more rooted in the observation of nature. For discussions on the idea of a national school see K. Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1997); and William Vaughan's essay 'David's "Brickdust" and the rise of the British School' in Alison Yarrington and Kelvin Everest (eds), *Reflections of Revolution: Images of Romanticism* (London, 1993), pp.134-159.

landscape art and a focus on ‘designs from poetick passages.’⁹ This shift in priorities was encapsulated by the change of the group’s name in 1808 to ‘The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design’.¹⁰

The five decades or so during which the Sketching Society was in existence saw great changes in the art world. It began to modernise, becoming greater in complexity and scale, with studios, institutions, exhibition rooms, artists, publishers and patrons all catering to and helping to create an ever more varied range of audiences and consumers. It was also a time of great practitioners such as J.M.W. Turner (who helped to pioneer a culturally ambitious form of British landscape art), whose influence over his peers extended to members of the Sketching Society, who used his works in the 1830s and 1840s for evening themes ‘In the Style of’. Of particular significance to the place of the group in this new world was the status now afforded the medium of watercolour, which has subsequently been seen as enjoying something of a ‘golden age’ during these years.¹¹ Watercolour painting, according to William Henry Pyne was distinctly ‘English’, of ‘English birth, of English growth’, and which ‘in our soil has arrived to maturity.’¹² With several key figures associated with the rise of watercolour painting as a medium for ambitious art among its members, the Sketching Society had a not insignificant role in the minting of this new status. Yet, despite its association with such prominent names as Girtin and John Sell Cotman, the Sketching Society’s place in, and importance to, the art world of this period has often just been simply assumed rather than scrutinised. In part, this is the product of the ways in which the group operated, with a writer for *The Athenaeum* observing, towards the end of its life, that the Society was ‘probably not very generally known’ beyond art world circles.¹³ Arguably, it is even less known today beyond specialist art scholars.

In an important exhibition, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum (VAM) in 1971, Jean Hamilton used some of that institution’s vast collection of Society drawings to give a worthy

⁹ This is part of the aforementioned inscription on the back of the drawing by Francia on the Society’s first evening.

¹⁰ This was the name the Chalon Sketching Society chose when it formed in 1808. It fitted far more closely with Reynolds’ ideals to begin with, but as we shall see changed focus in the 1830s and 1840s.

¹¹ Smith, 2002a, p.1, reflects on this in regard to the exhibition curated by Andrew Wilton and Anne Lyles, *The Great Age of British Watercolours 1750-1880*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1993).

¹² Smith, 2002a, p.206 quoting Pyne, who used the pseudonym Ephraim Hardcastle for various publications. The quote is from the *Somerset House Gazette*, 15 November 1823, p.81 and is from a series he wrote about the medium of watercolour. Note, Pyne was a founding member of the Old Water-colour Society.

¹³ *The Athenaeum*, 11 January 1851, pp.55-56.

and timely overview of this significant group of artists.¹⁴ Tracing the development of the Society, Hamilton began with the inaugural club headed by Girtin and Francia, founded in 1799, which she then linked to a second group, with which Cotman was associated, and finally, the third Sketching Society, started in 1808 by Alfred Edward Chalon, his brother John James and Francis Stevens, which lasted until 1851. Each Society had slight variants in its rules, but generally the core concepts were kept the same. It is this that has led to the three clubs being placed together.

Generally, the groups had eight members, who each took it in turns to host an evening as president. Taking on this role, they had to provide materials, which often consisted of sepia and monochrome inks and washes, along with the paper for the artists to draw on. Furthermore, it was their opportunity to choose a theme that all of the artists present that evening were to use as their point of departure. Their choice of themes, which we can now trace through surviving sets of individual evening sessions, changed rather significantly over time, from those suitable for landscapes in Girtin's era, to ones which tended to incorporate figures more prominently during the Chalons'.¹⁵ Each artist was given between two and three hours to complete their work, after which those assembled would eat together and then end the evening with a discussion of the relative merits of each other's work; providing a critique which one participant, Thomas Uwins, thought was characterised by 'more candour and judgement than is usually found in professional critics'.¹⁶

In 1838, John Partridge exhibited a large group portrait of the Sketching Society at that year's RA, which focused on one of these critiques. Although the original is lost at present, the British Museum holds a highly-finished preparatory study for it (Fig. 2).¹⁷ Partridge was the

¹⁴ Jean Hamilton, *The Sketching Society, 1799-1851*, exh. cat. (London: VAM, 1971).

¹⁵ The sets of drawings were kept by the host for the evening.

¹⁶ Uwins was a member of the Chalon Sketching Society and had his memoirs compiled after his death by his wife Sarah Uwins; *A Memoir of Thomas Uwins, RA*, 2 Vols. (London, 1858), which provides many important insights into the workings of the Society. The quote is from Vol.1, p. 164.

¹⁷ Hamilton, 1971, p.4, suggests that this drawing was completed in 1838. However, Pieter van der Merwe makes the point that the drawing could not have been completed any later than 1833, as J.C. Robertson and George Robson who are in the drawing died in 1832 and 1833 respectively. Though it is not a point made by van der Merwe, this raises the possibility that the picture was at least in part intended to commemorate those figures. Partridge's oil was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1838 as number 408. See Pieter van der Merwe and Roger Took, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield, 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-painter, Royal Academician*, exh. cat. (Gateshead: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), p.102; and Richard Ormond, 'John Partridge and the Fine Arts Commissioners', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.109, No.772 (July 1967), pp.397-403.

host for the evening and can be seen standing next to the easel on which each artist's drawing was placed for the group's scrutiny. It seems to be a relaxed environment, with even Partridge's dog in the room, but each artist is concentrating intently on the drawing or else sharing an opinion with a neighbour. The scene immediately brings to mind Johan Zoffany's famous group portrait of the founding members of the RA.¹⁸ Like Zoffany, Partridge presents the group very much as they wanted to be seen, deep in discussion rather than in the act of making a work of art. It helps to set the scene as one of gentility and liberality, with a sense of group cohesion. The comradery of the fellow members is key to their identity and, on a certain level, it is of equal importance to the sketching itself. One can also see the homeliness of the setting, which would have been quite different to the workspaces and studios the artists would have occupied during the day. The 'candour and judgement' of the evening critique that Uwins spoke of is undeniably on display here, and you can see the other drawings piled up together near to the front ready for the next artist to describe their intentions.¹⁹

Along with the president for the evening keeping the drawings, one of the Sketching Society's long-lasting rules was that they could not be sold. This has meant that only a small selection of drawings are known in museums and other archival collections, though many more have come to light since Hamilton and Winter's works were published in the 1970s.²⁰ A further 74 drawings, originally in Partridge's possession, have been purchased for the VAM since the 1971 exhibition. These are significant because they are from the later decades of the Sketching Society, being mainly from the period 15 November 1833 to 1 December 1837. These were not available to Hamilton and would have certainly enhanced her work, as one of the main criticisms of the exhibition was that it did not 'chart the later history of the "Sketching Society"'.²¹ The subsequent acquisition by the British Museum of six complete evening sets from 1809 and 1810 has also massively enhanced our knowledge. They were once held by Francis Stevens, who was a founding member of the Chalon Sketching Society, and they are especially useful because they have original hand-written notes on the literary

¹⁸Johan Zoffany, *The Academicians of the Royal Academy, 1771-72*, Royal Collection Trust, London.

¹⁹ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.164.

²⁰ The main holdings for the drawings are the VAM, the British Museum, the Huntington Library and the Folger Shakespeare Library. In addition, a number of sketches, often not identified as Society works, have passed through auction houses.

²¹ Richard Ormond, "'The Sketching Society' at the Victoria and Albert Museum', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.133, No.186 (March 1971), pp.168-170, 169.

passages used for the evening's theme.²² In addition, the Folger Shakespeare Library has 64 drawings, probably all post 1820, which therefore date to the period within which Hamilton most struggled to find examples.²³ Moreover, it has also been possible to add to the picture by looking again at works that, for one reason or another, have been separated from an evening's set. Since the group knew each other well, and because the evenings were so informal, many drawings were not signed, which greatly complicates the dating and attribution of many of the sketches. However, since sepia ink and wash was easily the most common material used, it can be possible to link drawings to the Society which have not previously been identified with its meetings. Taken together with the three collections identified above, this alone helps to justify a fresh study of the Sketching Society.²⁴

Recent scholarship has started to re-address the history of British watercolours and to focus on unfamiliar artists, allowing new insights into the medium's development. Usually, however, while writers are clearly aware of the Sketching Society, their interest in it is invariably restricted to its relevance to the careers of the grand marquee names of Girtin and Cotman.²⁵ Lesser-known artists hardly feature, despite the fact that many were leading figures in their day, enjoying the limelight as Royal Academicians.²⁶ This thesis looks to recover some of those now 'lost' figures, in order to reconstruct the longer history of the Society, not only as it is revealing of the full complexity of the group's make up and activities, but as it serves to highlight its significance to the wider art world developments in the period. To achieve this, it will provide a brief history of the Sketching Society, including the links between the three groups first identified by Hamilton. Here, it will be argued that

²² Each work is also inscribed or signed by the artist helping significantly with identification. These are otherwise rarely to be found on Sketching Society drawings.

²³ See Judith Kennedy's article looking at an evening theme from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* using the Folger Library Collection, 'Bottom Transformed by the Sketching Society', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.47, No.3 (Autumn 1996), pp.306-318.

²⁴ See Appendix 1 for an overview of the primary and archival sources of the Sketching Society.

²⁵ For example, Greg Smith briefly looks at the Girtin Sketching Club in *Thomas Girtin: The Art of the Watercolour*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2002b); and Jane Munro in *British Landscape Watercolours, 1750-1850*, exh. cat. (London, 1994), pp.99-100.

²⁶ See Andrew Hemingway's essay 'The Constituents of Romantic Genius: John Sell Cotman's Greta Drawings' in Rosenthal, M., Payne, C., and Wilcox, S. (eds), *Prospects for the Nation: Recent Essays in British Landscape, 1750-1880* (New Haven and London, 1997), pp.183-204.

the Chalon Sketching Society, while the successor to the previous two now more familiar groups was, in many ways, quite distinct.²⁷

To begin, a more detailed history of the Chalon Sketching Society is needed, with a particular focus on the later, largely neglected period between 1830 and 1851. This means exploring who participated in the Chalon Sketching Society (including visitors), and its place in the wider art world of those years. In this respect, it is useful to recover the group's geographies, in terms of where it met at three important stages of the club (1831, 1837 and 1851). Here, the project looks to make a contribution to recent concerns with the situation and spatial aspects of early nineteenth-century cultural production in London, which has done much to recover the ways in which the city's 'modernity' was in large part distinguished by its performative spaces.²⁸ Where artistic life was performed mattered to an understanding of the forms it took and the meanings it had. The stage-like setting and studied 'performances' of the sitters in Partridge's group portrait of the Society is testament to their awareness of these matters. In art history, scholars have been increasingly attentive to such issues in regard to the display and viewing cultures of the period.²⁹ In this case, drawings by the group were exhibited at the Graphic Society on at least one occasion in 1840, the Hampstead Fine Art Conversazione in 1848, and at least twice at the Haymarket in 1851 and 1857.³⁰ In terms of the group's membership, it is of some significance to any evaluation of its standing that the Chalons' Society included five Royal Academicians, all of whom, with the possible

²⁷ In a letter used by *The Literary Gazette*, 26 December 1857, pp.1243-1244, Alfred Edward Chalon described himself as a founding member of Sketching Society in 1808. Chalon also mentioned the use of 'nine volumes of records' to help him to be accurate with dates and details. These were the now sadly lost Society minute books addressed below. See also Hesketh Hubbard's article 'The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design', *The Old Water-colour Society's Club*, Vol.24 (London, 1946), pp.19-33, where he refers to the Chalon group by their original name which was used until the 1830s and 1840s when the club simply were known as the Sketching Society. For consistency, here, the Chalon Sketching Society will be used predominantly, except for when it is appropriate to use the original name. Note, Hubbard had access to the Society minute books for writing his work.

²⁸ For specifically art historical examples of such studies, see John Barrell's essay 'Thomas Banks and the Society for Constitutional Information' in Monks, S., Barrell, J., and Hallett, M. (eds), *Living with the Royal Academy* (Aldershot, 2013), pp.131-152; and Rosie Dias' "'A World of pictures": Pall Mall and the topography of display, 1780-99' in Ogborn, M., and Withers, C. (eds), *Georgian geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 2013), pp.92-113.

²⁹ See David Solkin (ed), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836* (New Haven and London, 2001).

³⁰ The exhibition with the Graphic Society is mentioned in *The Literary Gazette*, May 16 1840, p.315; and the Hampstead Fine Art Conversazione in *The Athenaeum*, April 1 1848, p.344.

exception of Clarkson Stanfield, have rarely attracted scholarly appraisal.³¹ Such was the group's standing, or wish to be seen as part of the art world establishment, it would dedicate its first publication - a set of lithographs issued in 1840 - to the then current President of the RA, Sir Martin Archer Shee.³² Various members were also involved with other prominent institutions, such as the Old Water-colour Society (OWS).³³ In other words, its membership was drawn from, and intimately connected with, the capital's broader artistic communities. Yet, while the group's evenings attracted occasional visits from prominent art-world characters, for example Edwin Landseer and John Constable, it was no less eager to align itself with literary figures such as Washington Irving and Captain Frederick Marryat.³⁴ That its ambitions were social as much as artistic is well illustrated by Queen Victoria having twice chosen the evening's theme in the early 1840s, selecting 'Desire' and 'Elevation'.³⁵

Having reconstructed something of the group's cultural and social ambitions, this thesis will look to explore how the themes chosen for the Society's evenings evolved, tracking the shift away from a concern with 'Historic Landscape' towards subjects derived primarily from contemporary literature and then the ever more wide-ranging and diverse vision of the Chalons' era. Under the Chalons, the themes came to embrace Classical, Biblical, and Shakespearean subjects, but would also take in more abstract miscellaneous ideas, such as 'A Triumph', where the artists were left to produce a drawing from their own imagination.³⁶ Thus, much as the tendency has been to associate the group's activities with the development of landscape as a pictorial genre, in actuality, evenings began to involve a greater focus on figure drawing and narrative subjects. While there was some degree of consistency across the three different societies - not least as regards membership - the roles played by the aesthetics of the Picturesque, the Sublime and the Beautiful that have often been at the forefront in

³¹ Stanfield was the centre of an exhibition curated by Pieter van der Merwe and Roger Took in 1979, the accompanying catalogue was titled *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield, 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-painter, Royal Academician*, exh. cat. (Gateshead: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979). The other RA members were Uwins, both Chalons and Leslie.

³² Chalon et al., 1840.

³³ The group will be referred to as the OWS throughout. At the start of its history, in 1804, it was called the Society of Painters in Water Colours and is now known as the Royal Watercolour Society, or the RWS.

³⁴ See Hubbard, 1946, pp.31-33. Additionally, the group often had family members invited as guests, for example Clarkson Stanfield invited his son George Clarkson Stanfield.

³⁵ Uwins, 1858, Vo1.1, pp.202-203. Note that when referring to a set from an evening's theme (unless if it was drawn from the title of a play, book or poem) inverted commas will be used. For titles of individual drawings, or other works, italics will be used.

³⁶ 'A Triumph' was the theme for the evening meeting of 16 November 1832.

discussions of the group's output, differed significantly over the decades of the Society's existence and even within the Chalon Sketching Society.

Finally, the thesis will examine how the Society was represented by others and how it presented itself, by looking at its coverage in the contemporary newspaper and periodical press, alongside the Society's own publications, as well as the now little-known retrospective exhibitions on the group's works in 1851 and 1857.

Before turning to look at these issues in more detail, it will be useful to add a few key points for clarification and qualification. When the term 'Sketching Society' is used here, it refers to all three iterations of the group, with the names Girtin, Cotman or Chalon appended in order to differentiate them. Just taking the last of these groups, the likelihood is that somewhere between five and six thousand drawings were produced, many of which are now either lost or misidentified. Even if we were to limit the scope of any enquiry into the group's activities to those works currently identified and in accessible, public collections, the sheer volume of material presents a considerable challenge. It is for this reason that this study will focus on a select number of representative evenings and themes. Still, just as Queen Victoria did in 1837, we are going to unveil many 'valuable drawings' and, in turn, decide for ourselves whether accepting the Society's invitation to scrutinise the efforts of an evening's work has worth.³⁷

³⁷ A box of Sketching Society drawings from A.E. Chalon's collection were shown to Queen Victoria by Mr. Lane. See RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W) 23 March 1837 (Lord Esher's Typescripts). Weblink: <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/search/displayItemFromId.do?FormatType=fulltextimgsrc&QueryType=articles&ItemID=18370323&volumeType=ESHER>, accessed 13/11/2019.

Chapter 2 - The Sketching Society before the Chalons

The idea of artists meeting to sketch and to converse together had been conceived long before the Sketching Society. Ilaria Bignamini has provided a comprehensive overview of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century clubs in London, from the Virtuosi of St. Luke to the Rose and Crown Club, through the Academy in Great Queen Street and the two St. Martin's Lane Academies.¹ Although beyond the scope of this project, it is worth bearing something of this history in mind, not least as the Sketching Society were themselves quite conscious of their place in this lineage from the beginning. There was a reason why Francia was so careful to note the auspicious history of the venue where 'the Brothers' first met. Besides those early attempts to establish academies on a more or less formal model tracked by Bignamini, there was also a well-established tradition for artists to meet up on a more ad hoc, occasional basis. Due to their very nature, these kinds of evenings have left few traces. But there is an intriguing, small watercolour by Paul Sandby of 1753, which is of some note. It is an *Invitation to a Sketching Club* (Fig. 3) sent to Theodosius Forrest, a lawyer and acquaintance of William Hogarth, to come to an evening session at Thomas Sandby's house at Poultney Street. Accompanying verses make the promise that there will be a chance to 'attack cold beef and wine' once the party had finished sketching, making it just as much a social occasion as anything else.² It was a model of practice that the Sketching Society were, as we shall see, to follow closely. What Forrest's inclusion points out is the easy mix of amateurs and professionals - at least, as far as it is possible to make such a distinction - at such occasions, which would also be a feature of the assemblies organised by the Sketching Society.³

Interestingly, Paul Sandby played a part, of sorts, in the history of the Sketching Society, if at one remove. His godson Paul Sandby Munn was a member of both the Girtin and the Cotman groups. Likewise, Sandby was an important catalyst in watercolour painting and 'more than

¹ Ilaria Bignamini, 'George Vertue, Art Historian and Art Institutions in London, 1689-1768: A study of Clubs and Academies', *The Walpole Society*, Vol.54 (1988), pp.1-148.

² Martin Postle, 'The Sandbys and the Royal Academy' in John Bonehill and Stephen Daniels (eds), *Paul Sandby: Picturing Britain*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009), pp.28-37, see in particular pp.29-30.

³ See Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (London, 2000); and Kim Sloan, *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters c.1600-1800*, exh. cat. (London: British Museum, 2000).

any other artist, it was he who revealed to the English people the beauty of their own country.⁴ While Sandby lived on until 1809 and had remained an active painter, he was not, as far as we know, ever directly associated with the Sketching Society. However, he did act as tutor to Munn and Girtin even briefly lived next door to him.⁵ Sandby was a sociable man, and regularly staged informal salons at his Bayswater home.⁶ There were, therefore, plenty of precedents for the Sketching Society.

2.1 Dr. Monro's Academy

Dr. Thomas Monro's Academy has featured prominently in histories of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century watercolour practice, not least as it has been linked with such luminaries as Girtin and Turner.⁷ Three of the original members of the Girtin Sketching Club, Girtin, Francia and Underwood, certainly worked with Monro directly, though there is good reason to think that Munn was also involved.⁸ Following the group's first meetings, Cotman and John Varley were brought to Monro's attention by William Alexander.⁹ The Monro Academy itself was a place where artists could meet and form friendships, with many attendees going on to become leading figures in a generation of artists that eventually established their own professional watercolour society (OWS).¹⁰ That artists would eventually want to have greater autonomy and to organise themselves in this way was perhaps inevitable. Supposedly, Girtin had once told Cornelius Varley that Monro's methods did not give 'him the same chance to paint [as it gave to Turner]'.¹¹ Stepping away from their

⁴ Lawrence Binyon, *English Water-colours*, 2nd ed. (London, 1946), p.25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.98.

⁶ Henry Angelo, *The Reminiscences of Henry Angelo with Memoirs of his Late Father and Friends*, 2 Vols. (London, 1904), pp.176-177.

⁷ For further information on the Monro School see F.J.G. Jefferiss, *Dr Thomas Monro (1759-1833) and the Monro Academy*, exh. cat. (London: VAM, 1976); Sloan, 2000, p.207; Greg Smith, *Thomas Girtin: The Art of Watercolour*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2002b); and Andrew Wilton, 'The Monro School question: Some answers', *Turner Studies*, Vol.IV, No. 2, (1984), pp.8-23.

⁸ David Winter, 'Girtin's Sketching Club', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.2, (February 1974), pp.123-149., p.129. Winter quotes T. Girtin and D. Loshak, *The Art of Thomas Girtin* (London, 1954), p.30, for the link to Munn.

⁹ Smith, 2002a, p.180.

¹⁰ See Smith, 2002a, for an in depth look at the formation of the OWS.

¹¹ Quoted in Winter, 1974, from J.L. Roget, *A History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, 2 Vols. (London, 1891), Vol.1, p.97. The words of Girtin, according to Roget, were told to Mr. Jenkins by Cornelius Varley on Jan. 1, 1858. This is in reference to Girtin doing the outlines for drawings and then Turner doing the washes and painting.

patron, the foundation of the new ‘Brothers’ sketching club was a decisive move towards independence.

2.2 Girtin Sketching Club

Reviewing an exhibition of early English drawings, held at the Fitzwilliam Museum in December 1920, one critic drew attention to something that stood out for him from the works on show. This was the minute book of the first Sketching Society, which not only listed the members present at each of the evenings’ meetings, but gathered together a number of their sketches.¹² Drawn from the works of popular authors, such as William Cowper and James Thomson, the minutes also contained the poetic and prose passages that artists were to employ as a point of departure for their essays in ‘Historic Landscape’.¹³ Since the laws of the Society (as set out at the start of the minute book) simply required the subject to be ‘particularly lending to Landscape’, this gave the president for the evening some degree of license as regards the choice of subject matter.¹⁴ It may have been the group’s sense of humour, but the laws of the Society stated that if any member were to object ‘in any way to the said Subject he shall be fined one shilling.’¹⁵ Examples from the evening of the 28 September 1799, when the selection came from Cowper’s *The Task* (book V), illustrate just how closely those present adhered to the subject set. Indeed, there was almost a certain uniformity of approach. Showing the churning of a remote, hillside mill-dam, Girtin’s (Fig.4) interpretation of the theme was not too dissimilar from that adopted by the others present, who maybe took inspiration from each other’s examples. Only Robert Ker Porter’s (Fig. 5) response differed, not least by including a prominent figurative element.

The Society was to meet weekly, usually on a Sunday evening, at the house of each member in turn, with work commencing at ‘7:00 P.M.’ and finishing ‘precisely at 10:00 P.M.’¹⁶ A supper ‘with Ale and Porter’ would follow, which was scheduled to last an hour.¹⁷ To make

¹² F.H.H. Guillemard, ‘Girtin’s Sketching Club’, *Connoisseur*, Vol.LXIII, No. 252 (1922), pp.189-195.

¹³ These were from the nineteen recorded meetings in the minute book as examined by Winter, 1974. Other authors and poets the club used included: David Mallet (ca. 1705-1765), John Cunningham (1729-1773), Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), Ann Seward (1742-1809), Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) and Thomas Gisborne (1758-1846).

¹⁴ Winter, 1974, p.134.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.123

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

sure the evenings were well attended, ‘non-attendance without a previous excuse’ carried a fine of two shillings and sixpence, though in keeping with the friendly, jovial spirit of things this does not seem to have ever been imposed.¹⁸

The general use of sepia and monochrome brought a uniformity to the drawings that F.H.H. Guillemard thought made attributions surprisingly difficult, if it were not for the artists’ names being written on the back. For him, identifying the hand at work ‘in all cases would have been impossible’ otherwise.¹⁹ With artists seldom signing their works, the attribution of Sketching Society drawings has continued to be problematic. Only occasionally would the host of the evening inscribe the works himself or place the drawings in an album or mount bearing the artists’ names and the theme for the evening.

While several of the members around Girtin were eventually to form part of what is now usually identified as the Cotman Sketching Society, there would be an eighteen month gap between the last recorded meeting of the old group and the supposed inaugural evening of the new club on 5 May 1802.²⁰ In light of this, it is perhaps worth reassessing the usual assumption that the latter represented a straightforward continuation of the earlier group’s activities.

2.3 Cotman Sketching Society

There is a scarcity of information about the second Sketching Society. But, like the first, it has primarily been linked with the leading practitioner involved, this time Cotman. Firstly, there is no universal agreement on when the club started or when it concluded. If we were to follow Oppé, Hamilton and Guillemard, then we would set the group’s history to 1802 to 1804.²¹ However, there are intriguing examples that contradict these dates. The first is the start of the group, with Sydney Kitson making an interesting point regarding a set of seven drawings in Dr. Percy’s collection sale at Christie’s in April 1890.²² These were by members of the Sketching Society with the subject being ‘An Ancient Castle’ and the artists given as

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Guillemard, 1922, p.191.

²⁰ A drawing dated 5 May 1802 was in Guillemard’s possession at the time of his 1922 article, p.191.

²¹ A.P. Oppé, ‘Cotman and Sketching Society’, *The Connoisseur*, Vol.LXVII, No. 268 (1923), pp.189-198; Jean Hamilton, *The Sketching Society, 1799-1851*, exh. cat. (London: VAM, 1971), pp.6-10; and Guillemard, 1922.

²² Sydney Kitson, *The Life of John Sell Cotman* (London, 1937), pp.31-32.

