

# RENOIR

## 1841-1919



• ARTISTS IN GUERNSEY •

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Detail from Fog on Guernsey (No 2)  
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Renoir in 1875  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

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## **Renoir in Guernsey**

### **JOHN HOUSE**

The French Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir spent a little over a month on Guernsey in the late summer of 1883, staying in lodgings at No 4 George Road, St. Peter Port. He painted about fifteen pictures on the island, none of them large, and all showing views of the bay and beach of Moulin Huet, at the east end of the island's rocky south coast and within easy walking distance of his lodgings. We do not know why he came to Guernsey. A group of friends accompanied him, among them Paul Lhote and perhaps his wife-to-be Aline Charigot. We have no indication, however, of their reasons for choosing Guernsey rather than the coast of Normandy, which Renoir had visited and painted several times in the previous five years<sup>1</sup>.

The paintings are varied in theme; panoramic views from the track leading down to the bay, scenes with groups of figures among the rocks on the beach, and simpler sketches of rocks and sea. Besides the paintings, two of Renoir's letters from Guernsey survive and they are translated in full here<sup>2,3</sup>. The first, written soon after he arrived, is little more than a routine tourist travelogue, with its obligatory mentions of Robinson Crusoe and Victor Hugo's exile on the island. The second, however, written three weeks later to his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, is one of the most interesting that Renoir ever wrote about his art. It allows us to place his visit to Guernsey

very clearly in the development of his ideas about painting, as he increasingly abandoned explicitly contemporary subjects and direct work from the natural scene, in favour of a more generalised vision of the human figure within nature. The paintings he executed on Guernsey and from the sketches he made there are eloquent testimony to the twin claims of direct observation and idealised conception.

#### **The Image of Guernsey: Northern Mists, Southern Climate**

The majority of Guernsey's contemporary visitors, and most of those who wrote about the island, were English. For them, the island represented the South and its exotic vegetation and gentle climate gave it an almost Mediterranean allure. For French visitors, however, it had a more paradoxical image; a northern island, close to Brittany, with its associations of rugged primitiveness, but also a climate that belied its geographical location. For one writer in 1888, it was 'the Norman Eden'<sup>4</sup>.

Most French people in the later nineteenth century knew the island only as Victor Hugo's place of exile between 1855 and 1870 and as the

setting for his novel *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866). The island was hailed as a cradle of liberty, but beyond this little was known of it and few French tourists visited it. The Channel Islands were, however, included in the widely circulated Joanne Guides to Brittany. In the 1886 edition a new preface by Henry Boland vividly set out the appeal of the islands for a French readership: a race that combined Gallic gaiety with British phlegm; a people with a biblical character because of their incessant contact with the perils of the sea; and women renowned for their beauty. Boland gave further reasons for the French to visit the islands; although French was still their official language (it remained so well into the present century) French influence was on the wane and could only be reasserted by visitors from mainland France. Hugo himself had declared the worth of the islands: 'One day, Paris will make these islands fashionable and will make their fortune; they deserve it... They have the singular attraction of combining a climate made for leisure with a population made for toil'<sup>5</sup>.

Accounts like Boland's evoke an unchanging world, outside the sphere of nineteenth century 'progress', but in fact Guernsey had undergone major transformations in the half century before Renoir's visit. Steamboat transport had opened the Channel Islands to tourism and a spate of English guidebooks from the 1840's onwards testified to their popularity as resorts. Guernsey, then as now, was less geared to tourism than Jersey, but there was a great development in hotels and lodgings for the visitor and official bathing places, first for men and then for women, were set up beneath the cliffs to the south of the harbour at St Peter Port.

The harbour itself had been reconstructed and enlarged in the mid-century which allowed it to cater for the increasing leisure

boating, and also a dramatic expansion of the island's trade, primarily through the development of fruit cultivation in greenhouses. The inland scenery was already acquiring its distinctive glazing, the prime crop in the early 1880's being dessert grapes for the London market, harvested between July and the end of September. Only in the mid-1880's, after Renoir's visit, did maincrop tomatoes, grown under glass, begin to be exported (they were soon to replace grapes as the island's principal crop). Important too in the island economy was the quarrying of granite and the harvesting of seaweed<sup>6</sup>.

Nothing of the island's agricultural or commercial life puts in an appearance in Renoir's paintings. Greenhouses, of course, were hardly a promising motif for a landscapist; but earlier in his career Renoir had often painted towns and villages in France, and in 1880 he had exhibited at the Paris Salon a large canvas of mussel gatherers on the Normandy coast. Yet neither the autumn seaweed harvest with its attendant festivities, which took place during his stay, nor the picturesque streets and harbour of St Peter Port, attracted his brush. Only tourism, in the guise of some of the figures in his beach scenes, puts in a discreet appearance; otherwise, his pictures present the island as a refuge, a place of escape from the modern world.

### **Moulin Huet: 'A famous resort for artists'**

In nineteenth century guide books to Guernsey, Moulin Huet was consistently singled out as the island's finest scenic attraction. *Black's Guide to the Channel Islands* noted: 'It is not necessary to

attempt a description of the singularly exquisite views of rock-scenery obtained in this little nook. They are in some respects unrivalled in the Channel Islands, and everyone who visits Guernsey is expected to make this one of the first excursions'. The writer summed up the appeal of the place in terms likely to appeal to an Impressionist landscapist: 'The real source of the beauty of this spot lies, no doubt, in the ever-changing effects at all times and seasons; the freshness and life derived from the running stream; and the exquisite and sudden shifting of the scene, by the occasional introduction of the sea, with its numerous rocks and islets and the enclosing cliff'<sup>8</sup>.

