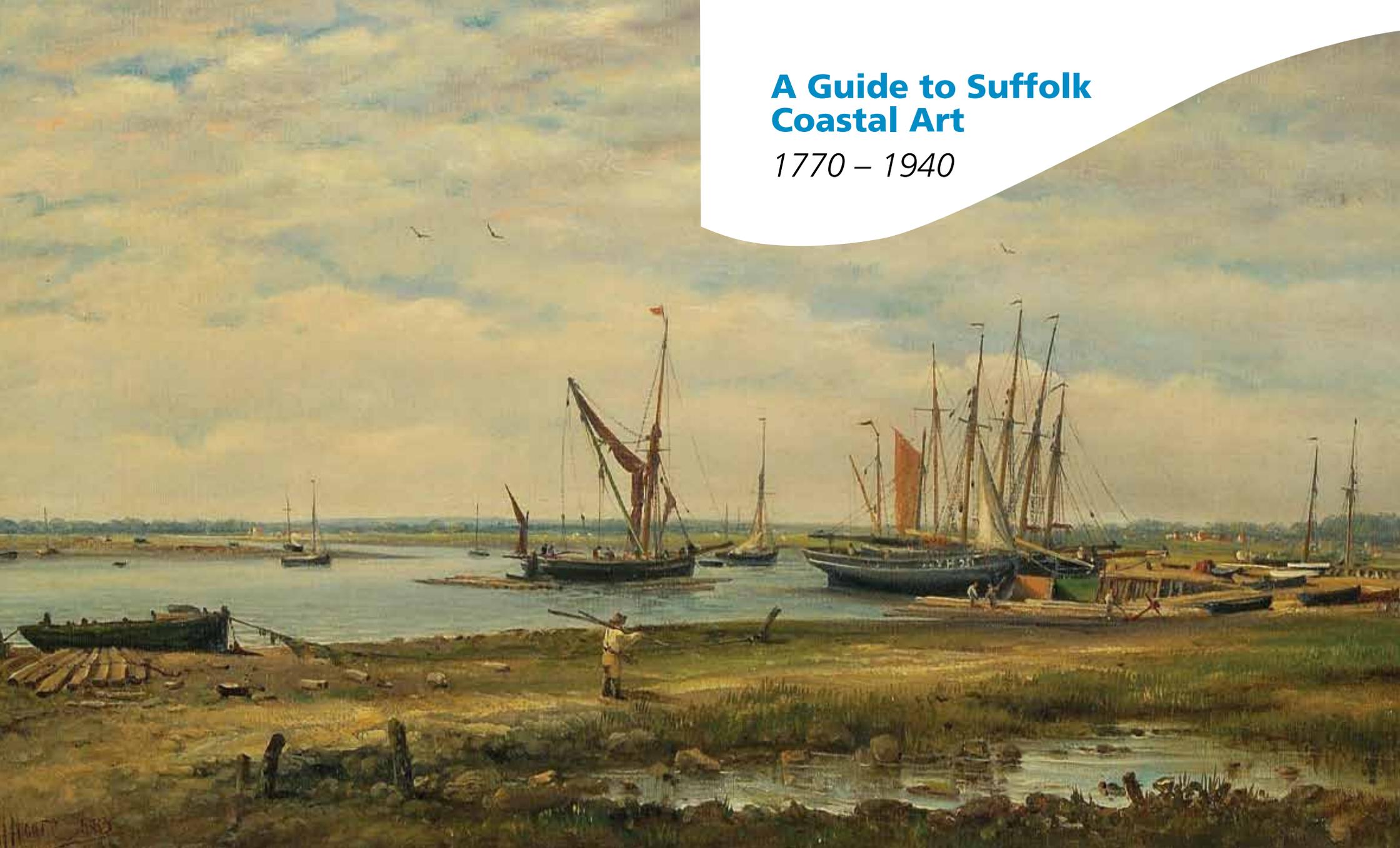


A Guide to Suffolk Coastal Art

1770 – 1940



Touching the Tide

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Cover Illustration: Slaughden Quay in 1883'.
An oil painting by John Moore of Ipswich

'The Suffolk Coastline - for two hundred years a favoured venue for many of our leading landscape painters'

Introduction

The coastline of Suffolk has attracted numerous artists over the last two centuries. They wished to paint the wild, natural landscapes and the open skies often set against the backdrop of the North Sea. In fact, many regard East Anglia as the cradle of English landscape painting, with John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough exemplifying all the special qualities of this very English tradition.