Girtin (Fig. 6), Munn, Porter, Samuel, Underwood, Callcott and Cotman (Fig. 7). This implies that the Girtin Sketching Club went on for longer than the last entry in the minute book, and that Cotman and Augustus Wall Callcott were present for at least one meeting.²³ We know that Munn was definitely a member, as his name appears in the original minute book, and this suggests there may have been a further minute book for the society that succeeded it. The drawings themselves were part of the Oppé collection that was purchased by the Tate in 1996. Frustratingly, they are undated, although it has been suggested that they must have been done before Girtin went to Paris in November 1801.²⁴ Cotman's drawing was not as strong as the others in the set, but it is an early example of his work.²⁵

As well as Cotman, the membership of this second group included Underwood and Munn from Girtin's group, but also John Samuel Hayward and Francis Stevens, who played important roles in the Chalon Sketching Society, emphasising the continuity of the clubs.²⁶ It is likely that William Havell and Joshua Cristall were also members, as the VAM have similar examples by them to those of John Varley.²⁷ Oppé did allude to them being associates, and his example of Cotman's *Satyr* (Fig. 8) drawn from Collins' poetical works is surely conclusive as Cristall also produced a version (Fig. 9).²⁸

We simply do not know when the Cotman group ceased to exist. Due to the lack of any minute books and the negligible nature of the material relating to evening gatherings, it is difficult to ascertain the end date. Hamilton skips over this briskly by saying that 'after Cotman's departure in 1804 there is a dearth of information about the group's activities.'²⁹ Nevertheless, there is a suggestion that a drawing by Cotman held in the British Museum

²³ This would support P.G. Hamerton's assertion in his article 'John Sell Cotman' in P.G. Hamerton (ed), *The Portfolio: monographs on artistic subjects* (London, 1897), p.52, that Cotman, Callcott and Munn were members of the Girtin Sketching Club. Hamerton probably gleaned this information from Roget, 1891, Vol.1, p.100, who in turn quotes Walter Thornbury, *The Life of J.M.W Turner* (London, 1862). Roget erroneously thinks a mysterious P.S. Murray was a member, but surely this was P.S. Munn.

²⁴ Kitson, 1937, p.32.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Other members Oppé, 1923, lists included: William Alexander, John Varley, Fleetwood Varley, Thomas Webster, Joseph Powell, Neil (J. B. Neale), and finally William Munn.

²⁷ The similar examples are for the evening themes 'The Death of Milo', 'The Crowded Mart', and 'Satyr'. For the *Satyr* see Oppé, 1923, p.192. The reason these have not been noticed until now as being part of the Cotman group is most likely because they were not dated.

²⁸ Oppé, 1923, pp.191-192. Hamilton, 1971, p.13, seems to think that this drawing by Cotman was produced as part of the Chalon Sketching Society on a possible visit to London. This is unlikely and the drawing is surely more clearly linked to the other chalk works done around 1804.

²⁹ Hamilton, 1971, p.10.

could conceivably have been done at one of the evening meetings in 1806.³⁰ It is titled *The Centaur* (Fig. 10) and it is a drawing that, with its classical theme, would have fitted into the Girtin Sketching Club's aim of a 'school of Historic Landscape' far more readily than his earlier sketch of *An Ancient Castle* (Fig. 7).

Fortunately, despite the lack of certainty regarding its history, the rules of the Cotman Sketching Society were recorded in a letter of 1803 sent by Munn to Hayward, confirming the latter's election as a member of the group (Fig. 11). They are, if anything, even more congenial than the rules attached to membership of the Girtin club and 'more logically arranged':³¹

1s The meeting shall be held, on every succeeding Wednesday at the house of each Member alternately –

2d The Member at whose house the meeting is held, shall be the President for that eveng [sic] & shall provide the materials for the drawings –

3 The subject shall be selected by the Prest. & given out at seven o clock precisely & at ten, the several drawings shall be presented to him – After which Bread & cheese & beer shall be introduced - & the meeting shall break up at eleven –

4th The Prest – shall have the liberty of introducing one Visitor –

5 If any Member shall be absent (unless prevented from attending by indisposition or his professional avocations) it will be expected that he present on the ensuing Wednesday, to the late Prest – a drawing from his subject. –

³⁰ Miklos Rajnai (ed), *John Sell Cotman*, exh. cat. (London: VAM, 1982), p.80. See also Cotman's drawing *Cain and Abel* on the same page which is held at the Cecil Higgins Art Gallery in Bedford. Both works have many similarities with Sketching Society drawings and are dated 1806. Jane Munro, *British Landscape Watercolours 1750-1850*, exh. cat. (London: The Herbert Press Limited, 1994), p.100 gives another example from the Fitzwilliam Museum of a *Classical Colonnade in a Wooded Landscape* which could also be from the Sketching Society.

³¹ Oppé, 1923, p.190.

In 1806, after failing to be elected to membership of the OWS, Cotman returned to his native Norwich.³² It is presumed, therefore, that he was not involved in the Sketching Society beyond this date and that his exit probably explains the lack of information on the group between 1806 and 1808. Nevertheless, Cotman clearly held the group in high esteem, as he evidently held on to a large collection of Sketching Society drawings, with many being sold at his posthumous studio sale in 1862.³³

Although the histories of both the Girtin and Cotman clubs have only been briefly described, they help to explain the existence of the later Chalon Sketching Society. It can be reasoned that each is distinct, but there is also a legitimate argument that there is a continuum between the three, which is why this thesis argues for them to be looked at separately but ultimately as one entity.³⁴

2.4 Themes in the Girtin and Cotman Sketching Societies

Mostly, the Girtin group appear to have drawn on popular texts, such as James Thomson's *Seasons* and James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems, focusing on passages which lent themselves to sublime or picturesque treatment.³⁵ The key point is that each poet or writer 'was born in the eighteenth century and, excepting Macpherson, who was in Scotland, all were active in England.'³⁶ The *Seasons* poems were used on one known occasion by the group, which links usefully to the Chalon Sketching Society, as they turned to Thomson too. As Andrew Wilton argues 'without the definitive success of Thomson's *Seasons* in the first half of the

³² Rajnai, 1982, p.30 for a detailed chronology of Cotman's life.

³³ See Rajnai, 1982, p.60. The sale was held by Murrell in Norwich between 26-27 November, 1862. Lot 58 was 'A folio of twenty-seven drawings by various artists, viz. Cotman, Varley, Webster, Hayward, & Munn, members of the Sketching Club, & friends of the late Mr. John Sell Cotman London 1803.'

³⁴ Hamilton, 1971, refers to the three groups as 'The Sketching Society' throughout her catalogue.

³⁵ Winter, 1974, p.132, helpfully outlined the themes chosen by the Girtin group and included a table with the nine authors and poets selected by the members which were written down in the minute books. There is an extensive secondary literature on the aesthetics of the picturesque and the sublime, especially in relation to landscape theory and practice, beginning with Christopher Hussey's pioneering *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London, 1927); Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757); and Rev. William Gilpin's book *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape*, 2nd ed. (London, 1794).

³⁶ Winter, 1974, p.133. Macpherson is given as the author although at the time he was referred to as 'Ossian' in the minute books.

[eighteenth] century, the development of landscape painting in England would have been rather different and perhaps delayed.³⁷

All members would have been aware of Rev. William Gilpin's seminal work on the picturesque. Art clubs, such as Monro's Academy and Girtin's Sketching Club, would have been ideal forums for the artists to explore, test and discuss Gilpin's ideas and other aesthetic concepts. This did not necessarily mean the group agreed. On the contrary, the informal nature of the set up meant that members most likely felt free to express their opinions both in word and through their drawings. According to Winter, who took a progressivist view of developments in watercolour, 'only at the first Minute Book meeting did the subject matter (Ossian; *Temora*, Book IV) give a prominent role to a human figure; its otherwise incidental appearance gives the impression that in the associates' conception historic landscape painting was also pure landscape painting.'³⁸ This, Winter believes, meant that 'unity, drama, and even "historicalness" were not to be provided by actors but imbued into the composition through the natural elements.'³⁹

It is also possible to see the group's reliance on contemporary literature as ultimately restricting; a constraint on their ambitions. To illustrate this point, a drawing by Munn epitomises why many of the sketches from the Girtin club would appear to fall short as history pieces (Fig. 12). Here, Munn depicts a picturesque scene from Thomas Gisborne's hugely popular *Walks in a Forest* (1796), and the idyllic landscape he created is reminiscent of any country village in England. In the distance, one can see a parish church, presumably meant to recall Gisborne's Yoxhall in the Needwood Forest celebrated in his verse. There are also signs of vernacular housing in the background with a typical English tree drooping over a lake or river. Its motifs and scenic conjunctions are all firmly picturesque.

Later examples from towards the end of the Girtin Sketching Club (Fig. 6 and 7), however, mark a shift. The group was still developing its identity and the evenings were sometimes of an exploratory nature. In this instance, the drawings depict a landscape with a castle perched high on a hill. But Girtin's treatment of the subject has a tempestuous storm whipping waves

³⁷ Andrew Wilton, *Turner and the Sublime*, exh. cat. (London: British Museum, 1981), p.25.

³⁸ Winter, 1974, p.135.

³⁹ Ibid. In an earlier example, Fig. 5 depicts a scene from Cowper's *The Task* by Porter who, in this instance, was the exception in using figures.

across the landscape towards the shore and the cliff on which the castle stands. In many respects, this would encapsulate the ‘Picturesque Sublime’ somewhat in the manner of works in that vein essayed by Turner in the 1790s.⁴⁰ Yet, Cotman shows the castle on a hill, this time with a gentle river running at its foot, which would surely be better classified as an exercise in the picturesque.

The Cotman group was comparable in many ways to the Girtin club in terms of literature used, but it did begin to turn to older sources, which greatly increased the opportunities for the members to use their imagination. In a similar manner to the Girtin group, William Collins’ *The Passions* was chosen by the Cotman club on at least one occasion (Fig. 8 and 9). These examples by Cotman and Cristall show the evolution of the Society, as figures are starting to take a more noticeable role in the drawings. This is certainly the case with *Pale Melancholy* by John Varley (Fig. 13), as one’s eye is drawn immediately to the captivating figure in the middle of the work.⁴¹ This drawing, in particular, would not look out of place in the Chalon Sketching Society.

It can be argued that the Cotman group’s push towards history painting showed a shift from the earlier club. For example, John Milton’s *L’Allegro* was selected for a meeting when Cotman (Fig. 14), Havell (Fig. 15) and Thomas Webster were known to be present, with the theme being ‘Towered cities please us then.’ Each drawing differs in composition, but all contain depictions of pyramids in the distance which almost certainly refer to Turner’s painting *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* that was exhibited in 1800.⁴² Hamilton, furthermore, began to see the influence of Poussin and Wilson in their works.⁴³ Figures, however, were used here as an aside, with only Havell showing a lone character gazing at the built up town in the distance dominated by a pyramid. Therefore, while the lack of figures places this example in the lineage of Girtin’s club, at the same time the selected theme anticipates later developments. Indeed, the Chalon group returned to Milton as a source on various occasions, particularly in the early 1810s.

⁴⁰ Wilton, 1981, p.34.

⁴¹ Partridge in 1834 used this same theme (Collins’ *Ode to the Passions*) in the Chalon Sketching Society and it is worth comparing Varley’s drawing to his (Fig. 42).

⁴² Hamilton, 1971, p.7.

⁴³ Ibid. Although Havell’s drawing in particular looks like it is based on an English and not foreign landscape.

To emphasise this loose sense of continuity between the groups further, another interesting example from the Cotman era comes from an evening where the group chose ‘Dante and Virgil at the Bridge’ from Dante’s *Inferno*.⁴⁴ This is the earliest literary source used by the Sketching Society until this point, and foreshadows the future direction for the Chalon group. John Varley’s (Fig. 16) treatment of the subject is evocative, perhaps recalling ‘little Devil’s Bridge over the Reuss, as depicted in Turner’s *Liber Studiorum*, published in 1809, but sketched during his first Swiss tour in 1802.’⁴⁵ Cotman’s drawing (Fig.17) feasibly was inspired by his previous sketch of ‘Devil’s Bridge, Cardiganshire’, with similar tall, narrow arches used in each composition.⁴⁶ Together the Sketching Society drawings present a picturesque element and depict Dante and Virgil as small figures towards the top of the works looking down. There is a strong hint of the British landscape school in terms of the bridges, the mountains and the foliage, which would explain Hamilton’s suggestions. Moreover, this would limit the debate towards these being history artworks. However, the use of figures is again apparent, even if rather small, and began to become more central to the group.

The final thematic example from the Cotman Sketching Society is from an evening devoted to ‘The Death of Milo’.⁴⁷ The members were evidently aware of Salvator Rosa’s treatment of the same subject, suggesting that they had access to an engraving at the meeting.⁴⁸ Cristall’s drawing (Fig. 18) in particular shows the agony of Milo as he desperately tries to escape, but does not include the wolves ready to attack as John Varley and Havell do. The works completed on this night were done in pencil and chalk, which seems to have been a practice almost solely completed in the Cotman group. Cristall’s picture even had a sketch of the anatomy of a foot on the reverse (Fig. 19), suggesting that the members might have had an introductory task to complete.⁴⁹ This final example would have fitted perfectly in the early Chalon Sketching Society through the use of a classical Greek story and emphasis on figures,

⁴⁴ The VAM have examples attributed to Cotman, Munn, Varley and Cristall.

⁴⁵ Hamilton, 1971, p.7.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ This is a Greek classical story of a wrestler from the sixth century BC who tore a tree apart when his hands became trapped in its trunk before being attacked by surprise and killed by wolves.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, 1971, p.9. See plate 11 on the same page taken from the Collection of A.G.B. Russell (a pen and bistre wash study, measuring 31 x 22 cm).

⁴⁹ The same occurs on the back of Varley’s and Havell’s efforts. Other evening themes, such as ‘The Crowded Mart’, also have drawings on the reverse, this time of a classical figure with a discus in his hand. Perhaps one of the members liked stipulating the use of chalk on their evenings as president. This may have also been an opportunity for the members to practise figurative elements for their sketches since the previous focus had purely been on landscape.

yet it would have been quite revolutionary to the early Girtin club. There are other unknown drawings from the Cotman Sketching Society which may be in private collections, or in the reserve collections of public museums and libraries, and their (re)discovery may enhance our knowledge of thematic choices by this group.⁵⁰

The themes clearly developed between the two groups, with Girtin's club emphasising the landscape, and Cotman's group beginning to assign a more prominent figurative element to the drawings. Kitson, furthermore, argues that the Cotman Society was moving 'away from romantic landscape towards the epic and pastoral', which links even more closely, as we shall see, to the Chalons.⁵¹ An understanding of these first two groups' thematic choices is key to viewing how the Sketching Society ultimately developed.

2.5 The role of Watercolour

Situating the Girtin and Cotman groups within the art world of the years around 1800 helps to emphasise that the members were also heavily involved in the professionalisation of the medium of watercolour. In this, the earlier association with Dr. Monro was not a coincidence. He was a major collector of watercolours, which helps to explain his acquaintance with many members of the Sketching Society, and why they in turn wanted to be connected to him.⁵² It is, therefore, of little surprise that members of Monro's Academy helped in the foundation of the OWS, with the Varley brothers being particularly prominent.

According to Greg Smith, there was also another gathering of watercolourists in a 'rarely discussed third group who made the decisive link between an informal and a public body'.⁵³ In 1804, Joseph Farington was told by James Ward that he, along with Samuel Shelly, James Green, Robert Hills and William Henry Pyne 'have for four years past been accustomed to meet once a week during the winter Season at each other's Houses *alternatively*, to *sketch & converse upon Art.*' The diarist does go on to say that the members 'have gradually admitted

⁵⁰ See Rajnai, 1982, p.60.

⁵¹ Kitson, 1937, p.35. Citing examples now in the VAM.

⁵² Monro collected works by Paul Sandby and John Laporte in the 1790s, and also examples of contemporary leading artists in this field such as Turner, Girtin, John Varley and William Turner of Oxford. See Smith, 2002a, p.168.

⁵³ Smith, 2002a, p.180.

others as *guests* to the number of 30 or 40 in an evening.’⁵⁴ Although such activities clearly helped with advancing the professionalisation of watercolour as a medium that Smith tracks, there does not appear to have been direct links with the Sketching Society in its various forms in the way that he implies. However, Smith does admit that ‘the greater emphasis on discussion amongst a large group suggests it was closer in spirit to a *conversazione*’.⁵⁵ It is worth noting, however, that, like the Chalon Sketching Society, the group that Ward was referring to did organise excursions. Pyne described a trip to Windsor Forest and how ‘he, Hills, Cristall, Ward and Havell met at the end of the day to study and comment on their sketches.’⁵⁶ This mention of Cristall and Havell is interesting, not least as they were both involved in the second and third Sketching Societies.⁵⁷

It is obvious that watercolour artists of this period wanted to be connected with other practitioners of this medium, and that there was space for more professional bodies like the OWS, together with more informal gatherings, such as the Sketching Society. Smith, in his extensive study of the rise of the professionalisation of watercolour artists up until 1824, sees the importance and role of both gatherings, and it is clear how artists might have benefitted from their association with more than one group.⁵⁸ The Sketching Society played an important - and often ignored - role within the rise of watercolour, but, equally, it needed the other gatherings and societies to help it to become successful even as a social meeting. The medium of watercolour continued to play a key role in the Sketching Society history up until its conclusion in 1851. However, as we shall see, the membership shifted further towards links with the RA, with artists who specialised in oil paintings, as well as being competent in watercolour, playing an increasingly prominent part in the group.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.180 quoting Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 17 Vols., Kenneth Garlick, Angus Macintyre and Kathryn Cave (eds), (New Haven and London, 1978-84), Vol.6, p.2271.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.181. The *conversazione*, as Smith points out, was normally associated with more established artists and their patrons.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.182 quoting *Library of the Fine Arts*, Vol.3 (1832), pp.14-16.

⁵⁷ Havell was not a member of the Chalon Sketching Society but was recorded as visiting the group 37 times mainly between 1809 and 1814, but also later in the 1830s and early 1840s.

⁵⁸ Smith, 2002a.

Chapter 3 - The Chalon Sketching Society

The Sketches of which Lithographic Imitations are now offered to the public, were made by the present Members of a Society formed for the purpose of combining social intercourse with the cultivation of their Art.

(*Evening Sketches*, 1840)¹

This chapter aims specifically to improve knowledge of the little covered history of the Chalon Sketching Society. It will investigate those who participated in the group - either as a member or visitor - as well as exploring the geographies of the Society in this period through examining the locations of the evening meetings and occasional exhibitions. Where artistic life was performed mattered to an understanding of the forms it took and the meanings it had.² It will, furthermore, place the group within the London art world of this era, in terms of its broader cultural and social aims, as well as the group's ambitions and aspirations. This culminates in Queen Victoria twice choosing the evening theme for the club, epitomising the high society connections of the Chalon group and the 'cultivation of their Art.'³

3.1 Early History

On Twelfth Night (6th January) 1808, 'The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design' held its first meeting at the Wigmore Street home of Francis Stevens.⁴ Its host founded the group, together with the brothers Alfred Edward Chalon and John James Chalon who would continue to remain its prime movers until its eventual dissolution in 1851. Artists present at the first meeting also included William Turner of Oxford, Cornelius Varley, Thomas Webster, and Michael Sharp.⁵ The number of the group was limited to eight, but honorary members were later also allowed to attend. In addition, the evening's president could introduce one visitor, with this eventually increased to two. Although it is now most commonly known as the Chalon Sketching Society, it was often alluded to in its early

¹ A.E. Chalon et al., *Evening Sketches* (London, 1840).

² Partridge's group portrait (Fig. 2) explores this stage-like setting and emphasises the group's awareness of the performative space they were in during this particular evening meeting.

³ Chalon et al., 1840.

⁴ Sarah Uwins, *A Memoir of Thomas Uwins, RA*, 2 Vols. (London, 1858), Vol.1, p.164; and J.L. Roget, *A History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, 2 Vols. (London, 1891), Vol.1, p.280.

⁵ Roget, 1891, Vol.1, p.280. Henry Pierce Bone attended the second meeting.

formation as ‘The Bread and Cheese Society’, emphasising the group’s often forgotten social aspect.⁶ Though its rules broadly followed those of the Girtin Sketching Club, there were a few important differences. Perhaps most notably, there was an agreement not to meet during the summer sketching months, which may have been a factor in ensuring the group’s longevity.⁷

The club would meet every Wednesday evening between October (later November) and April at one of the members’ houses in rotation, with the host being the president for the evening. Every year, on Twelfth Night, the group would indulge ‘in a little extra merriment, with toasts and speeches around a Twelfth cake.’⁸ It was seen as such an important occasion that Uwins was to write that ‘Attendance on this day is the touchstone of our faith and devotedness to the cause of intellectual light.’⁹ An intriguing drawing by Charles Robert Leslie (Fig. 20), depicting the festivities of 1837, shows the Chalon brothers and Stanfield in fancy dress. According to an entry in the minute book, Stanfield showed ‘great talent in the varied arrangement of his dress during the evening with the scanty means at his disposal...As fun and frolic was the order of the night, the subject from the *Arabian Nights* was voted a bore, & by mutual agreement each Member was allowed to exercise his talent to his bent or humour.’¹⁰

There would also be an annual excursion at Midsummer to ‘something beautiful in nature or art, generally in both; and ended by a dinner at Richmond, Windsor, Hampton Court, or some other country retreat.’¹¹ Uwins also describes various trips to Somerset House, The Tower of London, the Zoological Gardens and Greenwich. The difference between this and the two previous Sketching Societies is that, while they also enjoyed excursions, these were sketching tours not group trips.¹² During an ordinary meeting, the group would convene at the host’s

⁶ Hesketh Hubbard, ‘Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design’, *The Old Water-colour Society’s Club*, Vol.24 (London, 1946), p.19.

⁷ A.P. Oppé, ‘Cotman and Sketching Society’, *The Connoisseur*, Vol.LXVII, No. 268 (1923), pp.189-198, see p.198.

⁸ Roget, 1891, Vol.1, p.280.

⁹ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, pp.199-200.

¹⁰ Quoted in Hubbard, 1946, p.29.

¹¹ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.164.

¹² For example, Sydney Kitson, *The Life of John Sell Cotman* (London, 1937), p.33, relates how Cotman and Munn went on a visit to North Wales together in 1802. Greg Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760-1824* (London, 2002a), p.182, notes that Havell, the two Varleys and Cristall also visited Wales that year.

house who would then give out ‘the subject to be treated after tea and coffee.’¹³ ‘The member at whose house the meeting was held provided paper stained on drawing frames, pencils and sepia. The subjects selected as a theme, chiefly from the ancient classics, were chosen by the host, who prepared written extracts, on separate slips, for the members, with each artist treating the subject according to his own conception.’¹⁴ After having tea and a discussion around the proposed theme, the artists commenced their operations at eight o’clock:

and at ten sat down to supper, a very simple meal at first, but as their appetites grew more fastidious it became so luxurious that laws were found necessary to restrain it. After supper, the drawings were collected by the president, and put up separately for each member to criticise.¹⁵

Absence without an adequate excuse was not allowed and, if this happened on three occasions, it would render the member ‘liable for expulsion.’¹⁶ Even though a member would sometimes have a good reason for not attending, they were still expected to contribute a drawing.¹⁷ This could have been the case when Stanfield had ‘professional duties as a scene-painter at Drury Lane’, and in ‘February, 1842 when he was painting his view of Pegwell Bay at the theatre and the following month when he was “supposed to be in attendance on Her Majesty” at the same place.’¹⁸

3.2 Members

We are fortunate that, with the Chalon Sketching Society, members and their invited guests were recorded in the group’s minute books that Hubbard faithfully reproduced (Tables 1-2).¹⁹

¹³ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.164.

¹⁴ *Somerset House Gazette*, 25 October 1823, pp.35-36. This is the earliest reporting of the Chalon Sketching Society known at present.

¹⁵ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.164. See Fig. 2 for Partridge’s interpretation.

¹⁶ Hubbard, 1946, p.20.

¹⁷ Jean Hamilton, *The Sketching Society, 1799-1851*, exh. cat. (London: VAM, 1971), p.10.

¹⁸ Quoted in Hubbard, 1946, p.21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.31-33.

| Foundation Members | |
|--|--------------------|
| Artist | Attendances |
| Alfred Edward Chalon 1808-1851 | 874 |
| John James Chalon 1808-1851 M | 971 |
| Michael W. Sharp 1808-1809 | 38 |
| Francis Stevens 1808-1813 M | 106 |
| William Turner of Oxford 1808 M | 13 |
| Cornelius Varley 1808-1813 M | 148 |
| Thomas Webster 1808-1809 | 51 |

Table 1. List of Foundation members of the Chalon Sketching Society with the years they attended. **M** denotes they were a member of the OWS.²⁰

| Later Members | |
|--|--------------------|
| Artists | Attendances |
| Henry Pierce Bone 1808-1823 | 369 |
| Robert Trewick Bone (no dates given but joined around c.1813 until at least the 1830s) | 412 |
| Joshua Cristall 1812-1832* M | 406 |
| John Samuel Hayward 1812-1820 | 172 |
| Charles Robert Leslie 1829-1851 | 383 |
| George Lewis 1812-1814 E | 61 |
| John Partridge 1830-1844 | 348 |
| Charles John Robertson 1813-1832 E | 125 |
| George Fennel Robson 1832*-1833 M | 33 |
| Clarkson Stanfield 1829?-1851 | 446 |
| James Stephanoff 1809- M | 17 |
| Samuel John Stump 1810-1849 E | 796 |
| Thomas Uwins 1831-1845 M | 377 |

Table 2. List of later members of the Chalon Sketching Society with the years they attended. **M** denotes a Member of the OWS, **E** denotes an exhibiter at the OWS, * indicates this member became an honorary member of the group at this date.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., p.31.