Evocations of the beauties of this coastline ranged from the geological to the mythological. Dr Sieveking wrote in his often-quoted article *The Climate of Guernsey* (1867): On the southern side ...we meet with some magnificent scenery, which, owing to the rich, reddish-brown hue of the syenite composing the seawall, forms the most striking contrast with the brilliant green of the receding valleys and hill-tops on the one hand, and the ever-varying tints of the ocean on the other... The general character of the interior of the island is that of a tableland, of an undulating character, shelving off gradually to the north-west and north, but opening in narrow cliffs or wider valleys to the south, like a Danae wooing to her embrace the genial and life-giving beams of the Sun-God'<sup>9</sup>.

It was this contrast between the savagery of the rock scenery (technically formed of Icart gneiss, a particularly old granite-like rock) and the lavish cloak of foliage which gave the coastline its resonance. It offered a synthesis of botany and geology particularly appealing to nineteenth

century English visitors, for whom nature could be education and recreation at one and the same time. *Barbet's Guide for the Island of Guernsey* of 1840 added a further dimension to Moulin Huet's appeal: 'The overhanging precipices, largely indented with fissures, the impetuous waves rolling upon the pebbly beach below and breaking with violence upon the rocks detached from the cliff, together with the sudden disappearance of every object indicating the presence of man, will impart to the mind a feeling of solitude and abstraction from worldly scenes, and lead it almost instinctively to commune with itself, with nature and with God.' But, at the same time, the scene which stirred such feelings was readily accessible, and, as *Barbet's Guide* reassured the timid visitor, there was a cottage on the way down to the beach where picnics could be eaten'<sup>10</sup>.

Several of the guides also noted the suitability of the bay for artists. *Grigg's Guide to Guernsey, Alderney and Sark* commented in 1880: 'This is a famous resort for artists, many of whom have committed to canvas the lovely and ever-changing aspect its locality presents; while poets too have sung of its charms in language which such scenes alone inspire'. The celebrity of the place is emphasised by the use of a fine engraving of the bay, reproduced here, from a painting by Birket Foster, as the frontispiece of Volume IV of Cassell's lavish publication *Picturesque Europe* (1876-9). Here a panorama of the bay, from a viewpoint close to one that Renoir was to adopt (see No 4), shows no trace of tourism, but places archetypal peasant figures in the foreground to evoke a mood of rural retreat.

French traditions for viewing and portraying the natural world were very different from those

current in England. Rather than treating natural phenomena as lessons in the natural sciences or as moral sermons, the French observers tended to focus more on effect and mood, on the ways in which the play of light and weather transformed a scene, and on the individual's subjective responses to it. It was these two elements which were fundamental to the Impressionists' visions of nature. Close attention to detail was sacrificed in favour of overall effect, and the painter sought to recreate in paint his personal sensations in front of the fleeting light and colour of nature.

Renoir's views of Moulin Huet pay scant attention to the details of flora or rock structure, but treat the site as a splendid display of optical pyrotechnics or as the scenario for seaside recreation. Nature is a site of pleasure, not enlightenment.

### **Views of the Bay: Pictures for a Dealer**

Among Renoir's Guernsey paintings, four stand out as pictures of a different type; the four views looking down over the bay from the west (Nos 1- 4). All are more elaborately worked and more highly finished than Renoir's other Guernsey canvases, and they are the only four which are signed and dated 'Renoir 83'. It is almost certain that these are the four Guernsey pictures which he sold to his Parisian dealer Paul Durand-Ruel soon after his return from the island<sup>12</sup>. As far as we know, these were the only Guernsey paintings sold at the time of their execution.

Durand-Ruel had been the dealer most interested in the work of the Impressionists since the early 1870's, but financial problems greatly restricted his purchases between 1874 and 1880. In

1881, however, he began to buy extensively from Renoir, Monet, Pissarro and Sisley. At the same time, Renoir was gaining an increasing reputation as a portraitist of fashionable Parisian artistic society largely through the success of his *Portrait of Madame Charpentier and her Children* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) at the 1879 Salon exhibition. Madame Charpentier, wife of a leading publisher, hosted a celebrated literary Salon.

Durand-Ruel, when he began to buy from Renoir in 1881, sought to sell the works, particularly to the same circle of clients who were commissioning portraits from him. The dealer's purchases were mainly modern life figure scenes and landscapes. From 1879 onwards, Renoir made a number of trips away from his home in Paris, to the coasts of Normandy and the Mediterranean, and to Italy and Algeria, during which he painted landscapes, many of which were bought by Durand-Ruel. On these previous trips Renoir painted many of the most scenic and spectacular views around him; views from cliff-tops; the Grand Canal in Venice, Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples; and the bay and exotic public gardens of Algiers.

The four views from above Moulin Huet fall closely into this context; views of a locally celebrated site, seen from viewpoints very like those commonly used by topographical illustrators<sup>13</sup>. However, Durand-Ruel was not able to sell the pictures immediately; all four were in his stock in 1891, and three still in 1908. He included one or more of the pictures in a number of exhibitions while they were in his stock. One of them (probably No 1) was among those included in the first exhibition he organised in New York in 1886, and two (Nos 1 and 4) in the first major

Impressionist exhibition mounted in London, at the Grafton Galleries in 1905<sup>14</sup>.

