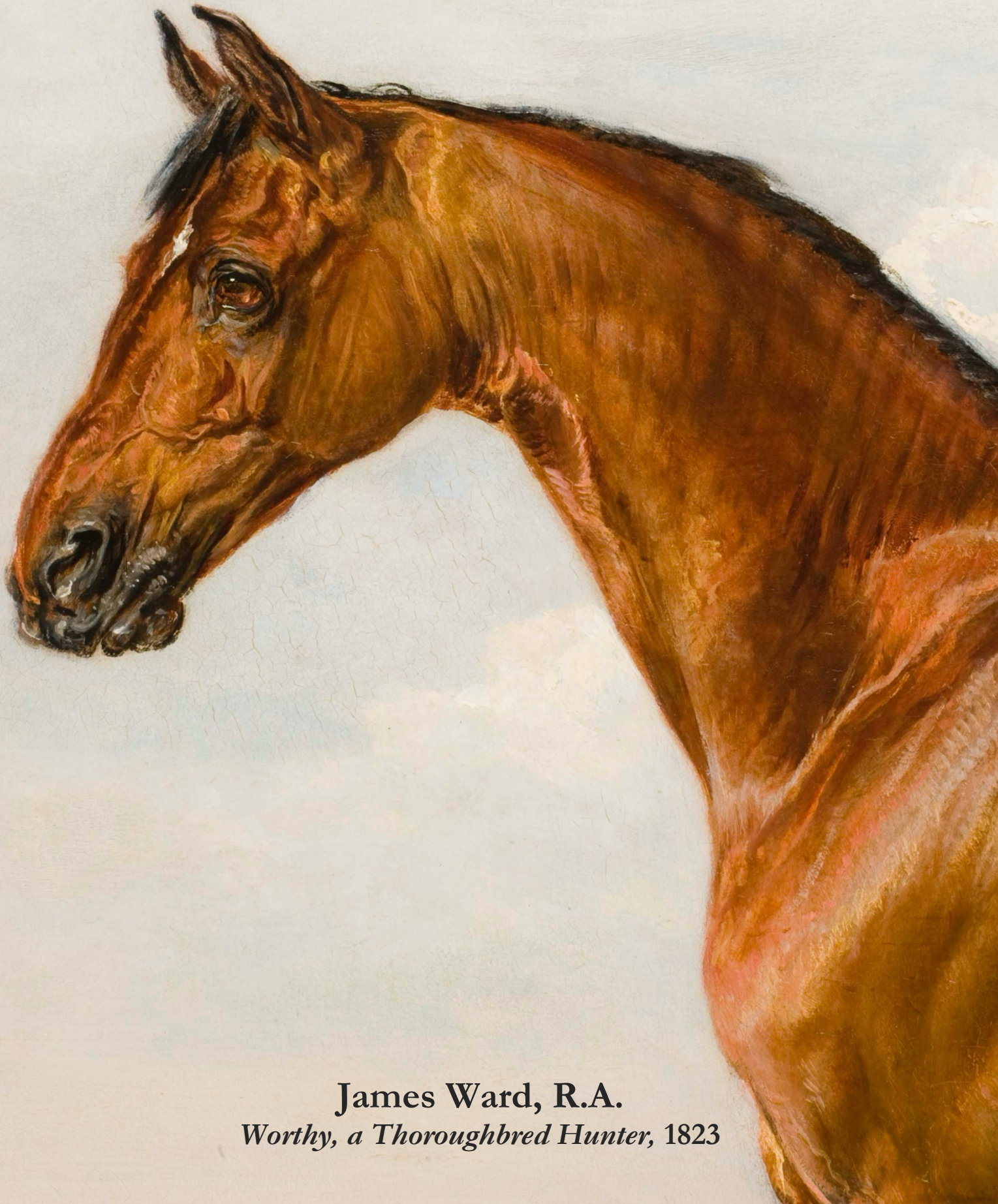


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James Ward, R.A.
Worthy, a Thoroughbred Hunter, 1823

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JAMES WARD, R.A.