²¹ Ibid., p.31. Hubbard states that attendances did not include excursions, and there are gaps in the minute books between 21 June 1820 - 1 November 1822, and also 18 April 1828 - 6 November 1829 where other guests may

Even though the Chalon Sketching Society lasted for forty-three years, its membership was remarkably consistent with only twenty different figures associated. There was some continuity of membership from the Cotman Society, with Stevens and Webster (as well as, most likely, Cristall and Cornelius Varley) playing a role in the activities of both.²² Despite some confusion about his association with these different groups, Hayward was another member who helped to bridge the two, as evidenced by his acceptance letter from Munn in 1803 (Fig. 11). The last, and probably strongest, proof of some form of link between the various iterations of the Sketching Society is Munn, who was previously a member of both the Girtin and Cotman groups. Munn became a tutor to Stevens and even visited the newly formed Society six times between 1808 and 1810, making one wonder why he did not become a member himself.²³

Both tables emphasise the significant link between the OWS and the Chalon Sketching Society, with eight of the twenty members being involved in both.²⁴ This is particularly obvious with the early membership, showing that the Chalons had some of the most talented watercolourists of the day involved in the start-up of their group. Two of the members - Cristall and Robson - even became Presidents of the OWS.²⁵

Despite being well attended throughout the first decade of its existence, the Chalon group's dynamic changed in the 1820s with the retirement of Cristall to the country in 1823. This meant the Society was 'reduced to four members, the two Chalons, Stump and H.P. Bone.'²⁶ In a testament to the club's cohesion (and obvious friendships between members), the last new recruits were elected in 1813, when Robert Trewick Bone and Charles John Robertson joined. However, with just four associates the Society could easily have dwindled away, before (nearly 15 years later) Stanfield and Leslie were added to its ranks, becoming integral

have attended. Note that Hayward is known to have been a member of the group until at least the end of 1821, which is later than Hubbard puts it. See Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, pp.166-168 for a letter from Uwins to Hayward dated December 1821.

²² See C.M. Kauffman, *John Varley (1778-1842)* (London, 1984), p.17. Cristall, as ascertained earlier, has drawings in the VAM linking him to the Cotman group. Cornelius Varley was close friends with Cristall accompanying him on a tour of Wales in 1803. Furthermore, his brother John was a member of the earlier group, making it highly likely Cornelius participated, or visited the Cotman Sketching Society in some capacity.

²³ Hubbard, 1946, p.22.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Others were also regular exhibitors at the OWS.

²⁵ Robson was President in 1820, and Cristall held the Presidency three times (1816, 1819 and between 1821 and 1831).

²⁶ Hamilton, 1971, p.17.

members.²⁷ Partridge and Uwins were additionally elected to the group in 1830 and 1831, adding the longevity that helped the Sketching Society to continue until 1851.

A brief point should be made here about the gradual pull of the group towards the highest echelon of art: the RA. The founding of the OWS was largely due to the dismissiveness of watercolours at the RA, with works often being hung in other rooms away from the important oil paintings of the day and an intense debate raging over whether a watercolour was a painting or a drawing.²⁸ This influenced whether artists could be put forward for RA membership, as even in 1824 many Academicians and conservative critics still believed a watercolour was merely a drawing.²⁹ Conversely, it is easy to see why watercolourists stuck together and why the Sketching Society was dominated by leading practitioners of this medium in the early years of the nineteenth century. Therefore, with the addition of Stanfield, Leslie, Uwins and Partridge in the late 1820s and early 1830s, the Chalon group took a new direction, as all of these artists had strong links with the RA and were known for their proficiency in oil.³⁰ In fact, with John James Chalon joining his brother as an elected member of the RA in 1841, the Society could boast five Royal Academicians at one point.³¹ The merging of professional watercolourists and oil painters in the Sketching Society is intriguing at this point in history, as the RA members were clearly accomplished in both mediums. Arguably, these links increased the knowledge of the group's existence within the artistic world and certainly impacted upon who visited the Society. One can imagine that the Girtin Sketching Club would have been envious of the greater status the group was beginning to have.

3.3 Visitors

Emphasising its continuity with the Cotman Sketching Society, the evening host of the Chalon group was allowed to invite one visitor who did not necessarily have to be an artist,

²⁷ Hubbard, 1946, p.22. Hubbard did not know the dates of the artists joining, as there is a gap in the minute books.

²⁸ See Smith, 2002a, pp.33-44; and David Solkin (ed), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836* (New Haven and London, 2001).

²⁹ Smith, 2002a, pp.33-44.

³⁰ Roget, 1891, Vol.1, p.410.

³¹ Partridge never became an RA member despite his skill in oil. He did, however, exhibit at the RA until 1846 when he decided to never show his works there again because of a dispute over the hanging of two of his portraits.

but could attend as a guest. This allowed a myriad of attendees from various professions - including novelists, architects, patrons, engravers and diplomats - showing the group's diverse links to various parts of society in London during the first half of the nineteenth century (Table 3).

| Visitors to Sketching Society | |
|--|--------------------|
| Name of visitor | Attendances |
| Callcott, A. W. 1814 | 1 |
| Constable, J. 1830.31.33.35.36 | 5 |
| De Wint 1814 | 1 |
| Etty, W. 1819.30 | 2 |
| Fielding, C. V. 1810-13.17.19 | 10 |
| Harding, J. D. 1833.45 | 3 |
| Havell, Wm. 1809-14.30.31.33.34.38.39.41 | 37 |
| Hulmandel (surely this is Charles Hullmandel) 1820 | 1 |
| Irving, Washington 1830 | 1 |
| Knight, J. P. 1842.46 | 3 |
| Landseer, Ed. 1830-37.42.44 | 14 |
| Maclise, D. 1841.46 | 3 |
| Marryat, Capt. 1840 | 1 |
| Planché 1830.41 | 2 |
| Pugin, A. 1845 | 1 |
| Pyne 1808.10-12.28 | 23 |
| Roberts, David 1843 | 1 |
| Sheepshanks, Mr. 1833 | 1 |
| Stanfield, George | 42 |
| Turner 1809.12.13 | 6 |
| Varley, J. 1808-12 | 6 |
| Ward, E. M. 1844-48 | 22 |
| Wells, Mr. of Redleaf 1833 | 1 |
| Westmacott, R. Snr. 1834.35 | 4 |

Table 3. Selected list of visitors to the Chalon Sketching Society.³²

³² Hubbard, 1946, pp.31-33. Hubbard mainly used initials for first names making it difficult to identify guests. This was likely the way they were written in the minute books.

3.3.1 OWS and RA visitors

Prominent artists from both watercolour and oil backgrounds were the principal guests invited to the Society, and it is interesting to see the shift from watercolourists to RA members based on the dates given in the minute books. Beginning with the OWS, Havell was a constant visitor to the Chalon group and had a clear, well-documented friendship with the Varleys, Cristall and Uwins.³³ William Henry Pyne was also a founding member of the OWS and his visits to the Society explain his article on the group in the aforementioned *Somerset House Gazette*. Copley Fielding is perhaps one of the more important early guests, since he became President of the OWS in 1831 and remained in this position until 1855. Other artists linked to the OWS included James Duffield Harding and John Varley, with the latter most likely being a visitor of his brother, or of William Turner of Oxford (his tutee). The clear link to other associates of the OWS shows that the group was well established and known to contemporary watercolourists in the London art world of the period. This would have helped the Chalon Sketching Society to promote itself and also to keep abreast of current developments in art practice. Since the Society was, furthermore, a social group - and in the early 1810s many had links to the OWS - it is likely that the members (and visitors) would have talked about news regarding the medium of watercolour and, ultimately, the OWS. The role that the Sketching Society played in the development of the OWS - and other watercolour institutions - cannot be underestimated. A future line of enquiry could be whether its members were a distinct faction in the OWS like at the RA in the 1840s, and whether they presented themselves as a group through the exhibition pieces they submitted for display.³⁴

Particularly after 1828, the visitors from the RA began to increase, and those from the OWS declined. This was clearly linked to the new Academician members within the Chalon Sketching Society. The obvious exceptions were Callcott and Etty, who visited in 1814 and 1819, showing the connections the early group had to circles beyond the OWS.³⁵ There was,

³³ Smith, 2002a, p.182; and Uwins, 1858, Vol.2, pp.237-238.

³⁴ See *The Art Union*, February 1841, p.33. This is discussed in greater depth below. It shows the Sketching Society to have been a faction in the RA and certainly it was their influence that helped J.J. Chalon to be elected as a full Academician.

³⁵ Callcott, may have been a member of the Cotman Sketching Society. See P. G. Hamerton, 'John Sell Cotman' in P. G. Hamerton (ed), *The Portfolio: monographs on artistic subjects* (London, 1897), p.52.

furthermore, a mysterious ‘Turner’ who attended intermittently in the early 1810s who could conceivably be J.M.W. Turner, but was more likely to have been William Turner of Oxford.

Instead, the known marquee names who definitely visited the club were Constable and Landseer; in the latter case, this became quite regular in the 1830s.³⁶ In fact, many people probably thought Landseer was part of the Sketching Society itself with Queen Victoria, for one, listing him as a member.³⁷ Given that he visited on at least fourteen occasions, Landseer could possibly have been an honorary member. Stanfield’s friends, Roberts and Maclise, both came in the 1840s, with Roberts having just begun to release his lithographs from the Holy Land which almost instantaneously made him a household name. Other important Academicians who were known to be visitors included the narrative painter, Edward Matthew Ward, the sculptor, Richard Westmacott Snr, and the portrait painter, John Prescott Knight.³⁸

Lastly, the famous Gothic Revival architect, Augustus Pugin, was a noteworthy guest in 1845, probably also invited by Stanfield. Moreover, Pugin was a prominent convert to Catholicism in 1833, having a profound influence on Stanfield’s later conversion.³⁹ It would be intriguing to know if Pugin’s drawing from the evening is still in existence, or whether he did not participate in the sketching, which was sometimes the case for visitors.

Even as a small snapshot, it is clear that the Sketching Society must have been a known group amongst the Academy. It is worth considering their influence, as *The Art Union* was convinced that it was only because of ‘private interest, and not upon public grounds’ that J.J. Chalon was elected to the RA in 1841.⁴⁰ The columnist said, ‘he is, we believe a pleasant member of a club called “The Sketching Club,” consisting chiefly of leading members of the

³⁶ They both probably came as the guest of Leslie. He and Landseer had travelled to Scotland together and were good friends.

³⁷ From Queen Victoria’s diary when Mr. Lane lent a selection of drawings from A.E. Chalon’s Sketching Society collection. RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W) 23 March 1837 (Lord Esher’s Typescripts). Weblink: <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/search/displayItemFromId.do?FormatType=fulltextimgsrc&QueryType=articles&ItemID=18370323&volumeType=ESHER>, accessed 18/12/2019.

³⁸ Most likely this was Sir Richard Westmacott (1775-1856). It is confusing as his father, and his son, had the same names, with the latter becoming a Royal Academician.

³⁹ Pieter van der Merwe and Roger Took, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield, 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-painter, Royal Academician*, exh. cat. (Gateshead: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), p.147.

⁴⁰ *The Art Union*, February 1841, p.33.

Royal Academy, and who differ widely from the public and all other artists on the subject of Mr. J. J. Chalon's genius.'⁴¹ Even more scathingly, the article alleged that 'they have long resolved that he should be a member of the Royal Academy' and that 'there must be something very rotten in a system liable to so humiliating and injurious a procedure, which permits a few individuals, by acting in concert, to betray the interests and prejudice the charter of a Society.'⁴² Clearly, the Chalon group were a powerful force within the RA.

3.3.2 Other important visitors

Art collectors and patrons also graced the group, including John Sheepshanks in 1833 who presented his collection to the nation in 1857.⁴³ Robert Vernon - whose own collection is now split between the National Gallery and the Tate - very nearly visited on one occasion in the 1830s but, unfortunately, was 'unable to come.'⁴⁴ Lastly, a patron of Stanfield and Landseer, Mr. William Wells of Redleaf, who was himself also a prolific art collector, visited the group in 1833.⁴⁵ These help to show the close link between patrons and artists, and it must have been a unique opportunity for the former to see those they sponsored at work sketching original drawings. They may even have been given ideas for commissions from the resulting works, or possibly set the evening theme themselves.

Additionally, there were leading literary figures who visited, including the seafaring novelist Captain Frederick Marryat in 1840, a close family friend of Stanfield's.⁴⁶ James Planché, the dramatist and author of *The History of British Costumes*, and Charles Hullmandel, who was principally known as a lithographer, were also guests at the Society.⁴⁷ The diplomat and author, Washington Irving, came as a friend of Leslie in 1830, whilst he was in London helping to negotiate a trade agreement between the United States and the British West Indies, again highlighting the range of cultural figures associated with the Chalon group.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Works by Stanfield and Leslie are included in the Sheepshanks collection at the VAM.

⁴⁴ Hubbard, 1946, p.24.

⁴⁵ Van der Merwe and Took, 1979, p.147.

⁴⁶ Stanfield illustrated two books by Marryat: *Poor Jack* and *The Pirate and The Three Cutters*.

⁴⁷ Hubbard, 1946, p.24. Stanfield probably knew Planché from his time as a scene painter at Drury Lane, as Planché joined in 1828.

On an evening in March 1839, ‘Mr Havell, presumably William Havell’s brother Frederick James, the engraver, who made early experiments in photography, visited the Society and “treated the subject in Photogeny.”’⁴⁸ This resulted in his drawing looking ‘very beautiful on the wrong side.’ Then, ‘after supper he read a paper on “Photogeny”.’⁴⁹ The link with early photography is intriguing, as the book released by Joseph Hogarth in 1858 on the works of the Sketching Society included various photolithographic reproductions of evening drawings.⁵⁰ This highlights the Chalon group’s awareness of how the latest technological developments could help to promote their art. Indeed, there are other hints that members of the Society kept a close eye on innovations in reproductive technologies. Stanfield, for example, was friends with David Octavius Hill (an artist who showed a particular interest in photography). In October 1845, Hill gave Stanfield ‘a particularly fine album of which he wrote: “I sat up till nearly three o’clock looking over them. They are indeed most wonderful, and I would rather have a set of them than the finest Rembrandts I ever saw.”’⁵¹ This implies that Stanfield, at least, embraced this new method of reproduction. The intersection of art and reproductive technologies in the 1850s was being completely reshaped by photography. The introduction of photography may have led to traditional engravers feeling under threat, especially after seeing the Sketching Society’s 1858 photolithographs; a volume that *The Literary Gazette* praised for its faithful reproduction, their critic declaring themselves all but unable to distinguish between the plates and the original watercolours or prints.⁵² If the Society had continued beyond 1851 into the 1860s, the group may well have used this method on a far wider scale to make their works more extensively known in a similar manner, along the lines occurring across the Channel in France during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵³

⁴⁸ Hubbard, 1946, pp.24-25.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Joseph Hogarth, *Works of the Sketching Society* (London, 1858). See Chapter 5 for further detail on the photolithographs.

⁵¹ Helmut Gernsheim, *The history of photography: From the camera obscura to the beginning of the modern era*, 2nd ed. (Lausanne, 1969), p.167. This volume was a set of photographic reproductions containing over 100 calotypes ‘which have preserved their deep rich colours’, p.167. They displayed scenes mostly taken from the fishing village of Newhaven to the north of Edinburgh. The album today is in the Harry Ransom Center, Texas.

⁵² *The Literary Gazette*, 26 December 1857, p.1244.

⁵³ Stephen Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London, 2001).

The visitors outlined above are not exhaustive of all of those who visited the Society, and many other lesser-known friends and family members were also quite often present.⁵⁴ The main point to take away is the diverse mixture of acquaintances the Chalon group had from all corners of London society. It certainly was not a secretive club, especially in light of the speculation in the press around John James Chalon's election to the RA, yet it was exclusive in the sense that you had to know one of the members to be invited yourself. There cannot have been many groups active in London in the first half of the nineteenth century who could have boasted such connections.

3.4 The Geographies of the Sketching Society

Having established the various members and visitors to the Society, this sub-section will explore the geographies of the group. This will help to place the Chalon club within its social and artistic context. The members' residences were important in this respect, as this was where evening gatherings were held, and the drawings were produced. But, a mapping of the exhibition spaces used by the group is no less significant.⁵⁵ Geographical proximity was one of the key conditions for success among artists, writers and other cultural movers and shakers in early nineteenth-century London, with common meeting places and residences helping to facilitate professional and social interaction and cross-fertilisation. By retracing the geographies of the Sketching Society, in respect to Pall Mall and the wider London art world in this period as well as the broader urban expansion of the period, we can gain an insight into factors that played a central role in shaping the cohesiveness, identity and longevity of the group.

Three dates have been chosen for examination: 1831, 1837 and 1851. These cover the last two decades of the Society and are of particular significance. The first is important, because it was at this point the club came to be increasingly linked to the RA, marking a new era for the group.⁵⁶ Secondly, the year of 1837 shows obvious changes in the living conditions of certain

⁵⁴ For example, George Clarkson Stanfield, the son of Clarkson Stanfield visited 42 times.

⁵⁵ See Rosie Dias, "'A world of pictures': Pall Mall and the topography of display, 1780-99' in Ogborn, M., and Withers, C. (eds), *Georgian geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 2004), pp.92-113.

⁵⁶ Only A.E. Chalon and Leslie were full Royal Academicians in 1831. Stanfield was elected in 1835, Uwins in 1838 and J.J Chalon in 1841.

members as they gravitated towards the newly located RA.⁵⁷ Finally, 1851 will be examined, because this was the apparent concluding year of the club and the date of the first of Hogarth's retrospective exhibitions.⁵⁸

Since this sub-section focuses also on 'display' and is intrinsically linked to the geographies of the group, a brief point will be made on the sketches produced at Society meetings, when appropriate. '[E]ach member had to have the drawings' from their evenings 'bound in book form, or kept in a portfolio for review by the Society at the first meeting of the following season.'⁵⁹ This meant that there were potentially two places of display - the evening where they were produced, and subsequently, the first evening of the new Sketching Society season. Unfortunately, many of the drawings have not remained in folios and, without the minute books of the group, it is difficult to decipher which drawings are from which members' evenings as president. There are two ways around this which could be fruitful in the years to come: analysing auction catalogues from the members studio sales, and carefully studying the inscriptions on the back of each drawing.

3.4.1 1831

During the early 1820s, membership began to dwindle in the Chalon Sketching Society and there may have been the thought of stopping the group altogether. Instead, it was reinvigorated by new members, who were all regular exhibitors at the RA. This turning point in the group's history happened in 1831, since this was when Uwins joined who, surprisingly, was the final artist to be invited to the Society (there were no new additions in the last two decades). The link to the OWS and its watercolour beginnings never left the group, with Society drawings continuing to be in the form of sepia and watercolour. However, the impact of artists who generally specialised in oil paintings must have been significant.⁶⁰ The RA itself was still based at Somerset House in 1831, geographically over a mile away from the homes of many of the Sketching Society members, with the exception of Stanfield (Table 4 and Fig. 21). The OWS, on the other hand, had recently relocated to 6 Pall Mall East in 1823

⁵⁷ In the east wing of the new National Gallery in Trafalgar Square.

⁵⁸ *The Athenaeum*, 11 January 1851, pp.55-56 commenting on 'Mr Hogarth's' exhibition on the Sketching Society at 5 Haymarket. This is most likely the Joseph Hogarth who published *Works of the Sketching Society* (London, 1858).

⁵⁹ Hubbard, 1946, p.20.

⁶⁰ The working methods of oil painters and watercolourists would have varied. Stanfield, for example, often used bodycolour in his watercolours to highlight areas in his work in a similar manner to Paul Sandby.

- where it was to remain for 115 years - right in the centre of the London art world, and almost on the doorstep for most of the Chalon group.⁶¹

The main geographical observation from 1831 is the close proximity between the Sketching Society members, as the longest distance appears to have been between Stanfield and Leslie. This would have made evening meetings easier to attend, and perhaps offers an explanation for the Society's durability. The key anomaly is the location of the RA, and if the club had been around 30-40 years earlier, this would have illustrated Dias' argument about the 'conflict between Academy and other spaces of artistic production.'⁶² However, this had become a more complex issue by the 1830s, as various venues of display outside of the RA had become artistic forums.⁶³ The Sketching Society had yet to organise an exhibition of its works but, given the circles in which they moved, it can be presumed that more people within the art world, and beyond, were learning of the club. For now, the geographies of display for the Society would have been an intimate affair, with just the members and their visitors being party to this set of performative spaces. Simply put, the Chalon group achieved the desire of artists to be able to meet together in an informal setting, to sketch, and to discuss current affairs in the art world and society.

| Artist | Address |
|--|---|
| Alfred Edward Chalon and John James Chalon | 42 Great Marlborough Street |
| Robert Trewick Bone | 15 Berner's Street, Oxford Street |
| Charles Robert Leslie | 41 Portman Place, Edgware Road |
| John Partridge | 21 Lower Brook Street, Grosvenor Square |
| Clarkson Stanfield | 14 Buckingham Street, Adelphi |
| Samuel John Stump | 7 Cork Street, Burlington Gardens |
| Thomas Uwins | 25 Percy Street* |

Table 4. List of addresses of Chalon Sketching Society in 1831. * Uwins did not exhibit at the RA in 1831, his address is taken from the 1832 exhibition.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Roget, 1891, Vol.1, pp.423-433.

⁶² Dias, 2004, p.97.

⁶³ For example, the OWS and the British Institution which were in the Pall Mall area.

⁶⁴ *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCCXXXI, The sixty-third* (London: The Royal Academy, 1831); and *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCCXXXII, The sixty-fourth* (London: The Royal Academy, 1832) for Uwins' address.

Smith believes that the year 1824 marked the ‘point that the key if unspoken, goal of professionalisation, the creation and control of a significant market, was linked to a coherent public promotion of watercolour as an independent practice.’⁶⁵ Since many of the earlier members of the Chalon group would have gone through this process of professionalisation in their chosen medium, it could explain why the group suddenly had a more explicit link to the RA through new Society members, finally feeling more confident in London’s professional art world. The Chalon Sketching Society itself must have been a unique art club in 1831, as it encompassed both specialist watercolourists and now oil painters. The other main geographical point to be made is that the Society members all lived in the same radius, regardless of their link to the OWS or RA, showing that Pall Mall was a pulling factor for any involved within the art profession of this period. Outlining the rise of the Chalon group was the connection to leading practitioners of the day, such as Turner and Constable, with the latter being an evening guest in 1831. However, beyond art and literary circles, the group were most likely less known. The geographies of display for the group’s work from the Society would have been predominantly at their own residences. Nevertheless, this may have been more complex. Members were exhibiting at the main shows of the RA and the British Institution, and - though it would require further research - there may have been a group dynamic at play in their choice of paintings shown at these events.

Kennedy helps to illustrate a specific evening, as she focused on a set of drawings completed on ‘Feby 5th 1831’ with each individually being inscribed ‘Fourth night J. Partridge’.⁶⁶ John Masey Wright’s picture (Fig. 22 and Fig. 23 for a close up of the inscriptions) is intriguing, as he was a visitor to the Society four times and often guest drawings have been lost without a trace.⁶⁷ Fig. 23 shows the text that Wright was using for the evening ‘Bottom - Why do they run away? This is knavery of them to make me afeard’ and, interestingly, each member present used a slightly different passage from Act 3 of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.⁶⁸ This was not always the case, with the members often having to interpret how to draw the same

⁶⁵ Smith, 2002a, pp.4-5.

⁶⁶ Judith Kennedy, ‘Bottom Transformed by the Sketching Society’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.47, No.3, (Autumn 1996), pp.306-318. Partridge would always include the night of the drawing which referred to ones he hosted; therefore, this set was completed on the fourth evening that Partridge acted as the club’s president since he became a member in 1830.

⁶⁷ Wright visited in 1831, 1833, 1834 and 1846. Hubbard referred to a Wright, J.W. but he must have meant Wright, J.M. as there were no other active artists in that period with those initials and it corresponds with the meeting at Partridge’s house in 1831. See Hubbard, 1946, p.33

⁶⁸ See Kennedy, 1996, p.308 for the other passages used.

verse or theme. The freedom here provides further insight into the artistic minds of the group itself. In this set, only Bone, Wright and Leslie depicted Titania; John James Chalon alone included Oberon, and solely Stump emphasised a moonlit landscape. They all, however, focused on ‘confrontation and on terror comically portrayed’, which suggests that they may have discussed this before commencing their drawings.⁶⁹

The above set were undoubtedly produced at Partridge’s residence - 21 Lower Brook Street. When Wright and the members had finished, they would have displayed their drawings in a similar manner to Fig. 2 before carrying out a critique of the evening’s work. The only difference is that Partridge’s group drawing from 1836 depicts Robertson, Robson and Cristall instead of Wright. Nevertheless, this helps to show that each evening would have had a different dynamic depending on who was able to attend and who was invited as a guest. Since all the Sketching Society meetings were held in the evenings, the layout of the houses regarding light-facing rooms would have been irrelevant as candlelight would have been the only option. However, Partridge’s painting of the group helps to show that the spaces being used, were large enough to fit many guests. This helps to emphasise that to be a member of the group, both culturally and socially, the artist’s residence had to be able accommodate a sizeable gathering in comfort and style. Indeed, it is clearly a well-appointed room, fashionably and tastefully furnished, that complements the kind of leisurely and refined activity taking place at 21 Lower Brook Street of an evening. It is the kind of space where the upper echelons of Victorian society might feel at ease visiting.