The four paintings all show Moulin Huet from viewpoints on or very near the main track which leads down to the sea from the northwest. In one *The Bay of Moulin Huet through the Trees* (No 3), the viewpoint is near the junction of the main track and the Water Lane, the site of the present car park. Renoir would probably have reached Moulin Huet down the Water Lane from St Martin's, the most direct route from St Peter Port by foot and itself a renowned tourist attraction. In another picture (No 4), the view is seen from rather higher up the track (the trees have grown up too much for the precise viewpoint to be located), and in the other two (Nos 1 and 2) the bay is viewed from further down, near the present tearoom. The ruins of the cottage seen in *Fog on Guernsey* (No 2) still stand to the left of the track, while in No 1 the characteristic shape of Cradle Rock appears in the bay.

These four viewpoints vividly illustrate what so many of the nineteenth century guide books noted, the way in which the panorama of the bay constantly changes as one goes down the track towards the beach. Renoir had no need to scramble up the cliffs to find interesting and varied views. Indeed, his choice of such easily reached subjects is very characteristic of his activities as a landscapist. Not for him the physical discomfort that Monet put himself to in his search for dramatic outdoor subjects.

These panoramas of Moulin Huet are not particularly large, but the elaboration of their brushwork and the consistent degree of finish all over the pictures mark them out as paintings which Renoir would have considered fully finished.

It is most unlikely that he would have been able to bring them to their present state on the spot, in the changeable conditions of light and weather of late summer. By this date it was normal practice for the Impressionist landscapists to complete their outdoor work in the studio before sale<sup>15</sup>.

Pictures of this sort were an essential part of Renoir's stock-in-trade at this time. Their sale allowed him to spend time on projects which demanded longer attention and yielded less immediate results, notably his current experiments with figure painting.

### **Bathers on the Beach: Watteau and Athens**

In the letter which Renoir wrote to Durand-Ruel from Guernsey<sup>3</sup> and in his later memories of his stay there<sup>16</sup>, the image of bathers on the beach played a central role. The easy, informal customs of mixed bathing and changing clothes amid the rocks aroused his fascinated attention, but, as his mentions of Watteau and Athens in the letter show, he also fitted these experiences into an historical and cultural framework.

The detailed history of sea bathing is difficult to write, because informal customs rarely leave a trace in the written record. Many guide books described the excellent formal amenities provided for bathers at St Peter Port; separate bathing places for men and women: 'for safety, privacy, easy access and accomodation, unrivalled by any in the three kingdoms'<sup>17</sup>. One later reminiscence of the bathing place noted: 'Men while bathing wore no clothing. Women used their cast-off dresses. Mixed bathing was unheard of and, even with precautions, would hardly have been tolerated, except among members of a family'<sup>18</sup>. However,

informal bathing was clearly frequent elsewhere on the island. Victor Hugo's diary records that he and his party bathed at Moulin Huet on Sunday, 24th July 1870, and it seems most unlikely that they were the only people to do so<sup>19</sup>.

From a French point of view, the social customs of childhood on the island seemed unexpectedly liberal. Victor Hugo noted this in characterising Déruchette in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*: 'Add to all this the English sort of liberty which she enjoyed. In England the very infants go alone, girls are their own mistresses, and adolescence is almost wholly unrestrained. Such are the differences of manners. Later, how many of these free maidens become slaves? I use the word in its least odious sense; I mean that they are free in the development of their nature, but slaves to duty'<sup>20</sup>.

It was these easy-going customs that surprised and delighted Renoir among the rocks of Moulin Huet in 1883 and he related his responses to the scene to past examples, to the French early eighteenth century painter Watteau and to ancient Athens. Watteau's reputation in the late nineteenth century was largely shaped by the writings of the Goncourt brothers, published in the 1850's and 1860's. The Goncourts had conjured up the world of Watteau's pictures as a poetic vision of an earthly paradise of grace, leisure and sensuality, amid idyllic natural surroundings. They wrote: 'We are on Theleme or Tempe, those enchanted islands separated by a crystal ribbon from the land, as carefree as they are unpastored, where shade converses with repose, whose inhabitants stroll aimlessly and languorously about, matching their leisure with that of the clouds and the tide'. Watteau's world was 'a new Olympus' and it was 'among the Muses, moral and sentimental, of the

modern era that he sought the models for the women ...of his divine paintings'<sup>21</sup>. It was a synthesis of idyll and actuality such as this that Renoir found at Moulin Huet.

The association that Renoir made between the bathers on the beach and the idea of Athens related to contemporary debates about the role of the nude in modern life. In 1881, reviewing the Impressionist exhibition of that year, Joris-Karl Huysmans had defined certain modern sites where the nude might be found; 'in bed, in the artist's studio, in the anatomy theatre and in the bath'<sup>22</sup>. But for most modern commentators, the nude in modern art was an anachronism, since the nude had no place in modern society. This argument was vividly stated by Hippolyte Taine in 1865: 'The painters of Pompeii and Herculaneum ...had the unique good fortune ...to live with appropriate customs, to see at every moment nude and draped bodies, in the bath, at the amphitheatre, and as well to cultivate the gifts of the body - strength and speed. They spoke of a beautiful breast, of a well-structured neck or a rounded arm as we would talk of an expressive face or a well-cut pair of trousers... Nudity for the Greeks was not at all indecent; it was their distinctive trait, the prerogative of their race, the condition of their culture, the accompaniment of their national and religious ceremonies... Today we only paint nuditities out of pedantry or lasciviousness; they did it to express their intimate and primitive conception of human nature'<sup>23</sup>. In the casual undress of the bathers at Moulin Huet, Renoir found this idea of the natural body recreated in the modern world.

