

## *John Crome's Windmill*

BY M. RAJNAI, Ph.D.

A FEW months ago Mr. Norman Baker, aware of the curious lack of George Vincent's graphic work in the Norwich Museum's collection, presented a pencil drawing by this artist.<sup>1</sup> It comes from the same album as the two drawings which the Museum received as a gift from Mr. Harold Day in 1963. It was soon apparent that Mr. Baker's drawing was a rendering of a scene which has long been familiar as the subject of a well-known painting by John Crome, *A Windmill on Mousehold Heath, near Norwich*, No. 926 of the Tate Gallery. The rounded hill crowned by a postmill, a path towards the left winding up to the mill, a sandpit to the right and a signpost in the foreground at the bottom of the hill can all be found in similar relationships to each other in the Vincent drawing and the Crome painting. The similarities are so striking that there can be no reasonable doubt that the scene is identical in both works. The differences, mainly in the proportions, can be explained by the fact that Crome never seemed to care much for topographically faithful renderings of his subjects. In this case, one suspects that the Vincent drawing is a factual record, while the Crome painting is an on-the-spot study, adapted to fit the artist's design.

Until recently, Mousehold Heath has always been accepted as the scene depicted—though with varying degrees of stress. The subject was apparently known as such to Thomas Churchyard, who is said to have owned the painting in 1844.<sup>2</sup> It was entitled *Windmill, Mousehold Heath* in the Gillott Sale of 1872, and again in the Tennant Sale of 1873.<sup>3</sup> The National Gallery, which acquired it from an anonymous sale in 1875, at first catalogued it more cautiously as *The Windmill*, but the description stated that it was "a scene probably on the same desolate Mousehold Heath, near Norwich, that is painted in 689"<sup>4</sup> (that is, in *Mousehold Heath near Norwich*, the other well-known painting by Crome now in the Tate Gallery). By 1900, the "probably Mousehold Heath" had become part of the title. As a next step, the "probably" was dropped and, in the 1913 catalogue, the painting appears as *A Windmill on Mousehold Heath, near Norwich*.

It was not until 1946 that a new change occurred. Mr. Martin Davis, in his catalogue of the British School paintings in the National Gallery published in that year, lists No. 926 simply as *A Windmill near Norwich* and says in the description: "The scene is apparently Mousehold Heath. The mill is usually supposed to be Sprowston Mill, which was destroyed by fire in 1933; the situation did not correspond very well. According to an old label on the back of the frame, it is Trowse Mill/near Norwich/painted by/Old Crome.

This picture is dated c. 1816 by Collins Baker. A Trowse Windmill was exhibited by Crome at Norwich in 1807; another in 1811.

The inference is obvious. It is possible that this old label (here mentioned for the first time) is correct. If it is, the painting may be either the 1807 or



the 1811 picture exhibited by Crome with this title; and this would make Collins Baker's dating of the picture far too late.

It is believed that Mr. Norman Baker's drawing provides the answer to the question posed by the 1946 catalogue entry. While the signpost of the Crome painting seems to bear no inscription, the Vincent drawing has one which can just be deciphered as "To Crown Point". Assuming that the mill represented must have been somewhere in the vicinity of Crown Point, one is led to refer to maps of the period—to Faden's map of 1797 and Bryant's of 1826. And, indeed, the first of these maps does show a windmill close to Crown Point, at Trowse.<sup>5</sup> As it does not appear in Bryant's map, the mill must have ceased to exist by 1826;<sup>6</sup> but its former existence is remembered in the name of a pit near by—Mill Pit—which is marked by Bryant on the same spot as the mill was marked in Faden's map.

It seems safe, on this evidence, to conclude that the common subject of No. 926 of the National Gallery and the Vincent drawing is Trowse windmill, and not a mill on Mousehold Heath. It is also most likely that No. 926 is one of the two paintings of this subject shown by Crome in the Norwich Society Exhibitions of 1807 and 1811. In the latter exhibition, the full title of the picture<sup>7</sup> is given as *Windmill at Trowse—evening*. Since No. 926 is obviously not an evening scene, we are left with the 1807 *Trowse Windmill*<sup>8</sup> as the probable work. Stylistic considerations do not contradict this dating. Although the painting is in a rather poor state, cracked and covered in a yellowed varnish which cautions against any very definite statement, it seems that a dating to 1807 is much to be preferred to Collins Baker's dating—c. 1816.

<sup>1</sup>8 by 13 in.; dated bottom right: "Aug. 1818".

<sup>2</sup>W. F. Dickes, *the Norwich School of Painting*, 1905, p. 107. The existence of a small copy of this painting in water-colour by Churchyard seems to confirm Dickes' statement. See No. 74 in the catalogue of Thomas Churchyard Exh., Woodbridge, 1965.

<sup>3</sup>G. Redford, *Art Sales*, 1888.

<sup>4</sup>National Gallery Handbook, Fourth Edition, 1893.

<sup>5</sup>See also E. B. S., "Trowse—Something about its past", *Carrow Works Magazine*, Vol. XX, No. 4, July 1927.

<sup>6</sup>In fact between 1818 (the date of the Vincent drawing) and 1826.

<sup>7</sup>Norwich Society, 1811 (2).

<sup>8</sup>Norwich Society, 1807 (134).

## *Towards a Dictionary of Norfolk Painters*

BY MICHAEL RIVIERE, M.A.

IN 1961 a book entitled *Forty Norfolk Essays* by Mr. R. W. Ketton-Cremer was published in Norwich. One of them is called *Some Forgotten Painters*, and it begins "I wish someone would compile a biographical dictionary of East Anglian painters". East Anglia is a big subject; but the staff of the Art