

Thomas Rowlandson



French prisoners under escort to Exeter Castle for forfeiting their parole

Reference: 11130

Dimensions:

Height: 26.50 cm / 10³/₈ in
Width: 40.50 cm / 16 in

With signature and date l.r.: Rowlandson 1799, inscribed l.l.: FRENCH PRISONERS under escort to EXETER CASTLE for forfeiting their parole, pen and ink and watercolour over pencil
26.5 x 40.5 cm; 10½ x 16 inches

Provenance:

Christie's, London, 7 April 1998, lot

There is another drawing of French prisoners on parole at Bodmin in 1795, in the collection of the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Paul Mellon Collection (B1975.3.145). During the wars which followed the French Revolution, French prisoners were a not unusual sight on the streets of England, and in the present drawing they were presumably being marched to the gaol inside the castle. Another, undated, view of the South Gate, Exeter, is also at Yale (B1975.4.703).

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

Rowlandson seems to have used artistic licence with the architecture, which does not appear to be strictly accurate.

Rowlandson worked extensively in the West Country, where he made annual tours. He usually stayed with his friend Matthew Michell, who had an estate at Hengar near Bodmin in Cornwall, where the artist would base himself.

In 1068, William the Conqueror selected Rougemont as the site of a larger and more strongly fortified castle than had existed before at Exeter. Baldwin de Moles, or de Brionus, the husband of the king's niece Albreda, oversaw the castle's construction and became hereditary sheriff of Devonshire. His son Richard died without issue, and the castle was granted to Richard de Redvers, who was created Earl of Devon by Henry I.

In 1232, Exeter Castle was seized by Henry III, who gave it to his younger brother, Richard, Earl of Cornwall. It remained mainly in the possession of the Earls of Cornwall, and in 1337, when Edward, the eldest son of King Edward III, was created Duke of Cornwall, the castle became part of the Duchy of Cornwall.

After its surrender to General Fairfax in 1646 during the Civil War, the castle ceased to be a military fortress. Within the ancient walls, much of the original structure of the Devon County Court was erected in 1774, but it has undergone frequent alterations and some enlargements.