(London 1769 - 1859 Cheshunt, Hertfordshire)

WORTHY, A THOROUGHBRED HUNTER, 1823

Signed and indistinctly dated (lower right) *JWARD R.A. 1823* and with identifying inscription in the artist's hand on the verso: *Worthy a favourite Hunter by Worthy out of Elizabeth by Waxy [sic] - bred by Mr W. Wigram.*

Oil on mahogany panel

81.1 x 112.8 cm.; 31 7/8 x 44 3/8 in.

Provenance

Commissioned by William Wigram;

Thence by descent;

Fitzwigram Trust;

Sale, Christie's, London, 7 July, 2010, lot 175;

John Mitchell Fine Paintings, London, until 2015.

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As an equine painter, James Ward is commonly regarded in England as second only to Stubbs. The present portrait of a T.B. (thoroughbred) hunter, one of only two grand equine portraits to have been sold on the open market this century,¹ was painted at a time when Ward enjoyed the patronage of George IV and was lauded by both Géricault and Delacroix.²

Worthy stands on the high ground (possibly Aylesbury Vale?), the low horizon showing his shape against the sky, whose extent reveals sunlight at one extreme, rain at another. In between are miles of earth: distant hills, with washed out plains of crops, pasture and field boundaries miniaturised in the middle distance. This space ends abruptly beneath the horse's barrel with the lip of a slope, so that his mass dominates even the crown of an oak tree, the scale being further pronounced by the delicate plants that spot the earth and chalk beneath him, forming a second, advanced landscape in miniature, its own middle distance being marked by poppies.

Close comparisons to this painting include two portraits in the Royal Collection: *Soothsayer*, painted in 1821 (fig. 1) and *Monitor*, painted in 1824 (*Worthy* dates from 1823, fig. 2). The three paintings are almost exactly the same scale (the two Royal works measure 81.1 x 111.9 cm and 82.3 x 111.9 cm; *Worthy*, 81.1 x 112.8 cm); each has the horse facing sinister on a rise above a vale; and *Monitor* even has the same motif of red flowers in the foreground.

This composition is also seen in a number of other important works, notably *Eagle, A Celebrated Stallion* (1810, fig. 3) and *Dr. Syntax* (1820, fig. 4; both in the Yale Center for British Art), both shown below. Each of these demonstrates Ward's character, detailed here by Grundy:

"The salient characteristics of Ward's style are brilliancy, clear definition, and miniature-like finish"³ according to one writer, adding that 'he is one of the few artists of the period whose colours never fade but remain as fresh as the day when they were painted'.⁴

This 'miniature-like finish' is evident here in the reticulation of veins and in the lay of the coat, including whorls as it changes direction and white blemishes caused by saddle sores and girth galls. Yet with all of the particulars, he retains a larger sense of energy. "Power, indeed," adds Grundy, "was the keynote of his work. He loved

¹ The other being the Marquess of Londonderry's *Arabian Stallion in a Landscape*, a canvas from 1831 (92.7 x 123.2 cm), sold at Sotheby's New York, June 9, 1989, lot 54, for \$297,000.

² John Basket, *The Horse in Art*, London 2006, p. 28.

³ C. R. Grundy, *James Ward R.A.; his life and works, with a catalogue of his engravings and pictures*, London, 1909, p. lv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

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to paint mighty bulls, and fiery stallions, picturing their brutal strength, as no one has done, before or since, and this without the sacrifice of any of their other attributes. No other artist excels him in the rendering of the texture of their coats, or keeps more closely to life in giving the exact relative proportions of their limbs and bodies.”⁵

The blend of classical line and detailed empiricism followed Stubbs, as did Ward’s habit of resorting as much to animal markets and knackers’ yards as to antique models. From 1801 he studied with the anatomist Mr Brooks of Blenheim Street (off New Bond Street) and painted livestock at Smithfield Market, sometimes by torchlight; concurrently, he copied fragments of the Parthenon frieze.⁶