3.4.2 1837

The year of 1837 was significant on many levels for the Sketching Society. Firstly, the RA finally moved closer to Pall Mall by taking up the east wing of the new National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. Secondly, the large cultural change was the coronation of Queen Victoria in June. Together with her husband, they were important patrons of the arts and it is not surprising that they came across the Sketching Society, as we shall see later. Thirdly, although most members were still in the same residence, Stanfield, Uwins and Leslie (after his return from America) had all moved further afield, changing the geographies of the group’s meetings (Table 5 and Fig. 24). For example, Stanfield now had over a mile to travel

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.312.

to any other member's house, whilst Leslie was equally living a fair distance from Pall Mall in St John's Wood.

| Artist | Address |
|--|--|
| Alfred Edward Chalon and John James Chalon | 42 Great Marlborough Street |
| Charles Robert Leslie | 12 Pineapple Place, Hamilton Terrace |
| John Partridge | 21 Lower Brook Street |
| Clarkson Stanfield | 36 Mornington Crescent, Hampstead Road |
| Samuel John Stump | 7 Cork Street |
| Thomas Uwins | 10 Paddington Green |

Table 5. List of addresses of Chalon Sketching Society in 1837.⁷⁰

The link with the RA was firmly established as a result of Stanfield being elected in 1835 and Uwins on the cusp of becoming a member in 1838. The visitors to the group became ever more varied, with an increasing amount being fellow Royal Academicians. The Chalon Sketching Society, after its new wave of members, had settled once again, and the choice of evening themes began to develop in new areas.⁷¹ The use of words or phrases with multiple meanings, which afforded opportunities to portray everyday subjects in a variety of imaginative ways, was becoming ever more common.⁷² This is particularly obvious from the 1830s onwards, with each member often leaning towards a subject they specialised in when given this freedom. This allowed for a greater variation of drawings, and tested the imagination of the members to an even higher level. In the next chapter, an evening from Partridge's presidency in 1837, themed 'A Fall', is reconstructed, emphasising the different directions each artist took for their sketches.

⁷⁰ The addresses are taken from the ones listed for the artists in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCCXXXVII, The sixty-ninth* (London: The Royal Academy, 1837).

⁷¹ See the next chapter for an in depth look at the role of themes in the Society.

⁷² Words and phrases such as 'Consultation', 'Contemplation', 'A Triumph', and 'A Fall' offered opportunities for the artists to be creative in their works. See Chapter 4 for more examples.

3.4.3 1851

Supposedly, the Sketching Society was brought to an end on Friday 25 April 1851, with the four remaining members, the Chalon brothers (who hosted the evening at 10 Wimpole street), Stanfield and Leslie, addressing a fitting theme, ‘What you will’.⁷³ With Uwins being the last newly elected member in 1831, the state of the Society at the beginning of the 1850s was one of almost resignation to the fact that the group would have to finally disband: the Chalons had reached their seventies, and neither Stanfield nor Leslie were getting any younger. Moreover, they now lived further apart (Table 6 and Fig. 25).⁷⁴ Stanfield’s move to Hampstead (due to health reasons) was indicative of the shift away from the traditional centre of the art world in London but was also in line with wider societal developments. The professional classes were moving away from urban centres for healthier climes, while the shift to the suburbs also saw the growth of certain cultural or artistic quarters.⁷⁵

| Artist | Address |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Alfred Edward Chalon and James John Chalon | 10 Wimpole Street, Cavendish Square |
| Charles Robert Leslie | 2 Abercorn Place, St John’s Wood |
| Clarkson Stanfield | The Green Hill, Hampstead |
| Sketching Society Exhibition | 5 Haymarket |

Table 6. List of addresses of Chalon Sketching Society in 1851.⁷⁶

Unfortunately, the works from the final meeting are unknown at present, but the exhibition in 1851 included a catalogue, which helps us to know which evenings were displayed.⁷⁷ In a

⁷³ Hubbard, 1946, p.30. George Clarkson Stanfield was a guest for this evening. *The Art Journal*, June 1851, p.178, recorded the remaining three members as the Chalons and Stanfield, which raises the possibility that the group continued to carry on at least in the short term.

⁷⁴ Note, Partridge stopped attending the Society in 1844, Uwins in 1845 and Stump in 1849, therefore these members have not been included in the map. There is no certainty as to when Cristall last visited the group. However, we know that he attended at least until 12 April 1844 through a set of drawings from an evening at which Partridge was president (held at the VAM with the theme ‘In the Style of’). All four however were integral members in the last few decades - despite Cristall’s long absence from London - with Stump attending 796 meetings since joining in 1810 (putting him only behind the Chalon brothers in terms of attendance and commitment to the club).

⁷⁵ See Kit Wedd, Lucy Peltz and Cathy Ross, *Creative Quarters: The Art World in London 1700-2000*, exh. cat. (London: Museum of London, 2000) for more information on artistic gatherings such as the Holland Park Circle.

⁷⁶ The addresses are taken from the ones listed for the artists in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCCLI, The eighty-third* (London: The Royal Academy, 1851).

stark contrast to 1831 and 1837, the Society was beginning to be recognised and the opportunities for the display of their work had increased vastly. Through the 1840 folio released by the club, the discerning public were finally able to see sketches by the group.⁷⁸

Further displays of the Chalon Sketching Society's works were held in the 1840s, as we shall see below, raising the question as to why this was not done before. Since the Society was still very much an informal gathering, perhaps the members did not want to be judged on sketches that they had completed in only a couple of hours. Also, without external scrutiny of their drawings, this allowed them the freedom to experiment. Since the remaining four members were all firmly established in the RA by 1851, the connections to the London art world would have been particularly high. This, in turn, would help to explain the increased visibility of the group when their sketches were finally exhibited for the public in Pall Mall.⁷⁹ The group surely knew they were finishing in April of that year, making the exhibition a fitting tribute. Perhaps the group, furthermore, did not want their work to go to waste and desired the public to have a chance to see some of their completed pictures.

3.4.4 Queen Victoria

The Sketching Society's most famous 'patron' was Queen Victoria. According to *The Athenaeum*, on:

two memorable occasions the Queen selected the subjects for the evening - Desire and Elevation, - subsequently did the members the honour of offering to buy a series of sketches by them. This being contrary to a regulation of the club forbidding the sale of sketches, the artists in confederation instantly forwarded a set of drawings to Windsor for her Majesty's acceptance.⁸⁰

This acknowledgement of the Queen's link to the Chalon group from a contemporary newspaper indicates the press' familiarity with the club. It may have been the members themselves who informed the papers of these occasions, as it was clearly the highlight of

⁷⁷ Joseph Hogarth, *Exhibition of the Works by the Sketching Society*, exh. cat. (London, 1851).

⁷⁸ A copy of the 1840 folio is still held in the Royal Collection, which must have been presented to Queen Victoria.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 5, for an in-depth exploration of the 1851 exhibitions.

⁸⁰ *The Athenaeum*, 2 January 1858, p.22.

their history. It is also unlikely to be a coincidence that Uwins' *Memoir* was released in the same year as the article above. The extended description of the connection in the *Memoir* was furthermore mirrored in the minute books.⁸¹

The Art Journal describes the 'interest taken by Her Majesty in the Sketching Society' and her wish 'no doubt, of testing the ingenuity of the painters.'⁸² In fact, they go on to say that, when the theme 'Elevation' was chosen, 'to make assurance doubly sure, the Queen sent a special messenger to the house at which the Society was assembled, who commenced the subject selected by the Queen at seven o'clock, and remained until ten, when he returned to the palace with the sketches.'⁸³ Evidently, the Queen was excited to see the drawings. They must have satisfied her, as 'after inspecting and expressing her admiration of successive folios of Drawings, Her Majesty expressed her desire to purchase a drawing from each member.'⁸⁴ The group decided to each make a gift to the Queen instead of infringing on their rules of selling the sketches. Prince Albert then told Uwins how the Queen 'values very much' his drawing of Cupid and Psyche that had been given to her.⁸⁵ Later, when he was working on a fresco in the Pavilion at Buckingham Palace, the Queen found Uwins and said, 'I owe my acquaintance with your works to Mr. Partridge. I am anxious to express to you how much pleasure I have received from the drawings of the Sketching Society, and how much I value the present which has been sent to me of a specimen of the talents of each member.'⁸⁶ Uwins' response was equally important: 'I replied that Her Majesty's approbation and acceptance of the works of the Society was the greatest honour that had been conferred on it during the long period of its existence. I said, moreover, that I would immediately communicate to the members this repeated expression of Her Majesty's most gracious favour.'⁸⁷

Cristall was the fortunate member to have been president for the first theme, 'Desire', which was set by the Queen on 7 January 1842. Partridge was president for the above outlined

⁸¹ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, pp. 201-205; and Hubbard, 1946, pp.25-27.

⁸² *The Art Journal*, June 1851, p.179.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Hubbard, 1946, pp.26.

⁸⁵ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.205. It is worth considering the fact that this appears about 15 years after the encounter with the Queen, and Uwins was particularly excited about this event. However, he may have recorded these events just after they took place and other sources including Queen Victoria's diary confirm the acquaintance with the Sketching Society.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

second evening on 26 March 1842. All members were present at both meetings except for Leslie, who according to the Society's minute books, missed the first, which the group lamented.⁸⁸ For the first evening, Partridge arrived directly from Windsor and 'brought an envelope sealed with the arms of the Queen, enclosing a command from Her Majesty, that the subject for the evening should be 'Desire,' written in her own hand, now fixed in the Society's book.'⁸⁹ Uwins' *Memoir* goes on to say that 'The president (Cristall) will be delighted to possess a set made under such novel circumstances.'⁹⁰ Since neither set of drawings were sold to Queen Victoria, both Cristall and Partridge presumably kept the prestigious sketches.

The drawings from the evening theme 'Elevation' are found in the 1851 exhibition catalogue and later at Partridge's studio sale in 1874.⁹¹ We also know that, since Partridge was president, the drawings would have been produced at 21 Brook Street, at Grosvenor's Square. This must be a renaming of the same address at which he was located in 1831 and 1837.⁹² A letter from Partridge to Stanfield, dated 28 March 1842 (two days after the evening where Her Majesty set the theme 'Elevation'), gives another indication of the display of these drawings. Partridge writes, 'The Queen desired the drawings should be sent to her room and they are still there', and continuing, 'you will be glad to hear that the drawings were received with great eclat.'⁹³ Partridge also believed, 'I think I shall have a command for next Friday', and, 'I shall let you know in good time to communicate with the Society if a subject should be provided for us.'⁹⁴ This revelation has not been previously discussed, but it is fascinating that the Queen was seemingly close to setting further themes for the group. To further validate this letter, Queen Victoria wrote in her diary on the same day, 'We looked at some very pretty sketches, which Partridge left for us, - some by himself, Stanfield, Uwins, the 2 Chalons, Landseer, &c.'⁹⁵ It is unfortunate that we do not have these drawings in a public

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.203.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.203

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.203

⁹¹ Hogarth, 1851. Partridge's studio sale was held at Christie, Manson and Woods, 15 June 1874.

⁹² We know Partridge's address in 1842 from: *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCCXLII, The seventy-fourth* (London: The Royal Academy, 1842).

⁹³ John Partridge to Clarkson Stanfield. 28 March 1842, *Westminster Catholic Archives*, series 20, item no.11. Note this is a typescript by Fr. Francis Stanfield, one of Clarkson Stanfield's sons, who had access to the original letters.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ From Queen Victoria's diary. RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W) 28 March 1842 (Princess Beatrice's copies). Weblink:

collection today, as they would be a focal point for any exhibition.⁹⁶ However, we do know from an annotated catalogue, that a ‘Hogarth’ was the purchaser of the drawings for ‘Elevation’ from Partridge’s sale, and this most likely was Joseph Hogarth.⁹⁷ *The Literary Gazette* describes Uwins’ drawing as being *The Raising of the Serpent* and Partridge depicting another religious scene with *The Elevation of the Cross*.⁹⁸ Uwins’ *Memoir* shows that, when the Queen selected a work from each member to keep, for Alfred Edward Chalon’s she chose his drawing of *Elevation* which portrayed ‘Love elevated by the Graces’.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, the current whereabouts of the drawings from the Queen’s first theme ‘Desire’ are unknown, but we do know that Stanfield’s version was chosen to be kept by Her Majesty, although there is no description of what it illustrated.¹⁰⁰

Finally, since the Queen was a keen amateur artist, it was a shame that she did not choose a further subject for an evening theme, or even attend the Society as a visitor. However, it is easy to imagine her taking an interest in the 1851 exhibition, with a high chance that she visited herself. Either way, her connection was an illustrious part of the Society’s history.

3.4.5 The Graphic Society and the Hampstead Fine Art Conversazione

The first known exhibition of any drawings by the Chalon club was held at the Graphic Society in May 1840, which was most likely linked to the folio released also that year. The critic for *The Literary Gazette* described it as:

[a] display of numerous drawings and sketches: the chief contributors were Mr. Stanfield and Mr. Uwins. Many beautiful drawings and studies by the former, made

<http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/search/displayItemFromId.do?FormatType=fulltextimgsrc&QueryType=articles&ItemID=18420328&volumeType=PSBEA>, accessed 13/2/2019.

⁹⁶ None have been catalogued on the Royal Collection website, and after contacting one of the archivists, they are not recorded in the collection at present. However, it is very unlikely they were not kept by the Queen and since they would have been in a folio, they may come to light at some point in the future.

⁹⁷ The set ‘Elevation’ was split into two lots (40 and 41) in Partridge’s studio sale, with Hogarth buying both. His strong links to the group would have made these prized drawings to him, and it is hoped they will appear again one day.

⁹⁸ *The Literary Gazette*, 10 May 1851, p.334. These themes were recurring ones in the Chalon Sketching Society, with earlier examples in the VAM Hayward collection from the 1810s of ‘Moses and the brazen serpent’ and also ‘The Descent from the Cross’ (see Hamilton, 1971, illustration 39).

⁹⁹ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.204.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

during his recent journey in Italy; and of the latter, were some fine drawings by the old masters - drawings made by the Sketching Society, and numerous drawings and studies of his own.¹⁰¹

The Graphic Society was founded in 1833 by the artist and inventor William Brockedon and had, in its original form, 100 members from various classes of professional artists. They met six times a year, once a month between January and June, with the known venue of the group in 1840 being ‘the rooms of the Dilettanti Society, at the Thatched House, St James’s street’.¹⁰² This would make sense as roughly twenty-five members were from the RA and it would have been easy for them to meet, since St James’s Street is adjacent to Pall Mall and the art centre in London. Perhaps for the first time, the Chalon Sketching Society were able to make fellow professionals outside of their immediate circles aware of their work.

A further display occurred at the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione in April 1848. Various works from the Society were exhibited, including ones by Stanfield, Leslie, Uwins and the Chalons. *The Athenaeum* describes some of the sketches as being ‘old acquaintances, – others were new; but all were interesting. The new included a large collection of sketches bought by Mr. Gibbons, of the late Mr. Cristall, the artist.’¹⁰³ The Conversazione met monthly in the winter, and sometimes spring, at the Assembly Rooms in Hampstead. Here, they provided lectures and art exhibitions, which were often open to residents and were free of charge.¹⁰⁴ The lectures included scientific research, the arts and topics of a more general interest.¹⁰⁵ It is

¹⁰¹ *The Literary Gazette*, 16 May 1840, p.315.

¹⁰² See *The Art Union*, April 1839, p.42 for a lengthy overview of the group and its origin.

¹⁰³ *The Athenaeum*, 1 April 1848, p.344. This set of drawings helped to form some of the 1851 exhibition.

¹⁰⁴ See *The Athenaeum*, 25 December 1847, p.1329; and Sydney Mayle, *The Hampstead Annual* (London: 1900), pp.139-144 for more information on the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione which ran from 1846 to 1872. *The Athenaeum*, 25 April 1857, p.538 reported a weekly meeting at the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione that ‘will be devoted wholly to the works of the two Chalons. The Assembly Rooms will be kept open for a week, so as to give the public an opportunity of seeing these painters at their best.’ This was held three years before Alfred Edward Chalon’s death, so he undoubtedly chose the pictures for the exhibition and highly likely this included Sketching Society drawings. However, because this was not explicitly denoted, it has been mentioned here in the footnotes as a possible geographical place of display.

¹⁰⁵ The British Museum have a set of ‘Sketches Printed at the Second Hampstead Conversazione’ from 1846. This evening included a lecture on the Anastatic printing process, before several artists produced pictures of landscapes, figure studies and buildings, that were later turned into prints, which the British Museum now holds (museum number: 1933,0619.4.1-7). Those present at the meeting included the artists: Frank Topham, William Edward Dighton and Sir John Teniel; the printmakers: George Harrison, Basil Holmes, Nathaniel Holmes and Francis Kilburne; and the architect Charles Robert Cockerell (who was serving as the group’s chairman at this point). The make-up of the known visitors in 1846 shows that many of the group were professionals.

unknown if any of the Sketching Society were direct members of the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione, though given his address close-by to the Assembly Rooms in 1848, it seems likely that Stanfield was perhaps the architect behind the display. Indeed, his son George Clarkson Stanfield was to become an important supporter of the group along with John Ruskin.¹⁰⁶

3.5 Chapter summary

Through exploring a myriad of events in the Chalon Sketching Society's history, this section has helped to unveil areas of the group's activities which have gone hitherto overlooked including the geographies of the club. They have shown how the shift away from the OWS towards the RA was subtle at first, but became more obvious from the 1830s onwards. This unquestionably had an impact on the group's geographies of display, as from the 1840s they started to publish some of their drawings, and exhibitions were finally staged (albeit as informal ones before 1851). Furthermore, this chapter has shown how the geographies of the Society changed during the three different time frames examined, while the cultural and social aims remained the same. This could be explained by the geographical proximity of the residences of the members up until around 1831, which helped to initially establish the group and their strong bond together. Although the geographical distance between members increased temporally, the initial unity and cohesiveness from a regular social routine between November and April almost certainly helped the Society to survive for a remarkable length of time. Incidentally, the aspirations and ambitions of the group increased with the publications they released, and this will be returned to in following sections.

In her analysis of the topographies of display in the London art world of decades either side of 1800, Dias has argued that 'the promise of an artistic and ideological space beyond the Academy would remain with artists and the public for some time to come'.¹⁰⁷ The antagonism noted here had lessened by the mid-nineteenth century, at least in the case of the Chalon Sketching Society, as the group had gravitated towards academic acceptance. There were however various other exhibition venues available to the Society and even ones away from the centre of the art world, such as at the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione. The

¹⁰⁶ See Mayle, 1900, pp.139-144.

¹⁰⁷ Dias, 2004, p.111.

gradual assimilation of these venues gave ever further opportunities for new ventures and places of display. Dias states that ‘the discursive enterprise’ which the artists involved in her study collectively formed ‘could only be sustained through a spatial process, by exploiting the possibilities of both the exhibition space and the street.’¹⁰⁸ This would make the Chalon club an interesting case study for looking beyond Dias into the next decades of the early nineteenth-century art world. This is because the Society, through its use of exhibitions and printed folios, helped to expand the audiences that could see their works. That being said, the informal nature of the Sketching Society was of a different order to the kinds of commercially orientated, extra-academic practices that Dias surveys. Beyond their professional daily lives at the OWS, the RA, and other artistic endeavours, the Society was sustained through commitment, and ultimately friendships, rather than any financial imperative.

Through developing an understanding of the temporal changes in members’ places of residence, tracing the rise of the professionalisation of watercolour artists and also cultural changes within London (such as the coronation of Queen Victoria), this chapter has paved the way to explore the use of themes at Society evenings. Although having brushed the surface of thematic choices, the following section will look specifically to see if the choices demonstrate any continuity, or if there was rather a gradual change over time.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 4 - Themes

The original title for the Chalon group, ‘The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design’, seems far grander than the name later attributed to it and gives a greater sense of the aims of its founding members. The terms ‘epic’ and ‘pastoral’ referred to types of landscape, which were far more complicated than the group potentially originally believed. ‘Epic’, most likely, was seen to be linked to historical subjects and, therefore, to an elevated form of art, whereas ‘pastoral’ landscapes though often derived from classical literary sources may have been thought of as essentially decorative or lacking in that seriousness of tone associated with the former category. Undoubtedly, since the Chalon group began in 1808, the members would have been distinctly aware of Turner’s *Liber Studiorum*, which commenced publication the previous year. Here, ‘the various types of landscape were as sharply defined as the various types of verse, and painters understood the rules that governed the production of a “sublime” or “picturesque” landscape and welcomed prescribed limitations.’¹ In this work, Turner made use of both the ‘Pastoral’ and ‘Epic Pastoral’. John Varley had also ‘used the distinction between Epic and Pastoral in his treatise, *The Principles of Landscape Design*.’² Yet, in the reprinted and final version, Varley extended ‘his terminology to include Marine and Elegant Pastoral’, indicating the complicated nature of placing landscape works under specific headings.³ While this all indicates just how varied landscape art had become, it also marks it out as a field of uncertain definition and contested meaning. Again, in this, we might understand the Sketching Society as a forum in which such categories were debated and defined.

The Chalon group, in choosing their elaborate name, would have tried to make it clear to outsiders what the group initially stood for. It can be argued that the original name also links closely to the preceding Girtin and Cotman Sketching Societies, with Girtin’s group focusing on ‘Historic Landscape’ drawn from ‘Poetick passages’, and Cotman’s following suit to a

¹ Hesketh Hubbard, ‘The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design’, *The Old water-colour Society’s Club*, Vol.24 (London, 1946), pp.19-33, see p.19.

² Sam Smiles, *Eye Witness: Artists and Visual Documentation in Britain 1770-1830* (London, 2000), p.149. For further information on Turner’s project see Gillian Forrester, *Turner’s ‘Drawing Book’: The Liber Studiorum*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2000).

³ Smiles, 2000, p.149.

large extent.⁴ It is only later, from the 1830s onwards, that the Society changed direction. Alfred Edward Chalon himself weighed in on these matters in a letter he sent to Joseph Hogarth, which was reproduced in the Society's 1858 publication:

In Compliance with your request for an account of the Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design (as it was first named), to accompany your publication of some of its productions, most of which are neither Epic or Pastoral, as we had become less exclusive in regard to subjects and more amusing, I send you the following particulars.⁵

This explains why it can be difficult to tell whether the group had any procedure for themes used, as Chalon admits this changed with time. The 'amusing' aspect he picks out is interesting because this is not a characteristic of the group that is particularly well known. But it became more prominent from the 1830s and is obvious in examples such as his brother's *A Fall* (Fig. 26). Intriguingly, even though Chalon acknowledged that the group had broadened its scope, various members still completed drawings which might quite easily be reconciled with those aims expressed under the original title. Nevertheless, the informal nature of the club surely would have allowed evening conversation on current affairs in culture, politics and art, which in turn would have influenced the themes chosen.

Uwins' *Memoir* is particularly useful regarding themes chosen, with subjects being categorised into 'scriptural, romantic, dramatic, epic, pastoral, and miscellaneous; the last divide into definite and indefinite.'⁶ Another theme Uwins saw as separate was 'Imitation', which was a chance for the group to imitate 'any painter of established reputation, ancient or modern[,] living, or dead.'⁷ Sometimes this would come under the theme 'In the Style of', which was to become an especially popular choice in the later years of the Society. The headings 'romantic' and 'dramatic' cover a vast stretch of the group's work, with themes or motifs deriving from classical and contemporary literature, historical events and Shakespeare being used the most. 'Epic' was described in Uwins' memoir as a theme selected from or

⁴ This inscription is on the back of a drawing by Francia done on the first night of the original Girtin Sketching Club on the 20th May 1799 and is referred to extensively by David Winter, 'Girtin's Sketching Club', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol.37, No. 2 (February 1974), pp.123-149.

⁵ Joseph Hogarth, *Works of the Sketching Society* (London, 1858), unpaginated, introduction.

⁶ Sarah Uwins, *A Memoir of Thomas Uwins, RA*, 2 Vols. (London, 1858), Vol.1, p.188.

⁷ *Ibid.*

associated with ‘a poem written in heroic verse, whose subject is always a hero or some great person’, with *Paradise Lost*, *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* being exemplary.⁸ A ‘pastoral’, instead according to Uwins, ‘speaks for itself’, with works by Cristall given as examples.⁹

While the headings for themes outlined by Uwins are helpful, they also complicate matters, with authors crossing between genres and subjects. Shakespeare’s work, for example, could be both romantic and dramatic using Uwins’ thematic headings, and Milton’s both epic and romantic in nature. Many categories for themes could have been selected for analysis here, such as the ones Uwins suggested, but for the sake of clarity four have been chosen: Shakespeare, biblical, classical and contemporary literature, and miscellaneous. Taking each in turn, it will be helpful to explore the Society’s use of these particular themes and how their selection, or even interpretation, changed. Indeed, the main consideration here will be whether there was a distinct difference in themes chosen by the Chalon Sketching Society in comparison with the Girtin and Cotman groups, or whether there was a degree of continuity.

4.1 Shakespeare

Not unexpectedly, given his standing as the national poet laureate, Shakespeare was a constant resource of ideas for the Chalon group. The original members would surely have been aware of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery that existed in Pall Mall between 1789 and 1804. This was created through an enormous effort by the engravers John Boydell and his nephew Josiah to construct a public space to display depictions from various Shakespearean plays.¹⁰ Boydell’s intention was to revitalise contemporary British art. In his manifesto for the new gallery, he promised to restore the ‘noblest Part of Art’ that was the diminishing practice of history painting.¹¹ This immediately links to the aims of the Girtin Sketching Club and it is interesting that they both overlapped. Yet, it is surprising that Shakespeare’s plays were not used as themes in the original Society.

⁸ Ibid., p.190.

⁹ Ibid., p.191. Cristall often drew rustic or pastoral scenes for exhibition, particularly of Wales or locations near to his home in Goodrich in the 1830s.

¹⁰ For overviews of Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery see: Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven and London, 2013); Winifred H. Friedman, *Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery* (New York, 1976); and also Greg Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760-1824* (London, 2002a), pp.136-137 for more information on Westall’s role in the endeavour.

¹¹ John Boydell, *A Catalogue of Pictures, &c. in the Shakespeare Gallery* (London, 1789), p.v.