By the early 1880's Renoir was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the aesthetic ideas,

based on an overt, urban modernity which had formed the basis of his art during the 1870's. At the same time, he was becoming aware of the limitations of the techniques that the Impressionists had evolved, techniques which rejected drawing and the precise definition of forms, in favour of a rapid, richly coloured notation in oil paint of the overall effect of a scene.

His dissatisfactions made themselves felt in his figure painting before they did in landscape. His panoramic views of Moulin Huet still closely follow the patterns established in the landscapes of the 1870's, with a degree of added finesse in their handling which may have been a response to the demands of potential buyers. However, in his figure paintings he had begun to seek far more tightly defined forms. In part this was the result of demands from portrait sitters, who required a more literal likeness than was possible in the loosely brushed Impressionist sketch, but it also reflected a more radical dissatisfaction with his previous achievements, which had won him neither critical nor commercial success.

Together with this sharper definition of forms, he began to explore less overtly contemporary themes in his figure painting. This appears most vividly in a canvas of a seated nude which he painted during his trip to Italy late in 1881. Apropos this picture, he described how his study of Raphael's fresco paintings in Rome was leading him to seek 'the grandeur and simplicity of the ancients ...Raphael, who didn't work out of doors, had still studied sunlight for his frescoes are full of it. So, by dint of studying out of doors, I have ended up by only seeing the broad harmonies without any longer preoccupying myself with the small details which dim the sunlight rather than illuminating it.'<sup>26</sup>

However, his concern with more timeless themes, of figures in nature, preceded his trip to Italy. The previous summer he had planned a canvas very similar to those he undertook at Moulin Huet; a scene showing naked bathing boys on a beach near Dieppe. The mother of one of his friends described this project: 'He fears neither rain nor mud; he wants to paint a large canvas of naked boys playing with the sunlight playing on them; for this he wants it not to be too hot, and for there to be some sun; the children want there to be no wind and for it not to be cold, so they can pose naked in the water for two or three hours.'<sup>26</sup>

Renoir seems to have been unable to pursue this idea in 1881, perhaps because the weather conditions prevented it. But the easy-going habits on Guernsey allowed him to take up the plan again in 1883. Indeed, two unfinished sketches of naked boys among the rocks at Moulin Huet (Nos 12 and 13) tally closely with the 1881 project, and other Guernsey canvases show small bathing figures, often girls in bathing costumes, scattered across the beach (Nos 10 and 11).

In several of the pictures, however, Renoir concentrated more on a single group of figures, more carefully arranged (No 8) and this became the dominant subject of the largest of all his Guernsey pictures, *Children on the Seashore* (No 7). However, even this, like all the other pictures of figures on Moulin Huet beach, was abandoned in an unfinished state. The legs of the girl on the right, and in particular the small figures in the background, are clearly incomplete, and Renoir would probably have further refined the treatment of sea and cliffs.

Why did he never complete it? Two related

factors probably played a major part; first, that he was losing interest in modern dress scenes like this in favour of the outdoor female nude, the quintessential theme of the figure in nature in western artistic tradition, and second, that he no longer sought to complete his outdoor figure subjects in the open air, but realised that he could only bring them to the resolution he sought in his studio, back home in Paris.

### **‘Documents for making pictures in Paris’**

When Renoir wrote to Durand-Ruel on the 27th September from Guernsey, he made a clear distinction among the pictures he was going to bring home, between ‘several canvases’ and ‘documents for making pictures in Paris’. The ‘canvases’ were presumably the four panoramas of the bay which he soon afterwards sold to the dealer, the ‘documents’ the more informal sketches of cliffs and rocks and of figures on the beach.

The use of sketches made outdoors in summer as documents, as raw material, for studio compositions painted during the winter belonged to a long-standing academic tradition. During the late 1860’s and 1870’s, however, the Impressionists, and Renoir among them, had sought to paint even their larger figure subjects outside, so as to give a harmony of atmosphere between figures and their natural surroundings. But this was a difficult ambition to fulfil, because of the changeability of light and weather, together with the practical difficulties of transporting large canvases and arranging large figure groups. By the early 1880’s, too, as we have seen, Renoir was developing more positive reasons for abandoning outdoor figure

painting, using Raphael as his model as he concentrated on ‘broad harmonies’ instead of ‘small details that dim the sunlight rather than illuminating it’.

We do not know which of the Guernsey beach scenes were painted on the island. Very probably all of the smaller ones were at least begun there, and the two sketches which focus on sea and rocks (Nos 5 and 6) were probably entirely painted there. In the scenes with figures, the forms of the rocks on the beach do not correspond exactly with those at Moulin Huet, and the pictures may have been partly sketched away from the subject. It is also possible that the one larger picture, *Children on the Seashore* (No 7) was entirely painted in Paris from these smaller studies, particularly No 8. The way that the figures in *Children on the Seashore* detach themselves crisply from the background is very different from Renoir’s earlier outdoor figure painting, such as *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* of 1876 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris), where even the principal figures are absorbed into the play of coloured shadows. All over the surface of *Children on the Seashore*, there are traces of different colours beneath the main paint layer, which seem to bear no relationship to the picture’s subject. It is very possible that Renoir was re-using an abandoned canvas, and perhaps more plausible that he did this in his studio rather than carrying a failed canvas to Moulin Huet.