Ward’s proficiency was well recognised amongst his peers and patrons. Géricault declared his admiration for works he saw at the Royal Academy during his stay in England from 1820-22, writing that ‘the animals painted by Ward and by Landseer - the Old Masters have produced nothing of its kind’.⁷ And indeed there is some consonance between Ward and Géricault at this time, in works such as *Cheval de carrosse anglais avec un couverture à carreaux* (1820), in the *Farrier* series (1821), and in *The Epsom Derby* (1821; the Louvre).⁸ Equally, Sir Thomas Lawrence was a constant patron.⁹ Ward painted the horses in Beechey’s royal portrait *King George III reviewing his troops in Hyde Park, 1797* (formerly in the Royal Collection, destroyed in the fire at Windsor in 1992);¹⁰ the Duke of York’s renowned thoroughbred, *Moses* (1823); and various equine portraits for George IV, including *Nonpareil, charger of George IV* and *Monitor, Charger of George IV* (both from 1825, also in the Royal Collection). Additionally, 1823-4 saw the publication of fourteen lithographs: *Celebrated Horses*. Some idea of the artist’s conscientiousness in these studies may be read from an account of an equine commission for a Mr Harrison, measuring 30 x 24 inches, for which Ward undertook seven sittings from life, some of them over six hours each, spending a further three days on the finishing touches.¹¹

Ward also took pride in the technical preparation of works. Here, the support is a single panel of quarter-inch mahogany, possibly affiliated with two panels for equine portraits executed the following year: Napoleon’s charger, *Marengo* (81.9 x 109.9 cm; the Duke of Northumberland); and *The Black Horse* (80.6 x 112 cm; Tate Gallery). The

⁵ Ibid., p. ix.

⁶ Oliver Becket, *The Life and Work of James Ward, R.A., 1769-1859, The Forgotten Genius*, Sussex, 1995, p. 94.

⁷ Cited in Becket, op. cit., p. 112.

⁸ Reproduced in François Bergot, *Géricault Tout l’œuvre gravé et pièces en rapport*, exhibition catalogue, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen, 28 November 1981-28 February, 1982, pp. 61-8.

⁹ Grundy, op. cit., p. xlvi. See also xxxviii for Lawrence’s admiration.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. xxvii.

¹¹ Ibid., p. xliii

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likely source of these has recently emerged: one Robert Davy, an artist colourman and carver, recorded at 83 Newman Street from 1822/3, along the street from Ward's home, at 6 and 7.¹² A letter from Ward to his son from 19 December, 1823, describes the preparation of these supports: "The size I intend to paint him [Sir John] upon is 3 feet by 2 feet 8 ... If I have not a Pannel of that size which I hope I have - get one from Davy - he knows I believe how I like them primed without oil, and to absorb the least possible, but to absorb a little - & to have no colour - I can put what tint I choose".¹³

In addition to these details of the artist's methods, the identities of horse and owner have also recently been clarified. Worthy's sire and dam were thoroughbreds, probably with some background in steeplechasing, where big-boned horses often feature (see Worthy's bloodline, fig. 5). His dam was one Elizabeth, a rare twin-foal bred in 1800 by Lord Stawell that went on to win six races, including a notable sweepstake at Newmarket. Having been acquired by the East India Company, in 1810 she produced a filly by Worthy Senior (full brother to Waxy, listed above; died 1814), and then four foals sired by a hunter-stallion named Osiris. Three of these foals were sent to India, including the filly by Worthy Senior. Wigram took on the mare after the fourth foal, breeding three more Osiris foals, including one bay colt in 1817, the subject of the present painting. Osiris, meanwhile, belonged first to Lord Grosvenor; then, from 1808, to a son of the Duke of Beaufort. He won once at Newmarket before selling to Lord C. Somerset the same year.¹⁴

As for William Wigram (1780-1858), son of Sir Robert Wigram, he was a Director of the East India Company from 1809-12 and 1815-1853, becoming Chairman in 1823. His equine interests evolved from hunting stables at Benington, Hertfordshire, as Master of Puckeridge Foxhounds from 1834 (covering parts of Hertfordshire, Essex and Cambridgeshire) to racing, subscribing to the Racing Calendar from 1841-58 before his election to the Jockey Club in 1844-45.¹⁵

¹² Further details are remarked by Edgar Peters Bowran, formerly Curator of European Art at the Museum of Fine Art, Houston, in correspondence, 11 September, 2012.