Once Boydell's exhibition had started in Pall Mall, reproductions of the paintings displayed were produced in folios of engravings. The Chalon Sketching Society clearly had access to these at their evening meetings. The evening reconstruction for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* discussed above is a helpful example of how the group used the Boydell folio.¹² For instance, Partridge (Fig. 27) and Stanfield both portrayed Puck in a manner that drew on Reynolds's portrayal of the sprite for the Shakespeare Gallery (Fig. 28). Although Reynolds' painting illustrates from Act II, Scene II, and the evening for the Sketching Society used Act III, Puck is almost identical in Partridge's drawing. Reynolds's celebrity and links to history painting made him a perfect artist to follow by the Chalon group.¹³

In another instance of such conscious emulation of the Boydell precedent, both John James Chalon (Fig. 29) and Stump produced drawings that looked to James Northcote's painting of *Romeo and Juliet* Act V, Scene III (Fig. 30), where the titular heroine awakens as the friar enters the tomb. Chalon's drawing, in particular, is strikingly alike. Only the poses differ, and the friar is also slightly balder. Stump's work depicts the friar entering from the right, but the similarities are again obvious. Even Alfred Edward Chalon's version shows an awareness of Northcote's painting, although it is not as explicit as his brother's.¹⁴

In the VAM collection, there are examples from *The Tempest* (three separate evenings), two different sets from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act 3), *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and *Hamlet*. A further set illustrates *The Infancy of Shakespeare*, a subject completed by George Romney in 1797 for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. A drawing from this theme attributed to George Robert Lewis (Fig. 31) has various similarities with Romney's version (Fig. 32).¹⁵ Lewis portrays the infant Shakespeare in the arms of Nature, who reclines in a comparable pose to that depicted by Romney. Tragic and grotesque figures surround both drawings and,

¹² See Chapter 3. Judith Kennedy, 'Bottom Transformed by the Sketching Society', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.47, No.3 (Autumn 1996), pp.306-318.

¹³ See Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge, 1995); and Richard Wendorf, *After Sir Joshua: Essays on British Art and Cultural History* (New Haven and London, 2005).

¹⁴ The Folger Shakespeare Library includes the above drawings, and also themes based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Romeo and Juliet* (two separate evenings), *King Henry IV*, *Much ado about Nothing*, *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth*. Although most are not dated, it can be deduced that the set *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is likely the last produced by the group in this collection (5 February 1831). The reason for this is because Stanfield, Uwins and Partridge were absent from many of the drawings (and we know they joined between 1829 and 1831). Various works are attributed to Henry Pierce Bone, who left the Society in 1823, showing the sets at the Folger represent at least a decade in the group's history.

¹⁵ The evening's theme was taken from Thomas Gray's poem *The Progress of Poesy. A Pindaric Ode*, III, i.

although more focused to the left in Lewis' attempt, the faces are alike. In both, there is an illumination of light with angels in the distance and, instead of having Shakespeare's name in the sky above, Lewis has placed it in front of the infant. Although clearly an original composition, Lewis surely was aware of Romney's work and possibly Fuseli's version too.¹⁶ The VAM have four other drawings from this evening, although, unfortunately, only one other can be attributed and that is to Cristall. Each portrays the infant Shakespeare in a similar pose to the infant Christ with the Madonna, which can only have come from the knowledge of Romney or Fuseli's works.

From the 1830s onwards, the Chalon Sketching Society appears to have turned away from Shakespeare. However, there are examples, such as Leslie's sketch (Fig. 33) from 1 December 1837 for the theme 'A Fall', where he chose a scene from *Henry VIII*. A second later example from 1847 is Stanfield's drawing of Falstaff from *Henry IV* (Fig. 34), which is perhaps the last drawing linked to Shakespeare. It emphasises how different the Chalon Sketching Society had become since its inception. Stanfield did not even draw a landscape to surround Falstaff, but instead produced a portrait of the character.

Auction catalogue records are invaluable in learning about the themes chosen by the Sketching Society, and Appendix 2 looks at this in greater depth. Various Shakespearean drawings were sold at the members' studio sales, which suggests that the group may have produced more drawings for this category than is currently understood. Yet, at the 1851 Sketching Society Exhibition the story is quite different.¹⁷ The majority of members were still alive, so would have had some influence on the drawings displayed. Nonetheless, only number 283, a drawing from Alfred Edward Chalon depicting 'A Salute' from *Henry VIII* (also later in Leslie's studio sale), and additionally, a set of drawings on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (numbers 334-341) referred to above, were displayed. Therefore, whilst we know Shakespeare was used as a theme by the Chalon Sketching Society throughout its existence, by the time the retrospective exhibition was held, the members clearly did not see this as an integral part of their work. On the basis of existing evidence, it is obvious that Shakespearean topics had lost their appeal.

¹⁶ Fuseli's painting was completed in 1805 and is called *The Infant Shakespeare between Tragedy and Comedy*, it is held at King's College, London. This in turn was most likely influenced by Reynolds' famous painting *David Garrick Between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761, Waddesdon Manor).

¹⁷ Joseph Hogarth, *Exhibition of the Works by the Sketching Society*, exh. cat. (London, 1851) held at 5 Haymarket.

4.2 Biblical

Based on drawings she had available at the VAM in 1971, Hamilton was able to suggest that stories from, or linked to, the Bible were ‘among the most numerous of the Sketching Society’s themes’.¹⁸ While this is certainly true based on the Hayward collection, it is perhaps less the case when treated more generally.¹⁹ For instance, it was not a source used by the Girtin or Cotman groups, despite its growing popularity as a pictorial theme around 1800.

Benjamin West, who was twice president of the RA, was a key figure in the rise of biblical themes. He was employed by George III in the late 1770s to paint large biblical subjects for display in the Royal Chapel at Windsor Castle and, although this scheme ‘collapsed in disarray’, there were only a couple of occasions over two decades when West did not exhibit a picture linked to the Chapel subjects at the RA.²⁰ Perhaps the most famous of these was *Moses Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai*, which was probably the largest painting to ever appear at the RA whilst in Somerset House when it was on display in 1784. This painting is ‘strongly reminiscent of seventeenth-century Italian religious art’, and David Solkin believes it has a ‘blatant nod in the direction of an older masterpiece, Raphael’s two-tier *Transfiguration* of c. 1516-20.’ This is key to understanding what British religious art looked like at the end of the eighteenth century, as in earlier times this type of work ‘might well have run the risk of being charged with popery.’ Yet, there was no challenge to West’s work on doctrinal levels and few of the well-educated visitors to the Academy believed that Catholicism still posed an active threat to Britain, especially in ‘a secular arena dedicated to the cultivation of taste.’²¹

Finally, in 1800, the picture dealer Thomas Macklin released an illustrated version of the Bible with artworks by many leading practitioners of the day, including West, Reynolds,

¹⁸ Hamilton, 1971, p.14.

¹⁹ Evening themes held in the VAM that Hamilton referred to include: ‘St George and the Dragon’, ‘The Creation of Eve’ (based on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*), ‘The Flight into Egypt’, ‘Moses Striking the Rock’, ‘Brazen Serpent’, ‘The Triumph of David’, ‘Job and his Friends’, ‘The Adoration of the Shepherd’, ‘The Raising of Lazarus’, ‘The Descent from the Cross’, ‘The Death of Stephen’ and ‘The Conversion of Saint Paul’.

²⁰ David Solkin, *Art in Britain 1660-1815* (New Haven and London, 2015), pp.180-181. For more information on West, see Ann Bermingham, ‘Apocalypse at the Academy: Death on a Pale Horse and the Revelation of Benjamin West’ in Monks, S., Barrell, J., and Hallett, M. (eds), *Living with the Royal Academy: Artistic Ideals and Experiences in England, 1768-1848* (Aldershot, 2013), pp.153-170.

²¹ Solkin, 2015, p.181 for all quotes. The painting *Moses Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai*, 586.6 x 373.3 cm is held at the Palace of Westminster, London.

Fuseli and Philip James de Loutherbourg.²² Like West's earlier work, Italian religious art from a Catholic tradition clearly inspired many of the pictures, though those involved also looked to Rubens, Poussin and Thornhill. British religious art in this period was evidently a mixture of these continental traditions, and it is against this background that the Sketching Society began to use passages from scripture for evening themes. Contemporary links to the Chalon group who were 'notable exponents of biblical themes' included Richard Westall, Benjamin Haydon and William Etty.²³ This continued with the attendance of John Martin and David Roberts in the following decades, with the latter visiting the club in 1834.²⁴ Biblical themes, furthermore, had the potential to reach the 'High Art' that Reynolds outlined.²⁵

Turning to examples produced by the Chalon group, we will focus firstly on a set held by the British Museum in the Francis Stevens folio. On 20 December 1809, the passage was drawn from *Psalms 137* (verses 1 to 2): 'By the Rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.'²⁶ There are drawings from this evening by the Chalons, Cornelius Varley, Henry Pierce Bone and Stevens himself, who each offered a unique interpretation of the verse. Alfred Edward Chalon's treatment (Fig. 35) included the harpist mentioned in the theme, as well as a pyramid in the backdrop, not unlike the earlier examples by Cotman and Havell (see Fig. 14 and Fig. 15) and perhaps also influenced by Turner. Varley's effort (Fig. 36) was reminiscent of the Cotman Sketching Society or even the Girtin group, with the landscape dominating the scene and only a small group of figures by the river. The low setting (or rising) sun conveys a sense of the exotic, along with the choice of buildings in the background. John James Chalon drew a similar picture to Varley, but this time included no figures and portrayed a solemn river scene with a sense of melancholy. Both this sketch and Varley's would have fitted in with the group's ambition of 'epic' landscapes. Bone's illustration is most similar to Alfred Edward Chalon's with figures and a harpist taking central stage in the artwork. Lastly, Stevens' portrayal is a mixture of the other members' approaches, with classical buildings and figures by the river, but differs in the use of a portrait format.

²² See Solkin, 2015, p.183; and Morton D. Paley, *The Apocalyptic Sublime* (New Haven and London, 1986).

²³ Hamilton, 1971, p.14. Etty visited the group on two occasions in 1819 and 1830.

²⁴ Hubbard, 1946, p.32.

²⁵ Joshua Reynolds, 'XIV Discourse', in Robert R Wark (ed), *Sir Joshua Reynolds. Discourses on Art*, 3rd ed. (New Haven and London, 1997), p.257.

²⁶ This is the inscription Stevens wrote in the folio.

The above example is almost unique for biblical themes, as it gave the members an opportunity to express the scene with a landscape composition if they wanted to. There are no comparable examples in the VAM Hayward collection; instead, their titles tend to focus on a central figure.²⁷ A typical illustration is Stump's depiction (Fig. 37) of *The Brazen Serpent*, produced on 10 March 1814. Stump portrays this through various figures telling a poor man - who seems to have just been bitten - to look up towards Moses. There is a suggestion of a landscape setting, but the central focus, like many drawings from the 1810s, is on the figures themselves.

Direct verses from the Bible used by the Chalon Sketching Society dwindled from the 1830s onwards and, at present, examples are almost completely non-existent in known collections.²⁸ There are some exceptions, but these tend to be when the members were given a generic theme, such as 'A Storm' (for which Stump chose to depict the prophet Samuel calling for thunder), or 'Giving a Lesson' (for which Leslie selected Jesus teaching the Pharisees when a woman was caught in adultery).²⁹ Other later works included Uwins' sketch of the Nativity for the evening subject 'Illustrations of Chiaro-scuro' in 1834.³⁰ Uwins again turned to the Christ child with the Madonna when, for an 'In the Style of...' meeting held on 12 April 1844, he produced a drawing in the likeness of one of Raphael's paintings (Fig. 40) on a night during which the Society experimented with colour.³¹ There may be many more 'scriptural' drawings yet to be (re)discovered, as Uwins said there was 'a feeling of regret that one drawing at least on every evening was not selected and sacrificed to insertion in some folio, where now would be collected more than a hundred Bible illustrations without a

²⁷ There are 12 evening sets in the Hayward collection using biblical subjects.

²⁸ There were other drawings that had loose links to Christianity, such as Stanfield's work from 31 March 1843 (when Partridge was president), *The Monk* (Fig. 38) which was taken from Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). It is similar to Stanfield's other drawing of Falstaff (Fig. 34), because they are both solely portraits with no landscape for a background. In fact, it would be difficult to place them as Sketching Society drawings if they had not been inscribed.

²⁹ 'A Storm', from an 1847 meeting, is held in the British Museum along with other examples by the Chalons, Uwins and Cristall who all used none biblical stories for this evening. Leslie's drawing for 'Giving a Lesson' was included in Hogarth, *Works of the Sketching Society* (London, 1858) and is discussed later as Fig. 64.

³⁰ Uwins' drawing was completed on 17 January 1834 and is in the VAM. A.E. Chalon also created a work in 1837 called *A Fall* (Fig. 39) that *The Literary Gazette*, 10 May 1851, p.334. believed depicted a 'falling angel', see further discussion on p.60.

³¹ Partridge drew in the style of Correggio for this evening choosing to depict the Madonna and child.

modern parallel.’³² This is an interesting insight into the group, as Uwins was clearly proud of their works from this theme and wanted to project this.³³

Biblical and religious drawings were not numerous at the 1851 Sketching Society Exhibition, but there were more in this category than Shakespearean ones.³⁴ For instance, evening subjects included: ‘Susannah and the Elders’, ‘Philip Baptizing the Eunuch’, and ‘The Annunciation’.³⁵ Stump’s and Leslie’s aforementioned illustrations for ‘A Storm’ and ‘Giving a Lesson’, which had biblical narratives, are two further examples that were displayed. Lastly, various biblical works were included in many of the members’ studio sales, again outlining the frequent use of this theme, particularly in the Chalon group’s early years.³⁶

4.3 Classical and contemporary literature

The Girtin Sketching Club used contemporary literature almost exclusively for its evening themes, but it was not until the Cotman group that older sources began to be chosen.³⁷ The Chalon group used both contemporary and classical literary sources, with scenes from mythology becoming more commonplace at evening meetings in the 1810s.

Classical texts such as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* were used on numerous occasions in the early years of the Chalon Society. On one evening, for example, the theme taken from this poem was ‘Daedalus and Icarus’, which was most likely influenced by the artists Joseph-Marie Vien and Charles Le Brun.³⁸ Dante’s *Divine Comedy* was similarly chosen with regularity and even the Cotman group used it as inspiration for the evening subject ‘Dante and Virgil at the Bridge’ (Fig. 16 and 17). Later, towards the end of the 1810s, Dante’s prose was again used, this time for the theme ‘The Death of Ugolino’.³⁹ Virgil’s *Aeneid* was also selected at a group meeting with seven drawings preserved in the VAM. Unfortunately, they are not

³² Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.188.

³³ Access to the minute books would help to confirm if there were over a hundred evenings with biblical themes and whether the group did use them in the 1830s onwards.

³⁴ Hogarth, 1851.

³⁵ There was also a set for ‘The Hermit’ which had a loose link to Christianity.

³⁶ See Appendix 2 for examples of biblical subjects sold at the members’ studio sales.

³⁷ For example, Crisall’s drawing *The Death of Milo* (Fig. 18).

³⁸ Hamilton, 1971, p.13. ‘Phaeton asks of Phoebus Apollo’ was used as a theme from Ovid in the Hayward VAM collection.

³⁹ Hamilton, 1971, see Figures 54 and 55 in the book. The evening drawings from this set show how the Society’s works were influenced by a drawing by the sculptor John Flaxman.

inscribed or attributed, but Fig. 41 shows a host of figures with the prophet Sibyl pointing Aeneas towards the underworld and his dead father. Although not focusing on the landscape, this story would have been made well known amongst the members, with Turner's painting *Aeneas and the Sibyl, Lake Avernus* from c.1798 being on the same subject.⁴⁰

An important literary figure that the Chalon group began to turn to was the seventeenth-century English poet, John Milton. Various scenes from *Paradise Lost* and *Comus* were chosen for themes in their first decade.⁴¹ In a similar manner to the earlier described Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, Milton had gained attention from the art world towards the end of the eighteenth century. The Boydells were again involved, this time publishing *The Poetical Works of John Milton* in 1794 with various illustrations by leading contemporary artists.⁴² At the same time, between 1791 and 1799, Fuseli created forty pictures from *Paradise Lost* for his own Milton Gallery.⁴³

William Collins was another significant literary figure whose works were regularly used for themes, in particular the set of poems from his 1746 work: *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects*. For instance, the poem *Ode to the Passions* was chosen from this collection by both Partridge (Fig. 42) and Uwins (Fig. 43) on an evening in May 1834. Uwins' example depicts a calm scene with a woman holding a musical instrument in her hand, whilst being waited on by a cherub to her right. The figures again are the dominant part of the composition. Similarly, Partridge focused on melancholy and the woman takes centre stage in his work.⁴⁴ In contrast, another evening held by the Cotman club in around 1804 differed greatly to the Chalon group when Collins' poem *Ode to Fear* was selected. A sketch from this set by Cotman (Fig. 44) is held at the VAM, and presents two small figures pointing and staring across a large chasm towards a classical structure perched high in the distance. The choice of a darker wash in the foreground, and a light wash towards the top helps to portray a sense of the sublime. This early Sketching Society work displays the magnitude of

⁴⁰ This is in the Turner Collection at the Tate Britain (N00463). Here, Turner focused on Lake Avernus and the landscape leading towards the underworld.

⁴¹ 'The Creation of Eve' set has six drawings from the Chalon group in the VAM.

⁴² Westall, for example, produced twenty-eight works for forty guineas each. See Smith, 2002a, p.136.

⁴³ See Gert Schiff and Werner Hofmann, *Henry Fuseli*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 1975) for more information on the Milton Gallery. William Blake also wrote and illustrated a poem called *Milton* between 1804 and 1810, which the group may have been aware of.

⁴⁴ These both compare similarly to John Varley's (Fig 13) composition of the same subject sketched during the Cotman era, which almost seems to have been drawn on the same night, and not thirty years earlier.

the landscape surrounding Cotman's figures, and varies considerably from the later approach taken by Uwins and Partridge.

Finally, more recent authors were still favoured by the group, and perhaps the best example is Thomson and his seminal work *The Seasons*, which was used by both the Girtin and Chalon Sketching Societies.⁴⁵ Winter believed that the impact of Turner and his paintings' use of Thomson's prose, influenced Girtin's group to use this for a theme.⁴⁶ This is possible, but there were many other contemporary artists who were using *The Seasons* for their own pictures. For example, Thomas Macklin's Poet's Gallery, which opened in the 1790s, included 'works by Reynolds and Gainsborough [also] illustrating Thomson'.⁴⁷ About a decade later, the Chalon group chose the poem *Spring* for an evening theme on 4 April 1810.⁴⁸ The five drawings from this set each focused on the landscape itself with only Henry Pierce Bone and Alfred Edward Chalon including prominent figures in their compositions, in each case a botanist. Stevens' drawing (Fig. 45) exemplifies the early works from this group with a vast and sprawling landscape facing the botanist picking herbs from the land after winter had passed. Although not regularly chosen in the following decades, we find Thomson used by both Cristall and Alfred Edward Chalon for an evening in 1847 when the theme was 'A Storm'.⁴⁹ Chalon's drawing (Fig. 46) focuses on Celadon and Amelia amidst a storm-tossed landscape. It seems to have been rather hastily drawn, and the landscape is not as detailed as in Stevens' work. This example of Thomson being used by the Sketching Society is particularly useful, firstly, because of the link back to the Girtin club and, secondly, because of the Chalon group using *The Seasons* for a theme in the 1810s and then again later in the 1840s. Not many authors spanned nearly the entire history of the Sketching Society.

Walter Scott, who is the final literary figure we now turn to, was a 'great storehouse of subjects for painters at the time.'⁵⁰ An early set from around 1811 used the poem *The Lady of the Lake* by Scott which produced some of the best drawings from the Society through a mixture of figure compositions and serene picturesque landscapes, such as in Alfred Edward

⁴⁵ Thomson was most likely used by the Cotman group, but there is no record of this at present.

⁴⁶ Winter, 1974, p.132, 148.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.148.

⁴⁸ This set is held at the British Museum.

⁴⁹ Stump, for this meeting, chose a biblical scene with the prophet Samuel, Uwins drew a Greek mythology narrative with Telemachus detaining Calypso, and James John Chalon depicted a steamer struggling to arrive at the port of Folkestone. This helps to show the diversity of ideas even amongst just five members.

⁵⁰ Hubbard, 1946, p.27.

Chalon's version (Fig. 47).⁵¹ Although the attention is immediately directed to the two characters and the dog, the landscape is an integral part of the picture, and Chalon has added depth to this. Stump, Cornelius Varley and John James Chalon additionally have drawings from this evening, each similar in approach, but giving even more attention to the lake and landscape beyond.⁵² The latter decades also used Scott, which is not surprising as Stanfield was commissioned to illustrate his *Waverley* novels by Robert Cadell in 1841.⁵³ Examples from 7 February 1834 for *Tales of Crusaders* show two drawings by Alfred Edward Chalon (Fig. 48) and Partridge (Fig. 49) that are similar in construction, suggesting that the artists discussed the theme before starting to draw. They show Edith Plantagenet discovering the Knight of Leopold under the guise of a slave. It is interesting to see how a scene from the Middle East and the twelfth century was portrayed by the Society since this was rarely attempted. Their depiction of an Arabic character was most likely emulated from other pictures they had previously seen.

This overview of the literary sources used by the Chalon group is far from exhaustive. There were various other authors past and present used as well as additional stories from mythology.⁵⁴ Lastly, the 1851 Sketching Society Exhibition had several examples from classical and contemporary literature, such as 'Arethusa', 'Oedipus and Antigone', 'Comus' (with the passages used by the members), 'Aeneid' and 'Tam o'Shanter' by Robert Burns.⁵⁵ This demonstrates that the group still saw this genre as important, but not to the same extent as it did in the 1810s and 1820s.

4.4 Miscellaneous

The previously examined categories for themes were mainly used for the first decade of the Chalon Sketching Society, but from the 1820s topics that allowed more freedom to draw everyday subjects were regularly chosen. For example, 'A Consultation', 'A Bargain' and

⁵¹ Scott's novel was highly topical, being first published only a year earlier, when it became something of a publishing sensation.

⁵² All four drawings are in the Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens collection.

⁵³ See Pieter Van der Merwe and Roger Took, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield, 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-painter, Royal Academician*, exh. cat. (Gateshead: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), p.139.

⁵⁴ More specific sub-headings could have been chosen. For example: romantic, dramatic, epic and pastoral were used by Uwins, 1858, Vo.1, p.188.

⁵⁵ Hogarth, 1851. *Comus* and *Aeneid* are surely the same as the sets found in Partridge's studio sale.

‘An Accident’ were some of the themes selected. The group also began to use generic titles, such as ‘A Pasticcio’ or ‘In the Style of’, where the members were given the chance show their knowledge of Old Master paintings and the style of these artists. This fits in with Alfred Edward Chalon’s view that the group ‘had become less exclusive in regard to subjects and more amusing.’⁵⁶ Uwins split this miscellaneous category into two distinct groups: ‘definite and indefinite’.⁵⁷ To help to explain this, he gave the example of the subject ‘Christmas Time’ as definite, since it had a specific theme, and “‘A Command” (given after Her Majesty’s message)’, as indefinite, because it ‘afford[ed] scope for the imagination.’⁵⁸ Given that the ‘records’ list nearly 300 ‘miscellaneous subjects’, it is apt to say that members were particularly appreciative of the scope it afforded them.⁵⁹

The use of themes with indefinite interpretations meant that the group could specialise in subjects or genres they felt comfortable with. The Society, however, turned to definite miscellaneous themes far less, which is why this thesis is focusing on the indefinite topics.⁶⁰ It, furthermore, allowed members to fall back on Shakespeare, the Bible and literary sources they were familiar with if they wished to. The group, moreover, had the option to draw on everyday subjects, for example, Stanfield turned to the sea on many instances. This level of choice was not part of the Girtin or Cotman groups, or even the early Chalon Sketching Society, but has often gone overlooked because of the lack of drawings available.⁶¹ As greater numbers of later sketches come to light, this would be a rich area to study further, as it is obvious from the group’s publication and exhibitions that this is how they wanted to be seen by the public.

Two exemplary evenings help to show the uniqueness of this genre. The first had the indefinite theme ‘A Difficult Passage’, and was most likely completed in the 1830s. Stanfield chose to draw the famous crossing of the Alps by Hannibal, perhaps inspired by Turner, or by

⁵⁶ Hogarth, 1858, introduction.

⁵⁷ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.188. It is unclear whether ‘A Command’ was an undocumented third evening theme chosen by the Queen.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Definite miscellaneous themes were similar to the other genres, as each member was restricted to follow the theme given.

⁶¹ Such as in Hamilton’s exhibition in 1971 that did not include any drawings from beyond the 1820s.

one of his own sketching trips through continental Europe (Fig. 50).⁶² The elephants in the foreground and the towering mountains beyond show Stanfield at ease when drawing this scene, which looks notably accomplished for just two- or three-hours' painting. John James Chalon, by contrast, for the same subject rather amusingly showed a young lady being taught a piano lesson by a rather animated instructor (Fig. 51). The lady is clearly struggling with the passage and has managed to tangle her arms up much to the despair of the tutor who seems to be gesturing for her to stop or slow down. These two drawings help to emphasise the freedom of imagination given to the members.