The significance of art in terms of understanding the changing coastline of Suffolk was highlighted in the report *'Touching the Tide – A Landscape Conservation Action Plan for the Suffolk Coast'* (Jenman, 2012¹). With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, *'Touching the Tide'* aims to make a real difference to people's understanding of the ever-changing Suffolk coast through a variety of media including art. An appreciation of the coastal artworks of the county can raise awareness of how the coastline has changed over time, in an interesting and informative way.

Both the open coast of Suffolk, and the major estuaries, are subjected to continual change as a result of coastal erosion, inundation and the natural movement of sand and shingle along the coast by 'long-shore drift'. Climate change is likely to increase the rate and scale of change, and we need to gain a better understanding of what this may mean for coastal residents and businesses as well as for the natural environment, in order that we may plan effectively for the future.

In Suffolk, with its rich resource of landscape paintings, drawings and prints, extending back to the late eighteenth century, it is possible to use art to improve our understanding of long-term coastal change, and its implications, to assist future coastal management.

This booklet summarises the art history of the Suffolk coast and explains how it may be used to support the aims and objectives of the *'Touching the Tide'* Action Plan (Jenman, 2012¹).



Plate 2:
'Bawdsey Ferry near Felixstowe'.
An oil painting by John Moore of Ipswich. Circa 1880.

Plate 1: A Map of part of the coast of Suffolk
by Pigot & Co. 1840

Art and the Suffolk Coast

Artists started to paint the Suffolk coast from the late eighteenth century when the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars prevented gentlemen from travelling to Europe to take the Grand Tour. This led to an increasing interest in our own, more remote landscapes, such as those of the East Anglian coastline.

Research commissioned previously by The Crown Estate (McInnes & Stubbings, 2010²), identified over two hundred artists that had painted views of the Suffolk coast between Kessingland in the north and Felixstowe to the south. Views of the coastal towns and villages including Southwold, Walberswick and Aldeburgh, as well as the creeks and estuaries, were particularly popular subjects for visiting artists, some of who lived and worked there or who participated within artists' 'schools' for many years. Landscape paintings, depending on their accuracy, can inform us about not just physical change on the coast but also the

social and environmental changes that have taken place. For example, they may illustrate how coastal towns and villages expanded during the Victorian and Edwardian eras as well as showing historic buildings or structures such as fortifications, lighthouses and harbour or river walls. Apart from social change, such artworks may depict the nature of the landscape at the time they were painted. They may illustrate changing agricultural patterns and approaches to land use, whilst in some more detailed works it is possible to identify tree, shrub and plant species.



Plate 3: 'Walberswick Marshes' by Bertram Priestman RA. Oil on canvas. 1921

Suffolk Artists

Some of the earliest illustrations of the coastal scenery of Suffolk appear as copper plate engravings in topographical books from the 1750s. However, it was the introduction of the 'Picturesque' style of landscape painting in the mid-to-late eighteenth century that drew attention to the more interesting and remote parts of the British coastline. Whilst book illustrations in the form of engravings, aquatints and lithographs provide much useful information on the coast, it is the wealth of oil paintings and watercolours that form by far the largest number of illustrations of the Suffolk coastline.

Many of Britain's leading artists produced fine views of East Anglia including John Varley (1778-1842), Anthony Vandyke Copley Fielding (1787-1855), Thomas Hearne (1744-1817), Thomas Churchyard (1798-1865) and Henry Bright (1810-1873), whilst John Moore of Ipswich (1820-1902) painted accurate coastal and shipping scenes.