One other picture, of similar type and the same size as *Children on the Seashore*, has regularly been described as a Guernsey subject, *By the Seashore* (No A), which was completed at the time of its execution, and very probably sold by Renoir to Durand-Ruel in January 1884<sup>27</sup>. The uncertain

relationships of scale and space between the figure and the background here strongly suggest that the painting was done in the studio. However, the background does not correspond with any Guernsey site, but is very similar to cliffs which Renoir had painted in the Dieppe area. The picture was very probably painted in Paris after the Guernsey trip, perhaps at the same time as the unfinished *Children on the Seashore*, but it makes no use of the 'documents' Renoir brought home from Moulin Huet.

One ambitious figure subject, however, does have a Guernsey setting, the *Seated Bather* (No 14), often dated to 1885, but nearer in handling to the other works of 1883-4. The studies of Moulin Huet with its rocks and cliffs, and particularly No 10, provide all the elements for its background; but, as in *By the Seashore*, the figure is not placed in a legible spatial relationship with what lies behind it. Soon after his visit to Guernsey Renoir wrote to Monet: 'I'm stuck in Paris where I'm getting very fed up, and I'm seeking the perfect model. But, I am a figure painter. Alas! sometimes it's great fun, but not when one can only find figures that are not to one's taste.'<sup>28</sup> *Seated Bather* was very probably his principal figure painting of the winter 1883-4, and it suggests that his quest for the perfect model was not in vain. Although he did not, of course, find its actual subject on Guernsey, the relaxed habits of bathing at Moulin Huet may have been the catalyst which allowed Renoir, in this picture, to fuse monumental form with an easy informality of gesture and expression.

In 1894, Renoir sold two small beach scenes with bathers to Durand-Ruel, with titles which did not indicate their topographical location. One of these *Bathers in Guernsey* (No 16), originally titled

*By the Seaside*, was later exhibited on several occasions as a view of Guernsey<sup>29</sup>. The rocks in the background are vaguely similar to some of those around Moulin Huet, such as the Pea Stacks at the southeast corner of the bay, which are seen at the right hand end of the background cliffs in many of the other pictures (eg Nos 5 and 6). However, the exact grouping of rocks in *Bathers in Guernsey* is quite unlike any view at Moulin Huet. Moreover, the handling of these two pictures, with their bonneted figures treated in soft, cursive brushstrokes, corresponds more closely to Renoir's style of the early 1890's than to that of 1883-4. It seems very possible that the paintings were executed at this later period, shortly before their sale to Durand-Ruel, and perhaps distantly based on his earlier memories and sketches of Moulin Huet. If this is so, this imaginative return to Guernsey, a decade or so after his actual visit, shows what a hold the place still had on him.

Renoir's visit to Guernsey came at a turning point in his career, and his paintings from the island vividly illustrate the varied strands in his work at the time: the dealer landscapes showing typical tourist views; the sketches of sea and rocks, seeking to capture a rapid effect; the studies of figures on the beach, potential 'documents' for more ambitious projects; and *Children by the Seashore*, the largest and most resolved of the Guernsey figure paintings. *Seated Bather*, with its fusion of an ideal of womanhood with a Guernsey background, pointed the direction for his later career, when he abandoned contemporary subjects and came increasingly to challenge the old masters on their own ground, by matching his own art against the European tradition of figure painting.

1. From the evidence of his letters (see below 2, 3), Renoir arrived on Guernsey near the beginning of September and probably left around the 9th October 1883. He gave his address as 4 George Road in his letter to Edmond Maître of the 5th September. (The numbering of the houses in George Road has been changed since 1883: what was then No 4 seems to have been the previous house on the site of the present No 5.) Among its occupants in the 1881 Census was listed Sophie Ozanne, Lodging House Keeper; Miss S Ozanne also advertised 'Furnished Apartments in George Road' in Guerin's Almanac for 1886; thus it seems likely that Renoir lodged with her in 1883. Renoir's later reminiscences of the trip, published by Ambroise Vollard (in *En écoutant Cézanne, Degas, Renoir*, Paris 1938, p200) and Jean Renoir (*Renoir My Father*, London 1962, p166-7, both mention Paul Lhote as his companion. Vollard also mentions that Renoir's wife Aline also accompanied them, but, since Renoir married Aline Charigot only in 1890, five years after the birth of their first child, this account may be questioned. We do not know how regularly Aline accompanied Renoir on his travels between their meeting c1880 and their marriage.
2. Letter from Renoir to Edmond Maître, from 4 George Road, St Peter Port, 5th September 1883  
    'My dear Friend,  
    Once on the boat, like a child playing truant, I watched Normandy disappearing and, I must admit it, I regretted the good friends who were waiting for me; but the beautiful sea, though rough, had such charm and I am so weak that finally I gave in to the pleasure of watching the rise and fall of these beautiful masses of water, tinted with the most beautiful colours. We reached Jersey (for we are a group). There we visited the island like simple bourgeois, for now I need only Switzerland to become a perfect bonnet-maker. But Guernsey was our goal, and despite the admirable sites which unfolded before our delighted gaze, we waited impatiently for the boat which was to take us to see the rock upon which the great poet lamented for eighteen years. At last the whistle sounded and in calm sunny weather we sailed round Jersey on our way to our goal. What a pretty little place! What pretty paths! Superb rocks, beaches such as Robinson must have had on his island, as well as rump steak and ale at manageable prices — up to now, everything is fine. All I have to do is to

take advantage of the admirable weather and to bring you back some nice things so that you forgive my infidelity to beautiful Normandy.'

From Francois Daulte, *Auguste Renoir: Figures (1860-1890)*, Lausanne 1971, pp48-9. Renoir seems to have sent an identical letter to Paul Bérard; it is published in Maurice Bérard, *Lettres de Renoir à Paul Bérard*, *La Revue de Paris*, December 1968, p4.