The Society met at Partridge's house at 21 Lower Brook Street on the 29th night of his presidency on 1 December 1837, and were given the indefinite theme 'A Fall'. The members present included the Chalon brothers, Leslie, Stanfield and Partridge himself.⁶³ After a brief catch up, the group would have discussed the subject set by Partridge before commencing drawing their works for the evening. Once the three hours had passed, the members would have enjoyed a supper together before the evening appraisal of the pictures in a comparable manner to Fig. 2, which gives an idea of the particular interior space used by the group. In a similar manner, we will now examine each drawing. Though Stanfield's sketch is now untraced, we are fortunate that *The Literary Gazette* provided an insight into his work by saying that Stanfield illustrated it with 'a midshipman falling *en dishabille* out of his hammock through the cord of the one end becoming unloosed.'⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, Stanfield chose a motif linked to his maritime background and one he would have been at ease drawing. Alfred Edward Chalon and Partridge, however, seemed to both focus on biblical or Miltonic prose, although it is difficult to decipher what scenes they were portraying. Chalon's, according to the *Literary Gazette*, depicts 'a falling angel' with a laurel wreath above it and an instrument in its right hand (Fig. 39).⁶⁵ However, without a detailed description on the drawing's mount it is difficult to identify the subject with any certainty; indeed, it could also illustrate the suicide of Sappho. Partridge's shows what seems to be a

⁶² Turner's *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1812. It is in the Tate Collection.

⁶³ Based on the drawings at the VAM (minus Stanfield's work). See Hogarth, 1851. *A Fall* is on page 10 of the catalogue with the drawings numbered 121-125 including Stanfield at 123.

⁶⁴ *The Literary Gazette*, 10 May 1851, p.334. Stanfield's drawing most likely was sold separately to the other works. This often happened, for example, in the Chalon brother's studio sale (11 March 1861 held at Christie, Manson and Woods), lot 416 was for a Sketching Society drawing by Stanfield called *An Imitation* which sold for 9.9.0. The following lot 417 was for a set of Sketching Society drawings also called 'An Imitation' including works by Leslie, the Chalons, Crisall and Stump, selling for only for 2.2.0.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

warrior falling upside down whilst holding a shield in his right hand and a spear in his left (Fig. 52).⁶⁶

The last two drawings take completely different directions again. John James Chalon produced a comic drawing of a gentleman losing his balance whilst ice skating and toppling two of the nearest people to him (Fig. 26). The second character in the foreground looks forlornly at the viewer with an acceptance that he is also going to fall. This charming picture expertly displays the skaters on the ice, and perhaps recalls an event Chalon witnessed. Leslie would often favour a Shakespearean theme or a genre drawing, and for this evening, he drew a scene from *Henry VIII*, Act 3, Scene 3: ‘King. Read o’er this, and after, this - and then to breakfast with what appetite you may’ (Fig. 33). It illustrates the fall of Cardinal Wolsey on his failure to get a papal annulment for King Henry VIII. Leslie’s depiction of the Tudor monarch is reminiscent of Hans Holbein the Younger’s portrait of the king (c.1537).⁶⁷ This suggests that the portrait was well known at the time of the Sketching Society.

The above examples help to show the variation in drawings for miscellaneous evening themes and, furthermore, explain why this genre became popular with the members. In fact, at the 1851 Sketching Society Exhibition, drawings from these meetings were more numerous than all the previous genres examined. For instance, the themes ‘A Disaster’, ‘A Trophy’, ‘An Imitation’, ‘An Agreeable Sensation’, ‘A Wild-Goose Chase’, ‘A Pursuit’, ‘Elevation’, ‘An Escape’, ‘An Engagement’ and ‘What You Will’ were all displayed.⁶⁸ Additionally, there were the themes ‘In the Style of’ and ‘Imitation of any Master, ancient or modern’, which together consisted of the same amount of drawings as those with Shakespearean subjects at the 1851 exhibition.

4.5 Buckingham Palace Frescoes

In the previous chapter, a fleeting reference was made to Uwins working on a fresco at Buckingham Palace, which shares a link to the themes chosen by the Society. Describing the event in the club’s Annals, Uwins wrote:

⁶⁶ Partridge may have taken inspiration from the sculpture *The Falling Titan* by Thomas Banks, as well as more generally from the works of Fuseli and Flaxman.

⁶⁷ The original is held at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid.

⁶⁸ Hogarth, 1851.

On the 12th of April [1843] I received the command of his Royal Highness the Prince Albert to try my hand at fresco painting in a pavilion recently built in the gardens of Buckingham Palace. The Prince told me that Leslie, Stanfield, Eastlake, Landseer, and Maclise would be my coadjutors. To which list were afterwards added Etty and Sir William Ross. On the first morning that I went to the palace with a finished cartoon prepared for painting, the prince came along to the pavilion. After expressing his admiration of the design he said: ‘this reminds me of a drawing the Queen has got of yours of “Cupid and Psyche,” which she values very much, and she will tell you so.’⁶⁹

The topic chosen for the frescoes was Milton’s *Comus*, which the Sketching Society members would have been well versed in. The Society’s members were probably chosen by the Queen and Prince because of the previous contact between them and the high esteem the monarch had for their sketches. Incidents from Walter Scott’s novels were also chosen for frescoes in the Pavilion, but painted by different artists.⁷⁰ The decoration of the Garden Pavilion was, perhaps, an experimental measure, ahead of a competition set to design frescoes for the adornment of the new Palace of Westminster (after the destruction of the previous one from a fire in 1834). The aim was to emulate the German Nazarene fresco revival, which featured the works of national poets extensively.⁷¹ Closely following their German counterparts, the competition requested cartoons that depicted subjects ‘from British History, or from the works of Spenser, Shakespeare or Milton’, with the deadline being the first week of May in 1843.⁷² Perhaps surprisingly, none of the Sketching Society members entered, despite their knowledge of these themes. But this may well have been because Stanfield, Uwins, Leslie and the other artists who painted the Buckingham Palace frescoes

⁶⁹ Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, pp.204-205. ‘Cupid and Psyche’ was the drawing that Queen Victoria chose to keep as Uwins work from the Sketching Society, see p.204. The Annals refer to the Society’s minute books. Etty later withdrew and was replaced by William Dyce

⁷⁰ Clare Willsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940* (New York, 2000), p.303. The artists chosen for the Scott frescoes were H.J. Townsend, C. Stonehouse, J. Severn, and R. and J. Doyle. The group’s use of Scott for regular themes is worth noting here.

⁷¹ Willsdon, 2000, p.303.

⁷² T.S.R. Boase, ‘The Decoration of the New Palace of Westminster, 1841-1863’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol.17, No.3/4 (1954), pp.324-325.

were ‘notoriously underpaid, receiving £100 for each lunette’.⁷³ Even *Punch* remarked ‘that the Queen and Prince had used their positions to gain the services of their artists cheaply.’⁷⁴

This episode helps to show that, despite the still familiar scholarly focus on the early years of its existence, by the 1840s, the Sketching Society was perhaps more prominent in the London art world than at any other period in its history, with a clear acknowledgement of their skill in painting poetical and historical subjects. A future rediscovery of the Society’s minute books could potentially reveal whether mural and fresco painting had any influence on the selection of evening themes

4.6 Chapter summary

The four genres selected hereto explore the themes in the Sketching Society – though not in any way exhaustively – and are indicative of those chosen throughout its entire history, from Girtin to the closure of the Chalon group. Still, the use of particular themes clearly evolved through the decades, and arguably, the nascent vision of the Girtin Sketching Club of a school of ‘Historic Landscape’ did not ever fully materialise. Intriguingly, the Chalon group were probably the closest to this vision with their use of biblical subjects, classical literature and mythology, yet, even the themes they chose changed over time, as we have seen. Although the rules of the Society barely altered throughout the club’s existence, would the original members of the Girtin Sketching Club have felt at home in the Chalon Sketching Society? To answer this question, we need to look at the Cotman group which began introducing themes that allowed drawings to include figures. Since the Cotman club had members who overlapped the Girtin group, it shows artists were open to ideas evolving and changing over time. Therefore, by the time the Chalon group convened, figures were dominant in virtually every theme chosen, and Reynolds would have noticed that many of the drawings adhered to the ‘High Art’ he proclaimed, especially with the use of classical texts, the Bible and mythology. Therefore, perhaps without even realising it, the Sketching Society had started to achieve what the Girtin group had set out.

⁷³ See Pieter van der Merwe and Roger Took, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield, 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-painter, Royal Academician*, exh. cat. (Gateshead: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), pp.140-142 for more information on the Garden Pavilion frescoes.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.140

If we stopped at the beginning of the 1820s like Hamilton did, then the themes would conveniently link between the whole Sketching Society.⁷⁵ However, this misses out on three decades of output by the group, and one only needs to skim through the 1851 Sketching Society Exhibition catalogue, or to browse the studio sale catalogues of the artists involved, to see the vast array of topics chosen by the members.⁷⁶ The use of paint materials also changed, with the Hayward collection being dominated by sepia and the latter decades by watercolour washes - albeit greys and monochrome colours - and some experimentation with colour.⁷⁷

The main point to be made is that there was a difference around 1820 to 1830 in themes chosen. Nevertheless, the members still used Shakespeare, Biblical, classical and contemporary literature on various occasions and even on miscellaneous evenings when they were given complete freedom. This is also confirmed by the commission for the Buckingham Palace Garden Pavilion frescoes in the 1840s, with the use of *Comus*. However, a shift from the OWS to the RA - in terms of the outward affiliations of the membership of the Sketching Society - surely contributed to overall thematic changes. For example, it had been many decades since the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery and the Milton Gallery had closed, with most of the current members in the 1830s probably not ever having had the opportunity to visit these. The continuity in the group came through the Chalons, but not through the original title, 'The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design'.⁷⁸ Despite this apparent change, this chapter has shown that continuity still prevailed to a certain extent through the Sketching Society's existence. Nevertheless, perhaps the clearest way to understand the themes, would be to split the group into two periods: 1799 to 1820 and 1820/1830 to 1851.

The following section will continue this investigation through exploring the role of the contemporary press in detailing the group's activities and works, and also its publications and exhibitions, with a particular emphasis on the legacy that the Society were looking to leave.

⁷⁵ Hamilton, 1971.

⁷⁶ Hogarth, 1851.

⁷⁷ Hubbard, 1946, p.27.

⁷⁸ This is because they became 'less exclusive in regard to subjects' taken from Hogarth, 1858, introduction.

Chapter 5 - Exhibitions and Publications

Scholarship has paid remarkably little attention to the ways in which the Sketching Society looked to present its own history and identity, not least through the largely overlooked set of lithographs the group issued in 1840, the retrospective exhibition staged in 1851, and an account of the club published shortly after its dissolution. Yet, careful study of this material is revealing, not least because of the disparity between the group's own sense of itself and its current place in histories of British art.

Throughout its existence, Hubbard believed that the Chalon Sketching Society 'studiously shunned publicity', but we can find early references to the group in the contemporary press, which suggests that they had looked for wider exposure.¹ Writing in the *Somerset House Gazette* in October 1823, William Henry Pyne made mention of Alfred Edward Chalon being part of 'a friendly little club, composed of artists, who met at each other's apartments alternately one evening in the week, during the winter season, for the laudable purpose of mutual improvement in the art of composition.' This, in itself, helped Pyne to promote the medium of watercolour through showing professional artists' involvement in clubs beyond solely established institutions, such as the OWS. Chalon had even presented a drawing to Pyne, which he speculates could have been from 'the prompt effusion of an evening's amusement' and later says that 'the subjects [were] selected as a theme, chiefly from the ancient classics.' Pyne finished by mentioning some of the artists involved and saying that 'we could say much; but having neither time nor space to spare, we shall leave for the present, to the friendly enjoyment of their October meetings, with all our kind respect, and cordial good wishes.'²

Admittedly, there is a dearth of contemporary press coverage of the Chalon Sketching Society until around 1840, which may well imply that they did not want public attention. This is where Uwins' *Memoir* and the minute books of the Society are important for developing an understanding of this era of the group. The club was depleting rather rapidly (it was down to

¹ Hesketh Hubbard, 'The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design', *The Old Water-colour Society's Club*, Vol.24 (London, 1946), pp.19-33, p.30.

² *Somerset House Gazette*, 25 October 1823, pp.35-36. The main focus of the article was on Alfred Edward Chalon, which is unsurprising because he was the best-known Sketching Society member at the time Pyne was writing.

four members in 1829, as Cristall had retired to the countryside), which brought about the admission of Uwins, Stanfield, Leslie and Partridge. A decade later, however, the group was thriving, putting its work before the public in the form of a sumptuous volume of prints and advertising their establishment credentials through a dedication to the RA President Sir Martin Archer Shee.

5.1 Evening Sketches

In the minute books, the Chalon group's first reference to 'our forthcoming work' was a note regarding a letter from Shee, in which 'the president of the Academy said that he considered it a great honour of the Society to wish to dedicate their publication to him.'³ A couple of months later, twelve copies of the folio were produced and given to the Society members, before the final publication of the now titled *Evening Sketches* was released in June 1840 by Paul and Dominic Colnaghi, of 14 Pall Mall East. This included eight lithographs, about half the size of the originals, carefully reproduced by Maxim and Paul Gauci. The folio contained one drawing from each artist and Hubbard believed that, because the final paragraph in the advertisement said 'for the sake of variety, the subjects, as in the present instance, will in general be taken from the Sketches of different Evenings', further publications in this series were planned.⁴ These did not materialise, however, and it was only through a retrospective folio produced in 1858 that the Society finally managed to show a greater 'variety' of drawings, including complete evening sets.

It remains a mystery as to why the group decided to finally 'go public' in 1840. But, it coincided with most of the members being in their prime - in terms of their artistic careers - and the public would have been aware of the names of the group more so than in the earlier decades of the club. The earliest coverage in 1840 was from the *Literary Gazette* in May, which mentioned various 'drawings made at the Sketching Society' by Stanfield and Uwins that were on display at a meeting of the Graphic Society.⁵ This paved the way for the same paper reviewing the new folio publication of the group in July, which it believed to be 'the

³ Hubbard, 1946, p.28. The evening was dated 21 February 1840.

⁴ Ibid., and A.E. Chalon et al., *Evening Sketches* (London, 1840), unpaginated, with the advertisement on the third folio page.

⁵ *Literary Gazette*, 16 May 1840, p.315. The Graphic Society was founded in 1833 by William Brockedon and originally had 100 members including 40 painters. Stanfield and Uwins were clearly involved, with their work being displayed there. This was also possibly the first public display of the Society's works.

first *livraison*’ of future releases of the Society’s work.⁶ However, the reviewer preferred seeing the drawings of one evening together, mentioning:

that our gratification seemed to be enhanced by the union. It was curious and delightful to witness the strange differences with which persons of talent treated the same idea. One sporting with human character, another revelling in natural scenery to which human character was subordinate, a third full of humour, and a fourth full of pathos; all charming illustrations of the same theme.⁷

The *Literary Gazette* gave the group’s folio the highest praise, saying that ‘as work goes on the public will of course be enabled to make these comparisons, and we can assure the lovers of art that it will afford them no small pleasure to do so’ and that ‘the whole number does credit to the names it bears, and needs no higher recommendation from us.’⁸

Further acclaim was given by *The Spectator* in August, which said that the ‘originals have been imitated by Messrs. Gauci by means of lithography, with a fidelity and spirit equalling anything that has been done of the kind, and which has elicited the praise of the sketchers themselves.’⁹ They followed this by saying that the ‘loose, free, sketchy style of the different artists, and the effect of warm and cool neutral tints intermingled, are admirably imitated in the lithography: the tone of the browns and grays [sic] is beautiful, and the lights are never crude or harsh - all is mellow and harmonious.’¹⁰ This high praise for the prints themselves was not reciprocated by *The Athenaeum* however, which said that ‘as a whole, indeed, these ‘Evening Sketches’ have disappointed us.’¹¹ Rather scathingly, they reported that:

we should hazard little, if we declared that the artists of England here displayed in the undress of impromptu thought, were seen to more advantage than in the series of carefully-meditated, highly-finished, and exquisitely-engraved designs on which it

⁶ *Literary Gazette*, 25 July 1840, p.484.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *The Spectator*, 22 August 1840, p.788.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *The Athenaeum*, 22 August 1840, p.669.

was our duty to comment last week; and yet these “Evening Sketches” are no marvels of inventive genius or skill of hand.¹²

Returning to *The Spectator*, the reviewer obviously admired the artists, but was not duly impressed by the lithographs, which lacked the freshness of the originals. This was addressed, as we shall see, with the 1858 folio, which used photolithographs that were faithful reproductions, and, possibly more importantly, complete evening sets for comparison.¹³

This mixed reception would have disappointed the Chalon group and, perhaps, is the reason why further folio publications were not released during the club’s existence. Equally, the sketches may purely have just not been valued as highly as finished pieces of art by some at the time, and it was only with a retrospective view at the history of the Society that people later began to truly value the group’s work. This moreover, raises the issue of what actually constitutes a sketch, and if there is a difference when compared to a finished drawing.¹⁴ Due to the time restraints placed on each evening, the members would rarely have had time to complete their pictures as they would for an exhibition, or commission piece. The Sketching Society offers an insight into the working process of its members, since sometimes their drawings were later used as stimuli for important works. For example, Uwins’ painting *An Italian Mother Teaching her Child the Tarantella* was inspired by a Society work completed eleven years earlier.¹⁵

Now we shall turn to contemporary reviews of the drawings themselves, which were appraised in their lithographic form. Crisall’s was the first in the folio and depicted *The Daughters of Minius* (Fig. 53) from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. *The Athenaeum* clearly did not

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Another noteworthy development in 1840 was the experimentation with the Society rules. The group began to use colour for drawings on selected evenings, showing the club was open to being flexible and evolving with time. See Hubbard, 1946, p.27. The first evening with colour was at Stanfield’s on 30 March 1840. It proved to not be successful and was abandoned in May. However, it was brought back to the group from time to time.

¹⁴ See Charlotte Klonk, *Science and the Perception of Nature: British Landscape Art in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven and London, 1996), pp.105-113, for a further discussion on what the nature of a sketch is, and how it is seen, understood and valued.

¹⁵ *An Italian Mother Teaching her Child the Tarantella* was completed and exhibited at the RA in 1842, it is now held at the VAM. The Sketching Society drawing *Giving a Lesson* by Uwins from an evening held on 2 April 1831, inspired his later completed oil. The sketch was used in the 1858 publication (see Fig. 60).

think highly of the drawing, critiquing it as being ‘neutralized by glaring imperfections’.¹⁶ This was repeated in *The Spectator* who were even more cutting, concluding that ‘we cannot praise his drawing.’¹⁷ By contrast, *The Literary Gazette* thought it a ‘grand classic’.¹⁸ Indeed, *The Athenaeum* and *The Spectator’s* criticism seems rather misplaced, with Crisall producing an accomplished sketch which surpasses many of his earlier works held in the VAM Hayward collection. John James Chalon’s *A Halt* (Fig. 54) - which would have been seen as an indefinite miscellaneous theme - was universally praised, being called ‘worthy of De Louthenburg [sic]’ and considered ‘clever too, in the management of light’.¹⁹ The only negative points were that ‘more air should have been let in’ and that ‘the two dismounted travellers are sitting on a rock with the dogged air of a couple of culprits in the stocks.’²⁰ They, obviously, did not think this was the artist’s intention. The comment about the figures can be justified, but Chalon may have meant this. He also did let in a large amount of light on the left of the picture, yet, it must also be considered that this was a sketch and not a finished exhibition work. In fact, in the same year, Chalon produced a very similar composition, *A Gypsy Encampment*, as his diploma piece for the RA. Here, the sky is infiltrated by shades of blue, showing the light coming through, and the figures are more accomplished.²¹

Alfred Edward Chalon chose his drawing *Happy Moments*, which depicts a little girl playing with her pet dog, and the figure taking centre stage, which is typical of Chalon’s works. Stump drew *An Enchanted Island*, which brought a mixed reaction to the figure and the generic scene that could be ‘in any field in the kingdom with a tree and a pond.’²² Next, Leslie’s drawing for the seventeenth-century literary classic *Scene from Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (Fig. 55) was widely praised, with the *Literary Gazette* saying that it is ‘a piece as replete with character and humour as ever came finished from his popular pencil.’²³ Even *The Spectator*, which had been critical of the folio, said ‘this sketch is worthy to be made into a picture.’²⁴ It is easy to see why they were charmed by this drawing back in 1840, with the servant-maid flustering the main character (Jourdain) in a game of fencing. Leslie, clearly

¹⁶ *The Athenaeum*, 22 August 1840, p.669.

¹⁷ *The Spectator*, 22 August 1840, p.788.

¹⁸ *Literary Gazette*, 25 July 1840, p.484.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *The Athenaeum*, 22 August 1840, p.669; and *The Spectator*, 22 August 1840, p.788.

²¹ *A Gypsy Encampment* is dated 1840 but was given as a diploma piece in 1841 when he became an Academician.

²² *The Spectator*, 22 August 1840, p.788.

²³ *Literary Gazette*, 25 July 1840, p.484.

²⁴ *The Spectator*, 22 August 1840, p.788.

taking note of the positive acclaim, completed a large oil painting of this sketch in 1841, which is now held at the VAM.²⁵

Stanfield chose a generic title, *A Perilous Situation*, to show a shipwreck on a rocky shore - utilising his strength as a maritime artist - with the drawing being widely admired by *The Athenaeum*, who called it 'excellent' and the *Literary Gazette*, 'magnificent.'²⁶ Uwins' drawing, *Expectation*, undoubtedly drawn not long after his Italian tour, showed a 'graceful Contadina reclining on a rock'.²⁷ The sketch drew muted praise, except from *The Spectator*, which said it 'is not strongly expressed.'²⁸ The folio concluded with a figure drawing by Partridge on the theme *A Reminiscence of Italy* (Fig. 56), showing a mother holding her child in a similar vein to Renaissance artists. It is a particularly accomplished sketch for an evening and, unusually for the Society, was depicted as a portrait with an arched top. The *Literary Gazette* clearly thought highly of the sketch, saying that 'it belongs to a very noble class of composition.'²⁹ Nevertheless, *The Athenaeum* believed it was 'the worst drawn of the series'.³⁰

The variety of drawings showed the diversity of themes selected by the Society and this publication was important, because the artists themselves chose the sketches they wanted included. With this publication, they were attempting to gain public recognition for their group and, through dedicating it to the president of the RA, they clearly felt that this would improve the folio's saleability. However, the question needs to be asked as to whether this process helped to construct a group identity, or whether it said something about how the individuals themselves wanted to be seen. For example, the group may have decided to use a particular complete evening set for the folio, nevertheless individuals may have not wanted their drawing to be used. Allowing the members to choose a sketch themselves shows that the group valued each other's opinions, but meant that they were missing the commercial and sensible aspect of using complete sets. Moreover, by doing this, the public would have been confused as to the purpose of the Sketching Society: the drawings in the folio were not there to be compared, but to be admired. It was not until the 1851 exhibition, which we will now

²⁵ The painting is titled *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and was given by John Sheepshanks to the VAM in 1857.

²⁶ *The Athenaeum*, 22 August 1840, p.669; and *Literary Gazette*, 25 July 1840, p.484.

²⁷ *The Athenaeum*, 22 August 1840, p.669.

²⁸ *The Spectator*, 22 August 1840, p.788.

²⁹ *Literary Gazette*, 25 July 1840, p.484.

³⁰ *The Athenaeum*, 22 August 1840, p.669.

turn to, that the public finally got to see more than one drawing from an evening session together for the first time.

5.2 1851 Exhibition

With no immediate follow-up publications, the Sketching Society kept a lower profile in the 1840s, with the main excitement being the two evenings for which Queen Victoria chose the themes. It shows that, despite electing not to promote themselves as a group publicly, the members were clearly active behind the scenes, and were still known by the highest levels of Victorian society. A brief mention of the Sketching Society was made in *The Athenaeum* in 1848, regarding the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione, where Stanfield, Leslie, Uwins and the Chalons contributed drawings for one of the meetings.³¹ Many of these were from Cristall's collection, which Mr. Gibbons had recently purchased to help him out financially, despite 'not knowing what he' had really bought.³² Some of the works were described as 'exquisite', and one drawing as 'a clever sketch in the style of Constable', being the 'best J. J. Chalon we have seen for a long time.'³³

The 1851 exhibition at 5 Haymarket, organised by Joseph Hogarth, was an important milestone for the Sketching Society, as it was a chance for the public to see many of their works together - often in complete sets - probably for the first time. This exhibition had two seasons, with the first beginning in January and the second starting in May.³⁴ *The Examiner*, writing about the first season, said that 'the drawings are in number 121' (which is considerably less than the 351 in the exhibition catalogue that refers to the second season in May).³⁵ It also believed that 'it gives a good comparative view of the manner of the various

³¹ *The Athenaeum*, 1 April 1848, p.344.

³² *Ibid.* Mr. Gibbons is unfortunately always referred to without a first name. He was known to have commissioned Stanfield to paint *A Moonlight Scene at Sea*. Gibbons most likely was a patron and also a speculative art dealer, as he used the first season of the 1851 Sketching Society Exhibition to sell some of the works he had acquired from Cristall.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Hogarth must have reached a deal with Mr. Gibbons for the first season which started in January. It would have helped Gibbons to gain public exposure for his drawings. There is no definitive proof for how long either season ran, however, the second season contained many more sketches and likely was on show for longer. See Appendix 2 for further information on the drawings from Cristall's collection. The location of the exhibition in Pall Mall at the centre of the London art district is important, because it places the Sketching Society in a deserving place for a group that had not sought attention during its long existence.

³⁵ *The Examiner*, 11 January 1851, p.27; and Hogarth, 1851.

sketchers, and shows how differently the same subjects can be treated by different artists.³⁶ *The Athenaeum* reaffirms this by saying that ‘the great interest of these sketches consists in the variety exhibited in the treatment of the same idea’, but thought that the group was ‘probably not very generally known.’³⁷ This makes sense given the lack of details contemporarily written about them in the 1840s and before.

