

John White Abbott



On Windermere near Low wood – evening light

Reference: 10926

Dimensions:

Height: 18.60 cm / 7³/₈ in

Width: 23.90 cm / 9³/₈ in

Inscribed verso: Near Low wood July 16/Evening light on the [?]position from the Right, signed with initials, inscribed and dated on label attached to backboard: On Winandermere [sic] near Lowwood./JWA. July 16.1791, pen and grey ink and watercolour, original hand drawn mount attached to backboard

18.6 x 23.9 cm; 7½ x 9¾ inches

Provenance: Thomas Agnew & Sons Ltd, London, no. 14336; The Flannery collection, UK, and by descent until 2018.

This drawing shows Windermere near Low Wood, drawn in a gentle evening light which catches on the trees; a building

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on the left with a boat moored in front of it and slates stacked up at the base of the tree on the right. It seems most probable that the building is the Low Wood Inn. Nine years later, Low Wood Bay is where Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere journal begins (May 14 1800. Wm & John set off into Yorkshire after dinner at 1/2 past 2 o'clock – cold pork in their pockets. I left them at the turning of the Low-wood bay under the trees...).¹

From the end of the eighteenth century, the numerous slate quarries of the area had begun to increase production to supply the expanding industrial areas of the north of England. The slates would have been transported by boat, using craft like the one moored on the lake in this watercolour.

John White Abbott was a surgeon and apothecary in Exeter for about twenty years. Drawing was his hobby, and he was the best-known pupil of Francis Towne (1739–1816). He exhibited oil paintings regularly from 1793 to 1805 at the Royal Academy as an honorary exhibitor (a nonprofessional artist). His uncle James White, an Exeter barrister and non-conformist, was a close friend of Towne's and accompanied him on his Lake District tour of 1786.

Abbott's only known tour of any length outside Devon was to Scotland and the Lake District five years later. A series of eighty dated drawings from 13 June (York Minster) to 28 July (Glastonbury Abbey), record him in the Lakes during the second week of July 1791. He approached from the direction of Carlisle (7 July), spent two days around Ullswater, and was at Rydal on 10 July. After a couple of days in Grasmere and Windermere (12 July), he sketched in Borrowdale on 13 July before turning southwards, but was on Windermere again on 16 July, when the present work was drawn. Abbott travelled to Liverpool the following day and then on to the Peak District in Derbyshire, where he stayed from 21 to 23 July.

Although it is not known exactly when Towne taught Abbott, it has been suggested that the two must have been in contact in the later part of the 1780s when Abbott was in his twenties, as the work Towne produced on his Lake District tour appears to have had a strong influence on Abbott's early style, and on the work he drew during his own tour of the Lakes five years later. ²

In 1825 Abbott inherited his uncle's fortune and his property, Fordland, in Devon, and retired from the medical profession to devote himself exclusively to his painting, although he did not exhibit at the Royal Academy after 1822.

1. Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journals*, republished 1987, p. 18.
2. T. Wilcox, 'Francis Towne and his friends', exhibition catalogue, 2005, no. 29.