Letter from Renoir to Paul Durand-Ruel, 27th September 1883

'Dear Monsieur Durand, I hope to return soon, around the 8th or 9th of October, with several canvases and some documents for making pictures in Paris. Here I find myself on a charming beach, quite unlike our Normandy beaches, unfortunately a bit late in the year, but not too late to be able to profit a little from it. Here people bathe among the rocks which serve as cabins, since there's nothing else; nothing is more attractive than this mixture of women and men crowded on these rocks. One would believe oneself in a landscape by Watteau rather than in the real world. So I'll have a source of real and graceful motifs which I will be able to make use of. Some enchanting bathing costumes; and just as in Athens the women are not at all afraid of the proximity of men on the nearby rocks. Nothing is more amusing, when one is strolling through these rocks, than to surprise young girls getting ready to bathe; even though they are English, they are not particularly shocked. Despite the small number of things that I'll be able to bring back, I hope to be able to give you an idea of these charming scenes.'

From Lionello Venturi, *Les Archives de l'Impressionnisme*, Paris 1939, pp 125-6

4. Aristide and Charles Frémine, *Les Français dans les Iles de La Manche*, Paris 1888, p182
5. Guides Joanne, *Bretagne*, Paris 1886; the section on 'Iles Anglais de la Manche', reprinted from previous editions, had a new preface by Henri Boland, pp381-4.
6. For descriptions of the changes on Guernsey, see David Thomas Ansted and Robert Gordon Latham, *The Channel*

- Islands*, London 1862, pp14-5, and 'Don Quixote' (H C Andros), 'Root and Branch', *The Star* (Guernsey), 5th April 1892. For agriculture and horticulture, see Ansted and Latham, pp459-517; for the dates of the grape harvest, see Frémine (Note 2), p181; for the rise of tomato growing and other details of agriculture and geology see Nigel Jee, *Landscape of the Channel Islands*, London and Chichester 1982.
7. For the date of the autumn seaweed harvest in 1883 (2nd-4th October), see *La Gazette officielle de Guernesey*, 22nd September 1883; on the festivities surrounding the seaweed harvest, see Ansted and Latham (Note 6), pp515-6.
  8. D T Ansted (Ed), *Black's Guide to the Channel Islands*, Edinburgh 1868, pp128-9; this publication was reprinted in the 1870's and early 1880's.
  9. Dr Sieveking, The Climate of Guernsey, *The Lancet*, 30th November 1967, quoted in *MacKenzie and Le Patourel's Almanack and Directory* for 1883, p62
  10. *Barbet's Guide for the Island of Guernsey*, St Peter Port 1840, pp129-30.
  11. *Grigg's Guide to Guernsey, Alderney and Sark*, Guernsey 1880, p30.
  12. Durand-Ruel entered the following four pictures in his Stock Book on the 15th December 1883: *Baie du Moulin Huet*; *Brouillard Guernesey*; *Côtes du Moulin Huet*; *Baie du Moulin Huet*. Puzzlingly, the same four pictures were re entered in the Stock Book of 12th March 1884, which may perhaps suggest that Renoir delayed delivering them (perhaps in order to re-work them) after Durand-Ruel had committed himself to their purchase. It is virtually certain that these are the same as the four landscapes which were re-entered in the Durand-Ruel Stock Book on the 25th August 1891 after a major re-organisation of the stock, although two appear with different titles (as often happened in this 1891 re-organisation). The four pictures listed in 1891 can be securely identified as Nos 1-4 of the present publication.
  13. Besides Birket Foster's illustration of Moulin Huet, panoramic views of the bay appeared in Ansted and Latham (see Note 6), p483; T B Hutton, *Guernsey Views*, undated (a photograph perhaps dating to the 1870's); John Linwood Pitts, *Guernsey and its Bailiwick: A Guide and a Gossip*, Guernsey 1889, frontispiece; and Edith F Carey, *The Channel Islands*, London 1904, opposite p200, reproduction of a watercolour by Henry B Wimbush. In addition, the site was painted in watercolours several times by Peter Le Lievre; see Rona Cole, *Peter Le Lievre 1812-1878*, Guernsey 1988, pp7, 13.
  14. Durand-Ruel's 1886 exhibition in New York (*The Impressionists of Paris*, presented by the American Art Association) included *A Windy Day at Guernsey*; the subject of No 1 suggests that this was the picture shown; the same canvas, with No 4, appeared in London in 1905. Paintings from this group were also shown in Brussels (1904), Basel (1906), Montreal (1906) and Munich and Berlin (1912), as well as in Paris and New York.
  15. After leaving Italy early in 1882, Renoir told Durand-Ruel that his Italian views needed 'indispensable retouches' implying that there was nothing exceptional about this (letter of March 1882, in L Venturi, *Les Archives de l'Impressionnisme*, Paris 1939, I, p124. Monet's retouching in the same years can be more fully documented; see John House, *Monet: Nature into Art*, London and New Haven 1986, especially pp147-50, 167-182.
  16. Vollard and Jean Renoir (see Note 1).
  17. Anon, *A Trip to the Channel Islands*, London 1883, p14
  18. G W J L Hugo, *Guernsey as it used to be*, Guernsey 1934, pp68-9.
  19. Victor Hugo, 'Neuvième agenda', 24th July 1870, quoted in Gérard Pouchain, *Promenades dans l'Archipel de La Manche avec un guide nommé Victor Hugo*, Condé 1985, p135.
  20. Victor Hugo, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, 1866 (English translation), Everyman Library, pp65-6.
  21. Edmond and Jules Goncourt, *French XVIII Century Painters*, (translated by Robin Ironside) London 1948, pp6-7.
  22. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *L'Art Moderne*, Paris 1883, reprinted in *L'Art Moderne/Certains*, Paris 1975, p241; this passage refers back to a section in Charles Baudelaire's Salon of 1856, where he listed three of Huysmans' four places where the modern nude might be found: 'in bed, or in the bath, or in the anatomy theatre'.