The *London Literary Journal* assumed that ‘most of our readers are no doubt aware that some of our principal artists have formed themselves into what they call a Sketching Society’ with ‘the powers of the artist, as an inventor [being] taxed to the utmost.’³⁸ This is intriguing, because it almost implies that the Chalon Sketching Society had only recently been created. Some of the sketches from the first season were described in the press, with one in the likeness of Cuyp by John James Chalon being called a ‘signal success’.³⁹ They believed that Chalon’s drawings were ‘likely to prove no small surprise to such as have formed their judgement from his recent Academy pictures alone.’⁴⁰ This was rather favourable from *The Spectator*, which had been critical of the group’s publication in 1840. The final comment on the first season is from *The Art Journal*, which explained that the drawings were also for sale for between five to ten guineas and came from Cristall’s collection.⁴¹ It bemoans, however, that the ones on show were not the ‘best of them’ with these already having been bought by ‘sundry amateurs.’⁴² They even urged their readers to not ‘form an opinion concerning the Sketching Club and its evening productions, from the very inferior works he will see exhibited in the Haymarket’, nevertheless, they still believed that ‘the subject is one of much interest’ regarding the group itself.⁴³

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *The Athenaeum*, 11 January 1851, p.56.

³⁸ *London Literary Journal*, 15 January 1851, p.43.

³⁹ *The Spectator*, 11 January 1851 p.43.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *The Art Journal*, February 1851, p.65.

⁴² Ibid. It is worth making a point here briefly about the usually anonymous Victorian art critic. Helene Roberts, ‘Art Reviewing in the Early Nineteenth-Century Periodicals’, *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, no.19 (1973), p.9, has suggested that ‘art reviews do not rank very high in the scale of literary genre. But humble as is their status, they too can make a modest contribution to the understanding of nineteenth-century England.’ See also Helene Roberts, ‘British Art Periodicals of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, no.9 (1970), entire issue and Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London: 1850-1939* (Manchester, 2013).

⁴³ *The Art Journal*, February 1851, p.65.

Perhaps, either the Sketching Society themselves, or Hogarth, saw the comments in *The Art Journal* from the first season and took onboard their constructive criticism, as the second was clearly a more developed affair. It was advertised in *The Illustrated London News* on 12 April 1851 as a ‘collection of drawings by the Sketching Society, now on view at Mr. Hogarth’s, in the Haymarket.’⁴⁴ The spread, furthermore, included a drawing by Stanfield called *The Elements*, which was on display at the exhibition and seemed to be a highly finished work ‘abounding with masterly touches of the painter’s art’ (Fig. 57).⁴⁵ It included over two hundred extra drawings, and we know many were lent from the members’ own collections, because they later appear in their studio sale auction catalogues.⁴⁶

To judge from comments made in the press, the quality of the artworks displayed was undoubtedly increased. For example, the reviewer in the *The Spectator* said that ‘the two Chalons shine here peculiarly with dashing artistic treatment.’⁴⁷ *The Critic* were equally impressed with the idea of seeing the process behind sketching ideas, where the artists’ ‘proficiency in details is, of course, little exercised on productions where rapidity of execution is a chief requisite, but the immediate step from the mind to the hand is brought nearer to the spectator than in more finished works.’⁴⁸ This was one of the key attraction points, because the public normally could not see how artists created their ideas for finished pictures. *The Athenaeum* summed up the uniqueness of the show by saying that ‘the present collection is rich in specimens of the various artists; in which it is even more interesting to observe the varieties of treatment suggested by a common subject than the special excellencies of each.’⁴⁹ This captured, in essence, why the 1840 publication by the Society received a mixed reaction, as complete evening sets were not shown; although, this was rectified in the 1858 publication that we will turn to shortly.

⁴⁴ *The Illustrated London News*, 12 April 1851, p.282.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For example, the *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* drawings in the exhibition (numbers 334 to 341) were completed with Partridge as President and were sold as lots 4 and 5 on 15 June 1874 in his studio sale. These are now in the Folger Shakespeare Library. The catalogue accompanying the show was: Joseph Hogarth, *Exhibition of the Works by the Sketching Society*, exh. cat. (London, 1851).

⁴⁷ *The Spectator*, 10 May 1851, p.452.

⁴⁸ *The Critic*, 15 May 1851, p.240.

⁴⁹ *The Athenaeum*, 17 May 1851, p.532.

The Observer's critic was admitted to a private viewing of the exhibition, and they were particularly endeared towards the group. They described the various themes and scenes chosen for drawings before exclaiming:

there is hardly an exhibition room in England which could afford more valuable lessons and hint to the artist. Owing little, comparatively, to extrinsic graces these sketches necessarily exemplify original thought and original treatment in an extraordinary degree.⁵⁰

The last review of this season we shall consult appeared in *The Art Journal*, whose critical opinion had changed markedly since the first exhibition. They started with an overview of the group, before saying that 'every member who has been connected for any length of time with the society, is in possession of a large collection of these trophies of English dexterity in Art.'⁵¹ Concluding with high praise, the critic said:

the collection to which we now invite the attention of all lovers of Art, will go far to remove this impression; for we believe we may affirm without hyperbole, that setting wholly aside the very limited time allowed for their production, many of them display a decision, and correctness of outline, and a degree of completeness which entitle them to rank with some of the finest sketches of the old masters, executed doubtless with infinitely greater deliberation.⁵²

Returning to the drawings, although their whereabouts today is mainly unknown, some were vividly described by the contemporary press. For example, during the first exhibition season, *The Athenaeum* was drawn to 'Mr. Stanfield's *Discovery*', a work on an explicitly imperial theme, which depicted 'a group of officers and sailors planting the British ensign on a newly-explored territory.'⁵³ We find out more about the masters they imitated in the evenings for the theme 'In the style of', during which 'Mr. Leslie imitates Kneller, - Mr. Stanfield, Salvator Rosa and Claude, - and Mr. A. E. Chalon, Reynolds.'⁵⁴ This is an intriguing insight into some of the artists the group admired and this must have proved popular, as the 1858

⁵⁰ *The Observer*, 19 May 1851, p.3.

⁵¹ *The Art Journal*, June 1851, p.179.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.179-180.

⁵³ *The Athenaeum*, 11 January 1851, p.56.

⁵⁴ *The Athenaeum*, 17 May 1851, p. 532. This detail is not included in the show's exhibition catalogue.

publication included a set in this manner. We learn also of Landseer's drawing for the theme 'A Hoax', which featured a dog 'led up, half dubious, to a stuffed lion: the humour of the situation being augmented by the touch of burlesque analogy which has endowed the royal beast with a closed or wrinkling eye.'⁵⁵

Among the drawings from the exhibition known today, *The Observer* described a set based on 'the history of that wicked parrot, *Vert Vert*, [which is] told in a set of the very best sketches in the room, among which we would particularly indicate one by Mr A. E. Chalon, in which the horror of the nuns when the bird begins to indulge in strong language is exhibited.'⁵⁶ It then described a second drawing depicting 'the education of the parrot by the *bateliers de Loire* (a sketch by Mr. Partridge) [which] is also excellent, the character of the French boatmen, and their elaborate way[?] in training the animal, being capitally depicted.'⁵⁷ Chalon's drawing (Fig. 58) is quite different from the second one, which is almost certainly by Stanfield and not Partridge (Fig. 59). Partridge actually sketched one of the nuns painting a parrot with two fellow sisters observing, which definitely does not fit the above description. Furthermore, a drawing of a boat of any sort would have come naturally to Stanfield, therefore the newspaper's confusion is surprising.

This exhibition - particularly the second season - was a breakthrough for the Sketching Society, drawing attention from the press and also making their works available for wider public viewing. The various complete evening sets displayed showed the group as they wanted to be seen and was a fitting tribute to their achievements. 351 drawings may sound a large number, but this did not contain a vast array of evenings, meaning that even this showcase was a small sample of their total works. The examples from the various themes explored in Chapter 4 show that the Society used more recent sketches from the 1830s onwards, which means that the early years of the group were ignored to a large extent.⁵⁸ The current members clearly wanted their own drawings to be displayed instead of past members who may not have attended the group for decades. The final point to be made is that the

⁵⁵ *The Spectator*, 10 May 1851, p.452. This is an important description as at present we do not know the location of any drawings Landseer completed at the Sketching Society.

⁵⁶ *The Observer*, 19 May 1851, p.3. The theme is from this eighteenth century French literature classic *Vert Vert* by Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gresset.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Miscellaneous themes were the dominant genre at the second season. The Cotman and Girtin groups were not represented at all.

group had found a way - with the help of Hogarth - of presenting themselves in a relatable manner, that was missed in the 1840 folio because of a lack of coherency in the drawings chosen from separate evenings. This 1851 exhibition, in both seasons, displayed the Sketching Society as it was meant to be seen: as a group and not as individuals.

5.3 1858 Publication

With the Sketching Society meetings drawing to a close in 1851 and the positive reviews of its retrospective exhibition, it is surprising that it took another six years before Hogarth - or any other publisher - decided to use some of the group's works again. In fact, the contemporary press went virtually silent on Chalon's group until December 1857, when *The Observer* described 'the exhibition of the works of the Sketching Society, consisting of twenty-seven sketches by the ablest artists of the day, was opened to private view yesterday, at Mr. Hogarth's, in the Haymarket.'⁵⁹ Although on a far smaller scale than the public display of 1851, this was an important event in the Society's history, as it brought the group back to the public's attention once again. The drawings presented were, furthermore, used for a new folio publication that was released in the following year.⁶⁰ Hogarth clearly had the idea of combining the new folio with the exhibition and enticing gallery visitors to buy it after seeing the drawings in person.

The enthusiasm for the group had remained, with *The Observer* later saying that 'the beauty of the drawings, and the celebrity of the artists, render this one of the most interesting exhibitions in the metropolis.'⁶¹ Unfortunately, this new display at the Haymarket did not receive similar attention to the 1851 show, which is understandable as it included over three hundred fewer drawings. However, it makes it easier to examine the exact works which were on display based on the publication itself. The exhibition had five complete evening sets which, in order of appearance in the folio, were: 'An Imitation', 'A Debût', 'In the Style of', 'Giving a Lesson' and 'Flora and Zephyrus', with the latter being a rare evening depicted in vibrant colour. Finally, the folio included two extra drawings, the first being Partridge's group portrait (similar to Fig. 2), and the second a sketch by Alfred Edward Chalon with the

⁵⁹ *The Observer*, 6 December 1857, p.6.

⁶⁰ Joseph Hogarth, *Works of the Sketching Society* (London, 1858). Despite the date given on the title page, it may have been available in 1857.

⁶¹ *The Observer*, 6 December 1857, p.6.

title *A Reception*.⁶² The provenance of the drawings is important when discussing this exhibition and publication, as the folio indicates who lent the works. They came from Alfred Edward Chalon, Partridge, Stanfield and Leslie, indicating that these members were in contact with Hogarth. Interestingly, the chosen sets were previously exhibited in 1851 and were then included in the various members' studio sales.⁶³ This suggests that, unlike the first season in 1851, the drawings in the 1857 show were not for sale. Instead, it seems to have been largely Hogarth's commercial venture, who probably relied on selling many copies of the folio and attracting the public to the exhibition.

The portfolio begins with an introductory note by Alfred Edward Chalon, that describes the Sketching Society and gives various quotations from the 'nine volumes of records he had access to', which included 'each member [writing] an account of his *own* evening, with remarks "sometimes pensive, sometimes gay."⁶⁴ Hogarth then elaborates briefly, maintaining 'that the Studies and Sketches of eminent Masters have invariably and deservedly held a high position in the estimation of all lovers of Art.'⁶⁵ It is intriguing that Hogarth felt it necessary to explain why this folio should be a success, and that he refers to the group's members as 'eminent Masters'.⁶⁶ He makes it clear that the drawings reproduced were 'Sketches', however, it is debatable how well known the Chalon group were, since they had barely featured in the contemporary press since the 1851 exhibition.⁶⁷ Within this context, Hogarth's words seem to have been a spirited sales pitch.

The uniqueness of this new publication was the use of photolithographic reproductions. *The Literary Gazette* believed that even 'experienced artists who are unaware of the imitation, have to be told that the works before them are not, in fact, sepia or watercolour drawings, but photographs, in most cases pure and simple, and untouched by the brush afterwards.'⁶⁸ It is

⁶² Chalon's drawing was used as a frontispiece for the folio. Both sketches were most likely on display at the exhibition.

⁶³ *The Literary Gazette*, 26 December 1857, p.1244. For example, 'Giving a Lesson' was in Partridge's Studio sale as lots 7 and 8 held at Christie, Manson and Woods, 15 June 1874, and 'Flora and Zephyr' was in the Leslie's Studio sale as lots 295-297 and 354-356 held at Messrs Foster, 25 April 1860. Note the slightly different spelling for 'Zephyr' from 'Zephyrus' used in the photolithographs. 'An Imitation' was sold as lots 416 and 417 in the Chalon brother's Studio sale at Christie, Manson and Woods, 11 March 1861.

⁶⁴ Hogarth, 1858, introduction.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *The Literary Gazette*, 26 December 1857, p.1244.

conceivable that ‘these photolithographs issued by J. Hogarth can be considered among the first photolithographic sets’ in the world with ‘the lettering [being] made to appear engraved’, and some having ‘additional hand watercolouring.’⁶⁹ This would explain why the set in the VAM looks slightly different to that of the British Museum, especially the coloured evening, ‘Flora and Zephyrus’.

The evening subject, ‘Giving a Lesson’, was typical of the miscellaneous, indefinite thematic genre that Uwins describes, because of the almost unlimited opportunities available to test the group’s imagination.⁷⁰ Partridge was the host for this meeting, and *The Literary Gazette* provides an important commentary on the sketches shown.⁷¹ Uwins, chose to depict a dancing lesson with an Italianate background (Fig. 60). Clearly, this drawing inspired him, because he went on to produce a large scale oil painting with an almost identical composition.⁷² Alfred Edward Chalon’s drawing (Fig. 61) portrayed ‘a Lesson from Scripture - An old lady reads and talks to two young ones, a child nestling at her feet’ - and the work was described as being ‘beautiful in light and shade, able, and extremely characteristic of the painter.’⁷³ To emphasise the different approach of the members, Stanfield’s example was ‘a Lesson from Nature, in other words, a landscape, with two figures, an artist and his pupil, in the foreground’ and rightly, was referred to as being ‘a triumph of art’ with ‘its beauty of composition’ (Fig. 62).⁷⁴

Continuing with the same set, Partridge’s sketch (Fig. 63), ‘*The Mother’s Lesson*’, was described as ‘an astonishing performance, if really accomplished in the two hours. The richness of the background in this drawing, and the delicate gradations of shade are of the most able description; in front of some charming figures.’⁷⁵ This high praise would, unquestionably, have pleased Partridge, and perhaps explains why he chose this evening to go on display. Lastly, John James Chalon’s drawing, showing a ‘*Grandmother’s Lesson*’, is brushed over without comment, but Leslie’s (Fig. 64) is useful because he chose to use a

⁶⁹ Pieter Van der Merwe and Roger Took, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield, 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-painter, Royal Academician*, exh. cat. (Gateshead: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), p.105.

⁷⁰ Sarah Uwins, *A Memoir of Thomas Uwins, RA*, 2 Vols. (London, 1858), Vol.1, p.188.

⁷¹ *The Literary Gazette*, 26 December 1857, p.1244. The works were completed in sepia and brown washes.

⁷² *Ibid.* This was the previously mentioned painting *An Italian Mother Teaching her Child the Tarantella* produced in 1842, now in the VAM.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

biblical scene for the subject. He drew ‘*Christ’s Lesson*, a most able group in point of composition, something in the manner of West’, helping to highlight that the group still would turn to scripture for miscellaneous themed evenings.⁷⁶

The topics chosen for the publication were all miscellaneous themes, with the exception of ‘*Flora and Zephyrus*’. This was the only subject which could potentially have occurred in the early Sketching Society, yet, even here through the group using colour, there is an obvious difference. The Society were experimenting with colour in the 1840s, and this set helps to explore whether this change was successful, or not.⁷⁷ The evening itself was hosted by Leslie and the theme was possibly chosen due to his interest in genre paintings. Uwins’ drawing (Fig. 65) was thought to be ‘perhaps, the most classical, from his Italian recollections. His Flora stands like a Greek nymph to receive the salute of Zephyr’ with greens and blues perfectly harmonising the picture.⁷⁸ Four further sketches from this evening had similar compositions, with Alfred Edward Chalon’s being ‘of more earthly motive, and is admirably designed and coloured.’⁷⁹ Stanfield (Fig. 66), nevertheless, diverged from the ideas of the other members, and attempted a completely different perspective for the theme. He actually ‘avoids figures altogether. His scene is a tender and beautiful Italian landscape: his Flora a group of choice exotics, upon which Zephyr, in the shape of a butterfly, is about to alight.’⁸⁰ Out of any of the works in the 1858 publication, this drawing is closest to the Girtin Sketching Club, and shows what the early group could have attained if they had themselves been allowed to use colour.

Finally, the two themes, ‘An Imitation’ and ‘In the Style of’, were chances for the group to show their knowledge of artists and artworks they admired.⁸¹ Although this genre was not practised until the 1830s, it clearly became popular in the later stages of the Society.⁸² Alfred Edward Chalon’s drawing for ‘An Imitation’ (Fig. 67) drew inspiration from Gainsborough’s painting, *Mr and Mrs William Hallet*, with the main difference being that Chalon had chosen

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. *The Literary Gazette* speculated that ‘on four evenings out of five the drawings of the “Sketching Society” were in black and white, the fifth only on an average being a “coloured night”’.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Both evenings were hosted by the Chalons. The artists imitated by the group for these themes included Gainsborough, Turner, Rembrandt, Callcott, William Hogarth, Jan Stein (most likely Jan Steen), Brouwer, de Louterbourg, Hobbema and Van de Velde.

⁸² Uwins, 1858, Vol.1, p.188.

to purely focus on the young lady and the dog.⁸³ *The Literary Gazette* believed that ‘this is one of the most successful of the whole series of photographs, and proves how cleverly the style of Gainsborough was caught by the President on that occasion.’⁸⁴ His recently deceased brother, John James Chalon, had produced a fine drawing (Fig. 68) ‘In the Style of’ the now departed Turner, perhaps in tribute to the master. Here, Chalon ‘imitates Turner, with [the] sun in the middle of the sky, delicate stone pine, ruins in the foreground, and parted stream - a marvellous trick of resemblance, in this case slightly coloured.’⁸⁵

Although the 1858 publication and exhibition did not attract the same level of coverage as the show in 1851, it was still highly praised. *The Literary Gazette* concluded that ‘such airy, gay, unfettered efforts of genius as these have hitherto been confined to the choicest collections, and these marvellous reproductions by the means of photography, now first brought to completion after long and anxious efforts, are the newest and best art-application of the day.’⁸⁶ The press and the public had finally begun to discover their drawings, and to realise their importance. It is a shame that works from the early years of the Chalon Sketching Society were not displayed at any of the exhibitions, as these would have helped to show the group’s evolution and progress. However, the 1858 publication, became a fitting tribute to the group and outlined the lasting legacy that they wanted to create.

5.4 Chapter summary

The reason these contemporary sources are important is that Uwins’ *Memoir* was always composed from his perspective, and he actually left the group in 1845, six years before it finally stopped meeting.⁸⁷ The opinion of the press coincided with the release of the Society publications, and also their retrospective exhibitions. The consensus was mixed for the 1840 folio for two reasons: firstly, the method of lithography used meant that the drawings lost their freshness and were printed in a smaller format; secondly, because no complete evening

⁸³ Gainsborough’s painting is often referred to as *The Morning Walk*, 1785, and is at the National Gallery. Although similar and showing the influence of Gainsborough, Chalon’s drawing is a different composition.

⁸⁴ *The Literary Gazette*, 26 December 1857, p.1244.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* It would be useful to know whether the members did have access to engravings of the artists they were imitating because, if they did not, it would make their drawings even more remarkable.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Uwins supposedly left because ‘he wrote a minute in the book offensive to Cristall which he refused to erase.’ Hubbard, 1946, p.29.

sets were included. It was an important milestone for the Society however, as this was their first opportunity to make a group public statement.

The exhibition, held in 1851 through two seasons, was particularly well acknowledged by the press and, presumably, by the public. It received glowing reviews and they even advertised the second season with a drawing in *The Illustrated London News*.⁸⁸ The final exhibition, held in 1857, seemed to be a lower key affair and was linked to the 1858 publication. This folio had rectified the mistakes of the one released in 1840, by this time using faithfully produced photolithographs that were the full size of the original drawings, and included five complete evening sets. Apart from, possibly, the first season of the 1851 exhibition, the members of the Sketching Society were involved, to some extent, in each of the publications and exhibitions. This meant that they were able to show their group's work as they desired. Hogarth, most likely, had a large influence on the displays and 1858 folio but, without the group's input, the contemporary press reviews may have been quite different. The group's geographies of art and display mapped in Chapter 3 is also important to consider here. Both the 1851 and 1857/1858 exhibitions were held at number 5 Haymarket, a street perpendicular to Pall Mall and at the centre of the London art world. This emphasised the group's ambition and aspiration to finally widely show their work, which had steadily progressed from their first publication in 1840. Yet, this also highlights Dias's point that there were beginning to be artistic spaces 'beyond the Academy', with the Sketching Society probably never considering the RA as an exhibition location for their work.⁸⁹

The final major retrospective assessment by the contemporary press on the group was in the October 1858 edition of *The Art Journal*. This provided an important overview of the Sketching Society, and also delved into its influence on another emerging group - the Langham Sketching Club.⁹⁰ The commentary briefly looked at its history and focused on the evenings that involved Queen Victoria. Despite previous articles in the 1850s suggesting that the group were reasonably well known, the article says, regarding Hogarth's latest publication, that it 'has occasioned among amateurs and patrons some curiosity as to the constitution of this society, of which so little is known beyond the professional sphere of

⁸⁸ *The Illustrated London News*, 12 April 1851, p.282.

⁸⁹ Rosie Dias' "'A World of pictures": Pall Mall and the topography of display, 1780-99' in Ogborn, M., and Withers, C. (eds), *Georgian geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 2013), p.111.

⁹⁰ *The Art Journal*, October 1858, p.308.

art.’⁹¹ It points out that their sketches had been on display ‘at the Graphic, or the Artists’ Conversazione, or elsewhere’, but had not generally reached the wider public, and when seen with other paintings, ‘these works are generally overlooked in mixed collections.’⁹² Interestingly, the author quotes some ‘overheard’ comments by ‘a discriminating public’, saying (about works by the Sketching Society) ‘that it was “too rough” - “too smooth” - “perhaps his earliest attempt” - “very hard” - “very soft” - “Leslie! Nonsense he never saw it” - “by Stanfield! A vile forgery.”’⁹³ It is curious that the article uses these quotes, as the writer’s own opinion was generally positive regarding works by the Chalon group. Perhaps, this was to try to emphasise the other side of the members’ artistic practice that was clearly unknown by large proportions of the public.

The columnist then explains how the sketches were different to polished exhibition paintings. This was done through echoing one of the founding Society rules, that the drawings ‘are the result of a two hours *sederunt*’, which would make the public think before making judgement.⁹⁴ The article went on to say that ‘we have fallen on an epoch of exhibitions’ and that ‘these sketches - they are not a character appreciable in the glare of what the public know as an “exhibition”.’⁹⁵ It continues to say that the drawings ‘may be dry and learned, or they may be extravagantly hilarious, but they must shrink oppressed by the impertinent hues and curious finish which an inexorable public now demand in works of Art; and thus the reputation of the society has extended but little beyond professional circles.’⁹⁶ This view has changed little and, if anything, the public and ‘professional circles’ are even less aware of the Sketching Society today.⁹⁷

Finally, after the 1850s, there is a dearth of information on the Sketching Society, except for the studio sales of the members where the group’s works were always highlighted. For example, at Partridge’s sale in 1874, *The Athenaeum* mentions ‘the interesting COLLECTION of Sketching Society DRAWINGS’ as they wanted their readership to be

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid. These remarks would most likely be echoed today in many auction houses and public collections, as the Sketching Society drawings are quite different to the normal modes of output of their esteemed members.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

aware of these.⁹⁸ It was then not until 1891, and the release of Roget's *A History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, that the group gained any further interest.⁹⁹ This work has continually been used alongside Uwins' *Memoir* in academic studies. However, it was not written until forty years after the group culminated, emphasising the importance of the contemporary sources explored in this chapter. It is hoped that more articles on the Chalon group may be discovered in the future, alongside letters by the members, drawings which come up at auction and, hopefully, the finding of the lost minute books. Before examining the legacy of the Sketching Society, it seems fitting to end this chapter with a quote from *The Spectator* regarding the first season of the 1851 exhibition, which it summarised by saying that 'there is entertainment, added to a higher interest, in this collection; admitting the spectator, as in a manner it does, into the confidence of the artist in his least professional and public moments.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *The Athenaeum*, 6 June 1874, p.751.

⁹⁹ J.L. Roget, *A History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, 2 Vols. (London, 1891).

¹⁰⁰ *The Spectator*, 11 January 1851, p.43.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

There is always a peculiar charm about sketches. They are fresh, bold, vigorous. They even hint at excellence the artist can never attain, and are valuable as showing the power of thought and its various stages of development.¹

Here, the critic for *The Athenaeum* was attempting to educate its readers on the value of sketches. They would have been used to seeing finished works of art, but not necessarily the process behind making them. The Chalon group offered a unique insight into this progression through its retrospective exhibitions. Yet, would such works have been considered worthy of public viewing in the original clubs? The Sketching Societies of Girtin and Cotman's time were convened with the aim of advancing the cause of ambitious landscape art through informal gatherings of like-minded artists who practised in watercolour. Although the development of landscape art became less imperative to the Society over time, whether that was because the status of watercolourists was now more established, or because of the advancement of members' artistic careers, or changes in public taste, the original laws and rules of the Girtin group were still remarkably similar to the Chalon club when it was brought to a close in 1851, demonstrating a shared history between the groups. However, it was not until its culmination that the public and contemporary press finally had access to the drawings and began to appreciate them as the 'valuable' sketches that they were.²

Notwithstanding continuities with the earliest manifestations of the Sketching Society, it has been argued in this thesis that the Chalon group, in particular, was distinct in many ways. Alfred Edward Chalon, when writing the club's history, was careful to state that it began 'on the 6th January 1808', making no mention of the Girtin or Cotman Societies.³ Perhaps, Chalon's aim was to assign he and his brother a more prominent role within the history of the Society, since they played no role in the earlier iterations. Additionally, in order to enhance their lasting legacy, Chalon may have consciously ignored the origins of the Girtin club. Nevertheless, the work of the Girtin and Cotman groups is crucial to a holistic understanding of the Sketching Society's history.