Locations seriously affected by coastal erosion such as the historic, lost city of Dunwich, were painted by J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) and others as early as 1824. A succession of artists continued to paint the popular subjects of Dunwich, Southwold and Walberswick throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as indeed they do today. Henry Davy (1793-1865) was a topographical artist who painted views of the coastline, including particularly Southwold, showing the cliffline and the coast protection structures. Both Edwin Hayes (1819-1904) and Thomas Smythe (1825-1906) also painted detailed views of Southwold beach (see plates 8, 13 and 15).

As well as those artists who painted the coastal towns, cliffs and beaches, a number of artists were primarily marine painters who wished to capture shipping and craft against the backdrop of the North Sea or the Suffolk coastline including Edwin Ellis (1841-1895) and Clarkson Stanfield (1828-1878). Henry Moore (1831-1895) painted 'Crossing the bar, Walberswick Sands' in 1857. Walter Langley (1852-1922) visited Walberswick in 1891 and produced a number of views of the village as well as of nearby

Southwold. The celebrated watercolourist Myles Birket Foster (1825-1899) also painted several views of Walberswick in the 1890s, whilst Charles Robertson (1844-1891), a follower of the Pre-Raphaelite School of Artists, painted a view of Southwold harbour with Walberswick and its windmill.

A wealth of well-known artists came to Suffolk in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries including Sir Alfred East (1849-1923), Max Ludby (1858-1943), Thomas Pine (1843-1935), Frank Spenlove Spenlove (1863-1933) and George Hillyard Swinstead (1860-1926). From the 1880s there were increasing numbers of colour plate book illustrations to cater for the growing numbers of coastal visitors, as well as the introduction of colour picture postcards by companies such as Raphael Tuck, and J. & F. Salmon of Sevenoaks in Kent. In 1921 A. & C. Black published their 'Norfolk and Suffolk' volume (Clarke, 1921³), which was illustrated with forty colour plates by Alfred Heaton Cooper. The keen interest in paintings of coastal scenery continued through the early twentieth century until the Second World War and beyond, with artists such as Sir J. Arnesby Brown (1866-1955), Bertram Priestman (1868-1941) and Edward Seago (1910-1974) exhibiting views of the Suffolk coast.



Plate 4: 'Wreck of the Princess Augusta on Southwold Beach'.
A coloured lithograph by J.B Crome. 1838.



Plate 5: 'The Old Moot Hall on the shore, Aldeburgh' by Alfred Heaton Cooper. Watercolour. 1926.



Plate 6: 'Walberswick Ferry'.
A watercolour by Alfred Heaton Cooper. 1926

The accuracy of landscape paintings

Before we can make practical use of landscape artworks to assist with managing the Suffolk coast we need to be satisfied that the paintings accurately reflect conditions that existed at the time they were painted.

Some artists painted what they wished to see rather than the actual scene, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when 'picturesque landscapes' were favoured rather than pure topographical subjects. For example, the watercolour by Turner (Plate 7) shows the height of the cliff exaggerated and the position of the ruined church has been altered. However, other artists, including William Daniell RA produced fine, accurate images of Southwold (Plate 9) and Orfordness (Plate 10) that can be readily compared with the present day. During the mid-nineteenth century the leading art critic John Ruskin encouraged artists to depict what they saw 'with absolute accuracy' and many artists followed this advice. Such

accurate artworks also met the demands of Victorian and Edwardian visitors who wished to buy pictures to remind them of their holidays on the coast.

Other artists concentrated on coastal scenes with shipping or fishermen on the shore, although, sometimes such works can provide information on coastal and beach conditions. For example the oil paintings by Thomas Smythe show the nature of the beach and coastal defences along the Southwold frontage. His view looking towards Southwold from the harbour (Plate 13) shows a substantial beach similar in form to that of today whilst Plate 15 shows the rudimentary timber revetment that preceded the present defences.



Plate 7: 'Dunwich'. A Watercolour by J. M. W. Turner. c.1824.



Plate 8: 'Southwold' by Edwin Hayes (1819-1904). Oil.



Plate 9: 'Southwold' by William Daniell RA. An Aquatint from his 'Voyage Round Great Britain'. c.1823.



Plate 10: 'Orford Ness Lighthouse' by William Daniell RA. An Aquatint from his 'Voyage Round Great Britain'. c.1823.