23. Hippolyte Tame, *Voyage en Italie*, Paris 1866, (1874 edition), 1, pp 66-7, 70.

24. There is no clear evidence of Renoir's view of the qualities which finished landscapes should have. However, a virtually contemporary letter from Monet to Durand-Ruel suggests that the dealer was encouraging

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him to finish his pictures more fully: 'You know that for a long time now it has been my ambition to give you only finished canvases with which I am completely satisfied. You yourself, in one of your latest letters, urged me to work them up, to finish them as highly as possible, telling me that lack of finish was the principal reason for their lack of success... As for finish, or rather polish, for that is what the public wants, I shall never agree with it.' Letter of 3rd November 1884, in Venturi (see Note 15), I, p288; for further discussion, see House 1986 (see Note 15), ppl65-6.

25. Letter from Renoir to Madame Charpentier, early 1882, in Michel Florisoone, 'Renoir et la Famille Charpentier', *L'Amour de l'Art*, February 1938, p36; for discussion of this picture, known as *Blonde Bather* (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts), see London, Arts Council of Great Britain exhibition catalogue, *Renoir*, 1985, p232 (No 63).

26. Letter from Madame Emile Blanche to Dr Blanche, around 20th July 1881, in Jacques-Emile Blanche, *La Pêche aux Souvenirs*, Paris 1949, p443.

27. *By the Seashore* (No A) was very probably the picture bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir on 9th January 1884 as *Young Woman Knitting by the Sea*.

28. Letter from Renoir to Monet, early 1884, in Gustave Geffroy, *Claude Monet, sa Vie, son Oeuvre*, Paris 1924, II, p25; for further discussion of *Seated Bather*, see London, Arts Council of Great Britain (see Note 25), p239-40 (No 72).

29. The two pictures are very similar in setting and figure grouping; the vertical version was bought by Durand-Ruel on 6th April 1894 with the title *Baigneuses* (No 15), the horizontal one on 13th October 1894 with the title *Au Bord de La Mer* (No 16); the latter was exhibited as *Bathers - Guernsey* in London in 1905, and very possibly also in Paris in 1896 as *A Guernesey (Baigneuses)*.

## Catalogue of Paintings

All paintings are oil on canvas. Dimensions are given in millimetres; height precedes width. Photographs are numbered according to the catalogue.

1. *Vue de Guernesey*  
*View at Guernsey*  
460 x 560mm; signed and dated bottom right:  
Renoir 83  
Probably bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir, .15 December 1883; bought by Robert Sterling Clark, 1933; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass, USA.
2. *Brouillard à Guernesey*  
*Fog on Guernsey*  
540 x 650mm; signed and dated bottom right:  
Renoir 83  
Bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir; 15 December 1883; bought by Lillie P Bliss, New York, 1913; given by her to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, who sold it in 1943; Private Collection, Guernsey.
3. *Baie du Moulin Huet à travers les arbres*  
*The Bay of Moulin Huet through the trees*  
461 x 654mm; signed and dated bottom right:  
Renoir 83  
Probably bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir, 15 December 1883; Private Collection, Switzerland.
4. *La Côte du Moulin Huet*  
*Hills around the bay of Moulin Huet*  
461 x 654mm; signed and dated bottom right:  
Renoir 83  
Probably bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir; 15 December 1883; sold to Arthur B Emmons, 1911; bequeathed by his widow, Julia W Emmons, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1956.
5. *Baie du Moulin Huet Guernesey*  
*Cradle Rock, Moulin Huet, Guernsey*  
291 x 540mm; signed bottom left: Renoir  
Sold by Renoir to the dealer Ambroise Vollard before 1916; Private Collection, Switzerland, 1916; bought by the Tate Gallery London, 1954, and transferred to the National Gallery London, 1961.
6. *Marine à Guernesey*  
*Marine Guernsey*  
460 x 560mm; stamped bottom right with Renoir's studio stamp  
In Renoir's studio until his death in 1919; Max and Rosy Kaganovitch Collection; bequeathed to the French nation, 1973; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1987.
7. *Enfants au bord de la mer*  
*Children on the seashore*  
920 x 670mm; stamped bottom right with Renoir's studio stamp  
In Renoir's studio until his death in 1919; Howard Young, New York; bought by John T Spaulding, Boston, who bequeathed it to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass, USA, 1948.
8. *Enfants au bord de la mer à Guernesey*  
*Children on the seashore Guernsey*  
540 x 650mm stamped bottom right with Renoir's studio stamp

In Renoir's studio until his death in 1919; Alfred C Barnes; The Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pa, USA.