¹³ Correspondence with Edward Nygren, author of *James Ward, RA (1769-1859): Papers and Patrons*, The Walpole Society, Vol. 75, 11 September, 2012.

¹⁴ Correspondence with David Gerald, Waterford Farm, Cold Brayfield, Olney, Buckinghamshire, 17 November, 2014.

¹⁵ Wigram was also a patron of Landseer, commissioning *The Hunters at Grass*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1833, and *Hunter and Cob* in 1840 (now Leigh Park, Havant). He purchased a number of works by Ward at Christie's' sale of Ward's work in 1829.

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Fig. 1. James Ward, *Soothsayer*, signed and dated 1821, oil on canvas, 81.1 x 111.9 cm. The Royal Collection Trust.



Fig. 2. James Ward, *Monitor*, signed and dated 1824, oil on canvas, 82.3 x 111.9 cm. The Royal Collection Trust.

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Fig. 3. James Ward, *Eagle, A Celebrated Stallion*, 1809, oil on canvas, 90.8 x 121.9 cm. New Haven, Connecticut, Yale Center for British Art.



Fig. 4. James Ward, *Dr. Syntax, a Bay Racehorse, Standing in a Coastal Landscape, an Estuary Beyond*, 1820, oil on canvas, 71.8 x 92.1 cm. New Haven, Connecticut, Yale Center for British Art.

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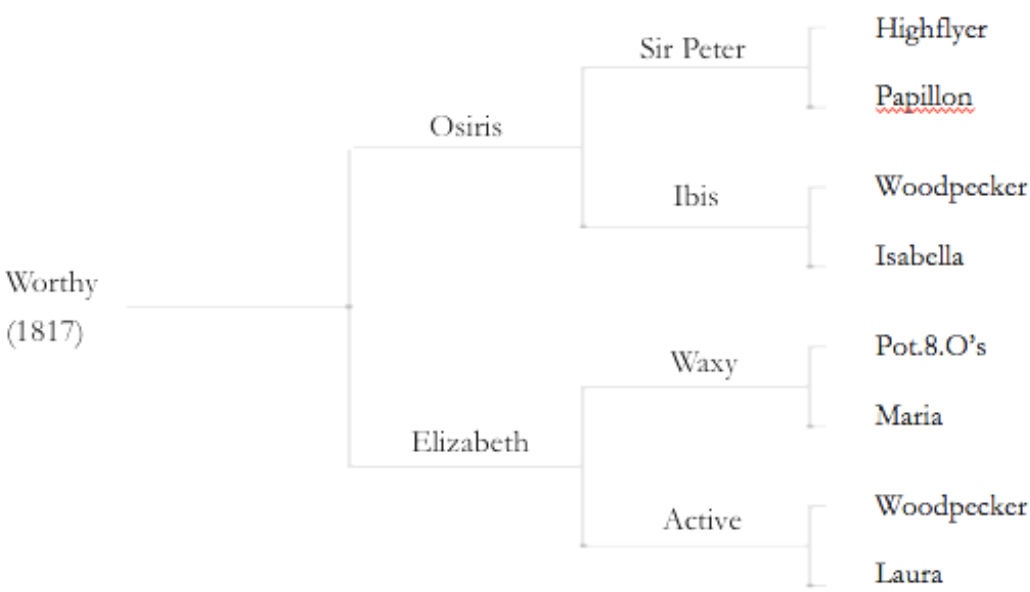


Fig. 5. Worthy's Bloodline.

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