¹ *The Athenaeum*, 2 January 1858, p.22. This refers to the Sketching Society and their exhibition in 1858.

² Ibid.

³ Joseph Hogarth, *Works of the Sketching Society* (London, 1858), unpaginated, introduction.

Despite the efforts of the Chalon group to create a legacy for their club, it has often been overlooked because of the focus on the celebrated names of Girtin and Cotman. It is still a largely unknown club, literally a footnote in most histories of watercolour. However, at various points it has resurfaced, beginning with Roget in 1891, Guillemard and Oppé in the 1920s, Hubbard in 1946, and Hamilton and Winter in the 1970s.⁴ In fact, the reason for many of these works was a general renewal of interest in the history of English watercolour artists and of landscape art around 1800 at several points in the last century.⁵ Nonetheless, we can be grateful for their studies, because they kept some understanding of the Sketching Society alive due to each group's important role in the rise of the medium of watercolour. Many members were involved with the OWS, but this is only half of the story of the Sketching Society. Once watercolourists had begun to establish themselves by the mid-1820s as professionals in their own right, it is interesting that the Chalon Sketching Society recruited new members who were all specialist oil painters, with most going on to become members of the RA.⁶ It is this era up until the culmination of the Chalon group that has often been ignored, just that period for which the club was most eager to create a legacy.

The aspirations of the Sketching Society, therefore, shifted and evolved over time. The Girtin club's lofty aim of starting a 'school of Historic Landscape' never fully materialised, although it came closest to achieving this during the early years of the Chalon group.⁷ The ambition of enhancing watercolour as a professional medium undoubtedly took centre stage during the first decades of the Sketching Society. This era of the Society links to Greg

⁴ J.L. Roget, *A History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, 2 Vols. (London, 1891); F.H.H. Guillemard, 'Girtin's Sketching Club', *Connoisseur*, Vol.LXIII (1922), p.189; A.P. Oppé, 'Cotman and Sketching Society', *The Connoisseur*, Vol.LXVII, No.268 (1922), pp.189-198; Hesketh Hubbard, 'The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design' *The Old Water-colour Society's Club*, Vol.24 (London, 1946), pp.19-33; Jean Hamilton, *The Sketching Society, 1799-1851*, exh. cat. (London: VAM, 1971); and David Winter, 'Girtin's Sketching Club', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.2 (February 1974), pp.123-149. Only Hubbard specifically looked at the Chalon group.

⁵ For example, the inter-war period and the 1940s saw a resurgence of interest partly due to the insularity of the period. This was evident in the neo-Romanticism figures of John Piper and Graham Sutherland and was interpreted by critics such as Kenneth Clark. In 1973 there was an important exhibition at the Tate called 'Landscape in Britain' which fed into the dynamic scholarship on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British landscape art of the 1980s. See Nicholas Alfrey, "1973 and the Future of Landscape", *British Art Studies*, Issue 10, <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-10/nalfrey> for an account on the impact of this exhibition.

⁶ See Greg Smith, *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760-1824* (London, 2002a). Pyne was still having to persuade people of the merit of watercolour in the 1820s but this can be seen as indicative of a certain self-confidence in the rise of the medium.

⁷ The inscription is on the back of Louis Francia's drawing *Landscape Composition - Moonlight*, 1799 which is held in the VAM (Fig. 1). This aim can also be linked to Reynolds' vision of 'High Art'.

Smith's seminal book on the rise of the professional watercolourist which he chose to conclude in 1824.⁸ John Tisdall went even further when writing about Cristall being 'part of the two most influential forces in the development of early English watercolours', namely 'the Sketching Society [which] was a workshop for a free interchange of ideas and methods' and 'the Society of Painters a co-operative marketing organisation for their work.'⁹ Intriguingly, Cristall was still a member in the 1830s and 1840s, by which time the aims of the group had clearly changed. The contentions and alliances that Smith brought forward from this period continued into the later decades of the Chalon group, but with a different main focus.¹⁰ Instead of being solely an important influence on watercolour as a medium, the Sketching Society had become a powerful faction within the art establishment of the day, and therefore, influenced oil painting. *The Art Union* believed that it was only because of 'The Sketching Club' that John James Chalon got elected as an Academician in 1841.¹¹ Moreover, they said that the group had 'long resolved that he should be a member of the Royal Academy', even if his election would 'excite universal discontent.'¹² Lastly, the shift was acknowledged in the group's 1840 *Evening Sketches* folio, where they were described as being 'formed for the purpose of combining social intercourse with the cultivation of their Art.'¹³ The group had grown beyond purely helping the rise of watercolourists to cultivating 'Art' in general. Therefore, in a sense, the Sketching Society had completed what it originally set out to do, but had less of a focus on developing landscape art and watercolour as a medium as it did up until the mid 1820s.

Through looking at the history of the groups, the themes they chose for their evening meetings, and the publications and exhibitions in the 1840s and 1850s, it becomes obvious that there were distinct differences in the Sketching Society, with a strong continuation between 1799 and 1820, then a new direction from 1820/1830 to 1851. In the latter period, the selection of themes allowed members opportunity to essay works across a range of genres. Seeking to publicise their activities more widely, greater coverage was also afforded the club in the contemporary press. There was a switch of allegiance from the OWS to the

⁸ Smith, 2002a.

⁹ John Tisdall, *Joshua Cristall 1768-1847: In Search of Arcadia* (Hereford, 1996), p.41. The Society of Painters is the OWS.

¹⁰ Smith, 2002a.

¹¹ *The Art Union*, February 1841, p.33.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ A.E. Chalon et al., *Evening Sketches* (London, 1840), unpaginated, see second page.

RA, which was reflected in the geographies of the group, as they moved slowly further away from Pall Mall, emphasising how the members lives changed over time, in a manner not unlike that of many an associate of other professional classes in London during this period, with a gradual move to more suburban locations. Nevertheless, despite the geographical dispersal of the group, it is important to note that there was still a reliance on the centre of the London art world, with 5 Haymarket, near Pall Mall, chosen for the 1851 and 1857/8 exhibitions. Yet, at the same time, exhibitions such as these highlight that there were spaces beyond the annual Academy exhibitions that even an informal group such as the Sketching Society could utilise.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, this was helped by the Society being noticed by the highest echelons of Victorian society, including the Queen herself, who set the group's evening theme on two memorable occasions. This, in turn, almost certainly played a part in the commissions for the Buckingham Palace Garden Pavilion frescoes that went to Uwins, Leslie and Stanfield.

Despite the Chalon group, in particular, documenting much of its history through diligently kept minute books, publications and exhibitions, there was an inescapably ephemeral nature to the club. This raises the question as to whether the members meant for the Society to be remembered for posterity, or if the documentation was essentially there to purely keep track of the activities of the small group of friends and colleagues involved. There was a self-consciousness about the recording of events, and Uwins' *Memoir* is meticulous in describing the group.¹⁵ Moreover, the Sketching Society clearly was an important part of each member's artistic career, as they all devoted many years of their lives to attending, with the Chalons being there for over 40 years.¹⁶ Yet, it was separate to the professional art institutions within which the members were concomitantly involved, including the RA and the OWS. If the group wanted to provide a long-lasting legacy, then surely in the 1840s new younger members would have been admitted. It is perhaps not surprising that a club which never claimed to be a formal institution did not have a substantive afterlife.

¹⁴ Rosie Dias' "'A World of pictures": Pall Mall and the topography of display, 1780-99' in Ogborn, M., and Withers, C. (eds), *Georgian geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 2013), p.111. Chapter 3 explored the exhibition of Sketching Society works at the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione. It has not been mentioned here because that was an informal display and it is unclear whether the Society members played a role in its curation.

¹⁵ Sarah Uwins, *A Memoir of Thomas Uwins, RA*, 2 Vols. (London, 1858).

¹⁶ This group affiliation was important because of the new connections it brought through other artists, patrons and opportunities. Also, in both the OWS and later the RA, the Sketching Society would have had allies within these institutions.

Remarks in the press about the Chalon group ceased after 1858, which is understandable, since there were no further publications or exhibitions after this date. Since the group's sketches were not generally sold or given away during their lifetimes - with the exception of Cristall's aforementioned collection - there was no other way for the public, or press, to view their works. It is only through museum collections today that we are beginning to rediscover the Sketching Society. Similarly, if the original Chalon group minute books come to light again, this would no doubt change the narrative on the club, as at present much of the story is based on fragmentary sources (drawings, memoirs, publications and contemporary press opinions). Not least, it would enhance our knowledge of the geographies of the Society, making it clear which member was president for each meeting and therefore the location for the construction and display of drawings, allowing us to better characterise the group's leading players.¹⁷ Therefore, what is written in this thesis is by no means definitive. It is provisional in a sense as there are many gaps still to be filled.

Although the legacy of the Sketching Society may have dwindled over time, a brief comment needs to be made about the Langham Sketching Club, which was started in 1838. According to an early history written for *The Art Journal*, the Langham Club followed the original Sketching Society's constitution, claiming that it 'has been the model on which many others have formed', differing only in that 'at Langham Chambers the appliances and means admit of sketching in oil, water-colour, or charcoal.'¹⁸ Otherwise, as with the original group, members were allowed just two hours to execute the evening's chosen theme. These also followed the earlier model, with the Langham Club using subjects such as 'the first act of Macbeth; others from the fourth chapter of St. Luke, and others in diverse *genres*, satirical, and sentimental'; all of which could easily have been used by the Chalon group for their evenings.¹⁹ Therefore, the Sketching Society did, in a sense, have a spiritual successor and afterlife of sorts.²⁰

This thesis has challenged the usual narrative of the Sketching Society's history, by placing it in a wider temporal context to look past the Girtin and Cotman groups. It has begun to offer,

¹⁷ Few works from the group are signed and rarely can it be deciphered who was the president. Therefore, the minute books would help with the location of the meetings and also help to show the themes chosen by each artist.

¹⁸ *The Art Journal*, October 1858, p.308.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ When the Langham group split in 1898, half of the members went on to form the London Sketch Club which still exists today.

albeit tentatively, an alternative way of understanding this period, through a group that operated in the centre of the London art world. Most of the activities and dynamics of the Sketching Society were veiled for large parts of its existence, with only circles of friends and professionals being involved. The history unveiled here begins to rectify this and to show a different legacy to that which has been portrayed since the last contemporary publication on the group's work in 1858. In a similar manner to the response of Queen Victoria, it is hoped that the club, and its 'valuable drawings', will gain renewed interest regarding its important place in nineteenth-century British art.²¹

²¹ A box of Sketching Society drawings from A.E. Chalon's collection were shown to Queen Victoria by Mr. Lane. See RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W) 23 March 1837 (Lord Esher's Typescripts). Weblink: <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/search/displayItemFromId.do?FormatType=fulltextimgsrc&QueryType=articles&ItemID=18370323&volumeType=ESHER>, accessed 13/11/2019.

Appendix 1 - Primary and Archival Sources

Various institutions and archival collections have been alluded to throughout this research and, although briefly described in the introduction, this section is intended to add further detail. Jean Hamilton, in her exhibition at the VAM, used the vast collection of works donated by the children of J. Howard Barnes in 1939, which included 244 drawings from the Sketching Society.¹ These cover the overlap of the Cotman Sketching Society and the Chalon Sketching Society, in which John Samuel Hayward was a member. The usefulness of this collection is that it holds various complete, or nearly complete, evening sets with the themes still known today. This is because Barnes wrote a manuscript on ‘The Artistic Life of John Samuel Hayward’, which contained various notes on Hayward’s career, including his time with the Sketching Society.² It is the latter which interests us, as it attempts to include the various theme names of the works now held at the VAM. The manuscript, additionally, includes the letter from Paul Sandby Munn, previously mentioned in the main text (Fig. 11), and information Barnes had collated on members. The main problem with this group of drawings - and to that point Hamilton’s exhibition - is that they only go up until about 1820, when Hayward ceased to be a Sketching Society member. Therefore, the addition of 74 drawings in 1980 to the VAM - which were collected by John Partridge from his evenings as the Society’s president - help to readdress the lack of works post-1820 for the Chalon Sketching Society.³ These drawings date from 15 November 1833 to 12 April 1844 and include works by the Chalons, Leslie, Uwins, Partridge and Stanfield. The last four artists were nearly completely ignored by Hamilton’s exhibition, showing the usefulness of having later works now in the VAM collection.⁴

Another addition to a national collection since Hamilton’s exhibition is at the British Museum, who purchased a folio of drawings that were once in the possession of the Sketching Society member Francis Stevens.⁵ The drawings in this folio cover six different

¹ Jean Hamilton, *The Sketching Society, 1799-1851*, exh. cat. (London: VAM, 1971), p.6. J. Howard Barnes was a descendent of John Samuel Hayward’s cousin Robert Barnes (1787-1862) who attended some Sketching Society meetings.

² This is held in PD.86a(2), L.1209-1954 at the VAM.

³ Donated by Mr. Charles Andrew Winsor, a descendent of John Partridge by marriage.

⁴ Many are also complete sets and the themes are all inscribed on the mounts accompanying the drawings.

⁵ Purchased from Christie’s British Watercolours auction on 30 March 1993, lot 37.

themes ranging from the biblical passage ‘By the Rivers of Babylon’ to Milton’s *Comus*.⁶ These are important as they are particularly close in date to the start of the Chalon Sketching Society in 1808, giving an indication of the early style of the group. The British Museum, moreover, has other catalogued drawings from the Sketching Society, together with some that are surely from their evenings but are not catalogued as such.⁷

The third large group of drawings from the Sketching Society is held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C., who own 64 works.⁸ One set has an evening theme based on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which was examined in the main text of this study. The other works in this collection share a Shakespearean theme and are all from around 1830.⁹ The United States also has Sketching Society drawings in the Yale British Collection and the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.¹⁰

In the United Kingdom, the Tyne and Wear Archive Museums have some interesting works from the Chalon Sketching Society, including sets on *Gertrude of Wyoming*, *Comus*, *Lady of the Lake*, *Robinson Crusoe*, a scene from Byron’s *Don Juan*, and *Paradise Lost*.¹¹ The Tate Collection, additionally, has drawings from the Girtin Sketching Club, including a set containing works by Cotman and Girtin showing that they were present together at a Society meeting on at least one occasion.

Unfortunately, the minute books for the Chalon Sketching Society have been ‘lost’, since they were ‘lent out for research in 1946.’¹² They were compiled by the presidents for the

⁶ The other themes included Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Woodhull’s translation of Euripides’ *The Bacchanalians*, Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen* (Book 3), and ‘Spring’ from Thomson’s *The Seasons*. Handwritten notes precede each evening set in the folio with the evening theme introduced. The drawings are dated 4 October 1809 to 4 April 1810.

⁷ The watercolour of the group portrait by John Partridge is a particularly useful drawing in British Museum collection (see Fig. 2).

⁸ Judith Kennedy utilised many of these in her article ‘Bottom Transformed by the Sketching Society.’ *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.47, No.3, (Autumn 1996), pp.306-318.

⁹ This is ascertained from Stanfield, Leslie, Partridge and Uwins having produced drawings for many of these evenings.

¹⁰ The latter has various examples from the Girtin Sketching Club, including the original minute book already referred to in the main text.

¹¹ They have 17 drawings in total with many from the early decades of the Chalon group.

¹² See Pieter van der Merwe and Roger Took, *The Spectacular Career of Clarkson Stanfield, 1793-1867: Seaman, Scene-painter, Royal Academician*, exh. cat. (Gateshead: Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1979), p.101. They were in the collection of Mr. H.A. Walton, a Stanfield descendant. This is known because of

evenings, and contain ‘a wealth of detail relating not only to the Society in general but also to the personal circumstances of the members themselves.’¹³ Hesketh Hubbard had access to the minute books when he wrote his important article on the Chalon group in 1946.¹⁴ Hubbard used various quotes from it and also, thankfully, gave a detailed list of members and a comprehensive catalogue of visitors, including the dates on which they attended. These minute books will surely resurface one day and will enhance our knowledge of the Sketching Society tremendously, opening up many further lines of research.

Due the nature of the Sketching Society’s ancient rule that the drawings from the evenings could not be sold, countless works have not been signed or inscribed.¹⁵ To further complicate the question of attribution, many were painted in sepia and monochrome colours, which is a different style to what the artists are known for. Therefore, Sketching Society drawings do come up at auction, but often go unidentified and sold purely as from the ‘English School’. The Witt Library at the Courtauld Institute of Fine Art has sections for most members containing their auction records. Various drawings by the Sketching Society can be found through careful study there. Contemporary auction houses do sell Society drawings occasionally, and it is hoped that this research will help to familiarise experts with their works, helping them to become easier to spot. Past auction catalogues are correspondingly useful, with the Chalon brothers, Stanfield, Cotman, Partridge, Leslie, Uwins and Crisall having Sketching Society drawings in their studio sales. This means that many will be in private collections across the United Kingdom and other parts of the world.

Hesketh Hubbard’s article ‘The Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design’, *The Old Water-colour Society’s Club*, Vol.24 (London, 1946), pp.19-33.

¹³ Van der Merwe and Took, 1979, p.101.

¹⁴ Hubbard, 1946.

¹⁵ Sarah Uwins, *A Memoir of Thomas Uwins, RA*, 2 Vols. (London, 1858), Vol.1, p.203.

Appendix 2 - Auction records and Exhibitions

This Appendix links particularly to Chapter 4 and the themes chosen by the Chalon Sketching Society for evening meetings. It examines the various studio sales of the members and gives examples of lots which link to the four thematic headings. It is not exhaustive, and further catalogues could provide more examples, but it does give a useful overview, since these sales were contemporary to when the Sketching Society existed.⁴¹⁸

Shakespeare

In the Chalon brothers' studio sale, the following Shakespearean sets were included: *As you Like it* (lots 465-467), *The Tempest* (lot 472), *King Lear* (lot 495), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (lot 601), *Winter's Tale* (lots 631-632) and *Much Ado about Nothing* (lots 636 and 660).⁴¹⁹ There is a separate section for 'Early works of the Sketching Society', so we immediately know that the above were from the period of Stanfield, Leslie and Uwins, as their names appear in the lot descriptions.⁴²⁰ Partridge's sale included: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (lots 4-5, which is the set referred to earlier in the Folger Shakespeare Library) and 'A character from Shakespeare' (lot 23, which may have been similar to Stanfield's drawing of Falstaff, which we encountered earlier as Fig. 41).⁴²¹

Leslie's sale contained various references to Shakespearean plays such as: *Anthony and Cleopatra* (lots 287 and 365), *Henry IV* (lot 288), *Henry VIII* (lot 306), *Much Ado about Nothing* (lots 340 and 350) and *Romeo and Juliet* (lots 340 and 350).⁴²² Furthermore, for the evening theme 'The Salute' we know that Stanfield (lot 288) drew a scene including Falstaff and Mrs. Ford, and for 'A Hoax' Alfred Edward Chalon (lot 307) used *Much Ado about Nothing*, Act III, Scene 1. Uwins' sale included two references to Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (lot 262) and *Anthony and Cleopatra* (lot 264).⁴²³ Stanfield's sale curiously contained no Shakespeare drawings, although the lack of Sketching Society works in the auction suggests

⁴¹⁸ Note that the auction records lack information regarding the date and size of the drawings.

⁴¹⁹ Chalon brother's Studio sale at Christie, Manson and Woods, 11 March 1861.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Partridge's studio sale was held at Christie, Manson and Woods, 15 June 1874.

⁴²² Leslie's studio sale was held at Messrs. Foster, 25 April 1860.

⁴²³ Thomas Uwins studio sale was held at Christie and Manson on 3 June 1858.

that many may have been kept by his family.⁴²⁴ Mrs. Gibbons' sale in 1883 comprised various Shakespearean drawings which, most likely, came from Crisall's evenings as president, including a scene from the *Merchant of Venice* by Stanfield (lot 62).⁴²⁵

Biblical

Specific examples in the Chalon brothers' studio sale show the themes of 'The Good Samaritan' (lot 410), 'David in the Tent of Saul' (lot 428), 'The Pool of Bethesda' (lot 453), 'Christ's Agony on the Mount' (lot 480), 'Joan of Arc and the fiends' (lot 481), 'Judith' (lot 503), 'The Prodigal Son' (lot 512), 'St Elizabeth of Hungary' (lot 529), 'The Death of Absalom' (lot 593), 'Temptation of St Anthony' (lot 610) and 'The Presentation of Samuel' (lot 658).⁴²⁶ This illustrates that the group certainly still used biblical scenes, and later themes with various saints in. The other members had similar works for sale, which the reader can visit themselves, however Uwins' auction is worth briefly exploring.⁴²⁷ There are scenes for 'Job' (lot 88), 'A Sermon' (lot 90), 'Christ Disputing with the Doctors' (lot 96), 'The Crucifixion' (lot 103), 'Jerusalem Desolate' (lot 104), 'Christ blessing the little children' (lot 108), 'Cain and Abel' (lot 109) when Etty was a visitor, 'The life of Saint Paul' (lot 121) and 'The Prodigal Son' (lot 123). The difference with some of these themes is the chance for the members to use their imagination with their own ideas. Instead of a stringent verse, for example, 'The Sermon' had endless opportunities with Uwins drawing St. Francis preaching to Brigands and Alfred Edward Chalon sketching a cathedral service.

Classical and contemporary literature

Although not as commonly used from the 1820s onwards, Partridge's studio sale consisted of sets on Milton's *Comus* (lots 44 and 45) and also Virgil's *Aeneid* (lots 46 and 47), showing that classical literature still had a place in the latter decades of the Sketching Society.⁴²⁸ Furthermore, Leslie's sale contained examples such as a theme from Milton's *L'Allegro* (lot 326) and Collins' *Ode to Mercy* (lot 327).⁴²⁹ The Chalon brothers' sale had various other

⁴²⁴ Stanfield's studio sale at Christie, Manson and Woods, 8 May 1868.

⁴²⁵ Mrs. Gibbons sale was held at Christie, Manson and Woods, 17 March 1883.

⁴²⁶ Held on 11 March 1861.

⁴²⁷ Held on 3 June 1858.

⁴²⁸ Held on 15 June 1874.

⁴²⁹ Held 25 April 1860. The first lot is by A.E. Chalon and the second by his brother.

examples, but Uwins' catalogue was more detailed, and so we learn that there were evenings exploring themes such as 'The Blind Highland Boy' (lot 89, from Wordsworth), 'Ulysses in the Isle of Calypso' (lot 92), and 'Bacchus and Ariadne' (lot 113). This is the only known example where a work by Wordsworth was chosen as a theme, which was most likely because of Uwins' friendship with him going back to a meeting in the Lake District in 1815.⁴³⁰

1851 Sketching Society Exhibition

The first season's drawings were probably from Cristall's collection that *The Art Journal* describes and it is worth quoting a passage in full:

Many of our readers are aware that the Sketching Club has existed for nearly half a century; the members meet weekly "at each other's houses;" each produces in three and a half hours (the exact time allowed for work) a sketch, which sketch remains the property of the host of the evening. But it is distinctly understood - and until now the rule has never been departed from - that such sketches shall on no account be sold. Recently, however, one of the members (it is not necessary to give the name, it will be sufficient to say that he is not a member of the RA) sustained severe losses by circumstances which in no degree inferred culpability or even imprudence; and in his difficulties he sought and obtained the sanction of his brother members of the club to dispose of his share of the sketches. They were first "picked" by sundry amateurs; the best of them were bought at moderate but fair prices; and the remainder were sold to the dealer in question at, we understand, an average price of one pound each. For these the dealer is modestly asking prices of from five to ten guineas each - a pretty reasonable profit upon his speculation.⁴³¹

Cristall was known to have returned to the group when he came back to London in the 1840s from Goodrich, and Roget claims that his 'reception was none the less cordial...and nowhere more so than among his former companions in the Sketching Society, which was now in its fullest activity.'⁴³² Roget recites a letter from Cristall in 1840 in which he mentions 'many

⁴³⁰ John Phillips, *Thomas Uwins, R.A. 1782-1857* (London, 1989), p.3.

⁴³¹ *The Art Journal*, February 1851, p.65.

⁴³² J.L. Roget, *A History of the Old Water-Colour Society*, 2 Vols. (London, 1891), Vol.2, p.19.

obstacles, principally money', which would certainly link to the comments in *The Art Journal* above, along with him not being a member of the RA.⁴³³ *The Athenaeum* in 1848 - regarding a display at the Hampstead Fine Arts Conversazione - said that 'the new (drawings) included a large collection of sketches, bought by Mr. Gibbons, of the late Mr. Cristall, the artist in his last illness through the kind intervention of Mr. Boxall.' It continues by saying that 'kind friends stepped in to relieve his anxiety (regarding money) on this point; and a purchase was effected of a series of sketches which had fallen to his share a member of the Sketching Club.'⁴³⁴ The kind friends would have been the other members of the Sketching Society and, interestingly, an auction held at Christie, Manson & Woods in 1883 included a large collection of the works of the Sketching Society from the property of Mrs. Gibbons, whose husband surely was the Mr. Gibbons who purchased Cristall's share of the drawings.⁴³⁵ These must have been the sketches which had not sold at the 1851 exhibition, or ones that the Gibbons family had decided to keep.

⁴³³ Ibid., Vol.2, p.16. It could also be Robert Trewick Bone or Charles John Robertson, but they sparingly attended in the 1840s.

⁴³⁴ *The Athenaeum*, 1 April 1848, p.344.

⁴³⁵ The auction was held at Christie, Manson and Woods, 17 March 1883 with most of lots 1 to 82 being works by the Sketching Society.

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