9. *Guernesey, étude*  
*Guernsey, study*  
190 x 330mm; signed bottom right: Renoir  
Bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir; 17 October 1901; sold to Lucien Abrams, New York 1933; Private Collection.
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10. *Baigneuses à Guernesey*  
*Women and children bathing on Guernsey*  
320 x 415mm; signed bottom right: Renoir  
Sold by Renoir before 1904; bought by Durand-Ruel from van de Velde, 1904, and sold to Dr Hahnloser Zurich, 1912; Hahnloser Collection.
11. *Rochers à Guernesey avec personages*  
*Rocks on Guernsey with figures*  
465 x 650mm; stamped bottom right with Renoir's studio stamp  
In Renoir's studio until his death in 1919; Private Collection.
12. *Garçons nus dans les rochers à Guernesey*  
*Naked boys among the rocks on Guernsey*  
460 x 560mm; stamped bottom right with Renoir's studio stamp  
In Renoir's studio until his death in 1919; Private Collection.
13. *Paysage avec baigneurs, Guernesey*  
*Landscape with bathing boys, Guernsey*  
460 x 550mm; not signed  
Early history unknown; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

14. *Baigneuse assise*  
*Seated bather*  
1210 x 910mm; signed bottom left: Renoir  
Deposited by Renoir with Durand-Ruel, 20 January 1886; bought by Durand-Ruel, 3 February 1892; sold to Mrs Potter Palmer 1892, and bought back from her by Durand-Ruel, 1894; sold to Jacques Balsan, 1930; Maurice Wertheim Collection, bequeathed to Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Cambridge, Mass, USA.
15. *Baigneuses*  
*Bathers*  
460 x 380mm; signed bottom left: Renoir  
Bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir, 7 April 1894; Private Collection, Switzerland.
16. *Baigneuses à Guernesey*  
*Bathers in Guernsey*  
380 x 460mm; signed bottom left: Renoir  
Bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir 13 October 1894; Private Collection, Paris.

In addition to these paintings, a number of others have traditionally been described as showing Guernsey subjects. Examination of the Guernsey coastline has confirmed that they do not represent the island. Most celebrated among these are the following:

- A. *Au bord de la mer*  
*By the seashore*  
921 x 724mm; signed and dated bottom left: Renoir 83  
Probably bought by Durand-Ruel from Renoir 9 January 1884, as *Young woman knitting by the sea*;

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The background cliffs resemble those of the Dieppe region.

B. *Marine à Guernesey*

*Guernsey seascape*

540 x 650mm; signed and dated bottom right: Renoir 83

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass,  
USA.

The background cliffs closely resemble those at Yport in  
Normandy.

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C. *Mer et Falaises*

*Sea and cliffs*

515 x 635mm; signed bottom right: Renoir

Robert Lehman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New  
York.

The background cliffs are of the type widely found in  
Normandy.

## Renoir: Outline Chronology

- 1841 25th February Pierre-Auguste is born in Limoges in central France; his father is a tailor and his mother a dressmaker.
- 1844 The Renoir family move to Paris, where Renoir makes his main home until c1900.
- c1854-8 Renoir is apprenticed to a porcelain painter and takes drawing lessons.
- c1860-2 Studies in the studio of the academic painter Charles Gleyre, where he meets Monet, Sisley and Bazille.
- 1862-4 Studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.
- 1864-5 Paintings by Renoir are accepted by the jury for the annual exhibitions of the Paris Salon.
- 1868-70 Paintings again accepted by the Salon.
- 1870-1 Renoir is mobilised during the Franco- Prussian War, but does not have to fight.
- 1872 The dealer Durand-Ruel buys two paintings from Renoir, but no more for the present.
- 1872-3 Renoir's paintings are rejected by the Paris Salon jury
- 1874 Joins in the independent group exhibition, where critics name the group Impressionists; exhibits with the group again in 1876, 1877 and 1882.
- 1878-83 Exhibits again at the Paris Salon; paints many portraits of bourgeois sitters whom he meets through his contacts with the society hostess, Madame Charpentier.
- 1879-86 Frequent visits to the Normandy coast.
- 1881 Durand-Ruel begins to buy paintings regularly from Renoir, and remains his principal dealer throughout his life. Renoir visits Algeria in the spring, and Italy (Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples etc) in the autumn to study the old masters.
- 1882 Visits the Mediterranean coast of France, and Algeria again.
- 1883 Durand-Ruel organises Renoir's first one- man exhibition. Renoir visits Guernsey(September/October) and the Mediterranean coast (December, in company with Monet).
- 1885 March. Birth of Renoir's first son, Pierre, to Aline Charigot, whom Renoir marries in 1890.
- 1886-7 Exhibits at the dealer Georges Petit's fashionable International Exhibitions.
- 1888 and thereafter Often stays and works in the south of France.
- 1890 Shows at the Paris Salon for the last time.
- 1892 Durand-Ruel mounts a major Renoir retrospective exhibition; the State buys a painting from Renoir.
- 1892-3 Makes visits to Brittany.
- 1894 September. Birth of Renoir's second son, Jean (later the famous film maker).

1898 onwards Spends increasing spells every winter on the Mediterranean coast as he becomes affected by rheumatism and arthritis.

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1900 Renoir's work is included in the Centennial Exhibition of French art at the Paris Universal Exhibition.

1901 August. Birth of Renoir's third son, Claude.

1903-7 Rents part of a house at Cagnes, on the Mediterranean coast west of Nice.

1907 Buys Les Collettes, an estate at Cagnes, and has a house built there.

1919 3rd December. Renoir dies at Cagnes.

Errata [All applicable corrections have been made in this edition]

p 17 Note 25 Publication date of *Renoir et la Famille Charpentier* should read 1938

p 18 No 2 Date of sale by Museum of Modern Art, New York, should read 1943.

p 19 No 12 Painting title should read *Garçons nus dans les rochers à Guernesey*.

p 24 Credit line should read Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

p 28 Add to credit line © Photograph Barnes Foundation.

p 34 Credit line should read Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Cambridge, Mass, USA.