The Suffolk artist, John Moore of Ipswich, worked in oils and his detailed views of the coast such as of Slaughden Quay in 1883 (Plate 11) can be relied upon as a reflection of conditions along this low-lying coastal frontage at that time. Landscape art can also describe social changes on the coast. For example, the detailed watercolour by Walter Crane painted in 1872 (Plate 14) depicts the fishermen's huts that used to line the foot of the cliff at East Cliff, Southwold before they were finally destroyed by a storm in 1905. Such views describe the lives of those who lived and worked along the Suffolk coast in the past.

In order to establish which Suffolk artists painted the coastal scenery most

accurately over the last two hundred years a ranking system was developed through a study sponsored by The Crown Estate (McInnes and Stubbings, 2010²). This resulted in the completion of a list of those artists, and their works, which can be relied upon in terms of producing paintings that truly reflected coastal conditions at the time they were painted. Those involved in the planning and management of the coast can examine these works, looking back for over two hundred years, to improve their understanding of the rate and patterns of change to not just the physical landscape but also the natural environment, as well as noting the impacts of these changes on those living and working along the Suffolk coastline .

Plate 11: 'Slaughden Quay in 1883. An oil painting by John Moore of Ipswich.





Plate 12: 'Ruins of All Saint's Church, Dunwich' by Alfred Heaton Cooper. Watercolour. 1926



Plate 14: 'Below East Cliff, Southwold' by Walter Crane. Watercolour. 1886.



Plate 13: 'Southwold Beach looking towards the town' by Thomas Smythe. Oil on canvas



Plate 15: 'At Southwold' by Thomas Smythe. Oil on canvas. Mid-19th C.

Plate 16: 'Minsmere Cliff' by Walter Daniel Batley. Oil on canvas. 1897.



Art and 'Touching the Tide'

The wealth of fine artworks of the Suffolk coasts and estuaries form a readily available additional resource to inform the *'Touching the Tide – Landscape Conservation Action Plan for the Suffolk Coast'*.

Paintings, watercolours and prints from the past, produced by some of Britain's leading artists, provide an accurate record of coastal conditions over time against which we can assess the rate of physical and environmental changes as well as providing information on social change and heritage. For further information on Suffolk coastal art please consult the reference list opposite or visit The Crown Estate website (www.thecrownestate.co.uk) where the full report on *'Art as a Tool in Support of the Understanding of Long-Term Coastal Change in East Anglia'* by Professor Robin McInnes OBE FRSA and Hope Stubbings may be read

or downloaded. This report includes a list of those artists who, in the opinion of the authors, provided images that can be relied upon in terms of illustrating the coast at the time they were painted.

For further study of oil paintings of the County the website www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings illustrates every oil painting of Suffolk held in public collections and can be searched by artist name and by location. The Public Catalogue Foundation book *'Oil Paintings in Public Ownership in Suffolk'* (Editor A.Ellis, 2005⁴), ISBN:1-904931-101-1 is also a useful reference work.

References

1. Jenman, W., 2012. *'Touching the Tide – A Landscape Conservation Action Plan for the Suffolk Coast'*. Suffolk Coasts & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. 82pps and Appendices. Suffolk County Council.
2. McInnes, R. G. & Stubbings, H., 2010. *'Art as a Tool in Support of the Understanding of Long-Term Coastal Change in East Anglia'*. The Crown Estate. ISBN: 978-1-906410-10-0. 91pps. Crown Copyright.
3. Clarke, W.G. 1921. *'Norfolk & Suffolk'*. A & C Black. London.
4. Ellis, A. (Ed.). *'Oil Paintings in Public Ownership in Suffolk'*. The Public Catalogues Foundation. ISBN: 1-904931-101-1.

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– Courtesy of Colchester and Ipswich Museums.

Plates 1, 4, 9, 10, 13, 15

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Plate 7

– Courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery.

Plate 8

– Courtesy of David Messum Fine Art Limited.

Plate 14

– Courtesy of St Felix School, Southwold.

Text

This Guide has been prepared by Professor Robin McInnes OBE of Coastal & Geotechnical Services, Isle of Wight for Suffolk Coasts & Heaths Partnership.

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