



Alfred Sisley

(1839-1899)

Hampton Court Bridge

(Le Pont de Hampton Court -
le Mitre inn)

1874

*signed and dated bottom left:
"Sisley. 74"*

Oil on canvas

h 45.7 cm x b 61.2 cm

WRM 2929





Brief Report

This cast-iron and brick bridge was built in 1865 to link Hampton Court Palace with the town of East Molesey on the opposite bank of the Thames. The third bridge on the site, it was itself replaced by the present structure in 1933. During Sisley's four-month stay in Hampton in the south-west suburbs of London in 1874, he painted two more views of the bridge, which was at that time only nine years old, and its immediate surroundings [Daulte 1959, cat. nos. 124 and 125]. From the standpoint of the artist on the low bank, we look towards a group of buildings on the street leading to the bridge on the far side of the river. The right-hand half of the picture is taken up by the green bank with numerous people strolling beneath large trees on a summer's day with well-broken cloud in a blue sky. A bridge diagonally running from the left into the distance is a motif we find frequently in Sisley's work: he employed it for the first time in 1872 in his depiction of the bridge at Villeneuve-la-Garenne [Daulte 1959, cat. no. 37]. Evidently Sisley acquired the commercially pre-primed canvas locally, in *landscape size* (24.0 x 18.0 inches), it was obtained from the London firm of Winsor & Newton, whose company stamp can be seen on the canvas *verso* [cf. Winsor & Newton 1863, p. 117] (figs 2, 14).

The artist presumably sketched the composition in charcoal on the pale, warm-grey ground before laying in the major zones of the picture in very thin paint (fig. 11). On this foundation, he gradually differentiated the motifs with lively brush-strokes. Alongside the brush he also occasionally used a scratching instrument (presumably the brush shaft) to add precision to the contours in the still fresh paint (fig. 9). In the sky region, the pale grey ground often plays a part in the effect. However, closer inspection reveals that what we have here is not simply unpainted canvas, but places where drying paint was evidently in many places scraped off or removed with a cloth (fig. 12). It is uncertain whether Sisley deliberately made use of this effect, or whether he was simply removing foreign bodies that had got into the wet paint. He signed the work while applying the final brush-strokes, so that the inscription is in places blended wet-in-wet with the underlying paint applications (fig. 6).



Picture support canvas

Standard format	standard English format supplied by Winsor & Newton: <i>landscape size</i> , 24.0 x 18.0 inches [cf. Winsor & Newton 1863, p. 117] (fig. 14)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	15 threads per cm in both directions, dense weave with even yarn thickness; selvage on the right-hand side; Z twist
Stretching	authentic; careful stretching with numerous traces of temporary intermediate fastening; 1.5 cm of the turnover edge has been turned back on to the reverse of the stretcher and fixed there additionally with small tacks; along the selvage there are clear stretchmarks and traces of fixing, which are due to the stretching of the length of canvas prior to commercial priming
Stretcher/strainer	original softwood stretcher with no centre-bar; inner surfaces only slightly chamfered (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer depth	1.7 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	black stamp with emblem on the canvas <i>verso</i> , turned through 180° relative to the orientation of the picture: "PREPARED BY WINSOR & NEWTON / 38, RATHBONE PLACE, / LONDON." (fig. 2)



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Ground

Sizing	present
Colour	pale grey
Application	smooth and even priming applied before cutting-to-size and stretching; two layers: a semi-transparent, pale, grey-brown layer, with apparently slight filler and binder content, first closed the pores of the canvas, while the pale-grey ground layer applied subsequently is opaque and has body (fig. 7)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	ground material is homogeneous and even; microscopically small proportions of a fine black and red-ochre pigmentation are discernible

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	presumably charcoal
Extent/character	the microscope reveals in numerous places, but especially along the main axes of the painting, accumulations of black charcoal particles on the edge of the paint applications (fig. 8); these traces suggest a first sketch of the scene in charcoal, whose loose particles were, in the course of the subsequent painting, in places integrated into the paint-layer and in others presumably wiped or blown off; the infra-red reflectogram does not clarify the situation here
Pentimenti	–



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

a partial and if anything semi-transparent lay-in of many of the areas of the picture with transient brush-strokes was followed by the successive build-up of the painting, beginning with the sky, via the main work on the trees and houses, and finishing with the small details and the signature (figs 6, 10, 11); the paint was largely applied wet-in-wet; the ground has remained visible in many places where no paint was applied, especially in the sky Sisley integrated its pale grey into the composition; in places the visible ground in the sky was only created as such by removing overlying paint layers: the still wet paint was reduced or removed in every possible direction with scraping tools or a cloth (fig. 12); whether this was a deliberate technique or the result of chance is unclear; there is a painted revision in the left-hand pier of the bridge, whose originally grey-green tone was replaced by a grey-violet, thus enhancing the complementary contrast with the neighbouring yellowish-green

Painting tools

predominantly bristle brushes varying in width from 0.3-1.5 cm; fine hair brushes varying in width from 0.1-0.2 cm were used for the drawing of the figures and other details (fig. 10); the details of the architecture of the bridge were made more precise by the use of a scratching tool, evidently the shaft of the brush, to outline the contours in the wet paint. (fig. 9)

Surface structure

brushwork is clearly visible, in places with relief-like surface structure (fig. 3)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, medium yellow, yellow ochre, pale red, red lake, medium blue, dark blue, pale green, dark green, black
VIS spectrometry: cadmium yellow(?) / chrome yellow(?), chrome red(?), vermillion, cobalt blue, viridian

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

present varnish is not authentic; remains of an older varnish can be discerned in the crevices of impasto areas



Signature/Mark

When?	the signature was added with a fine brush in dark-grey paint, wet-in-wet in the underlying white and bluish-green paint-layers, directly upon completion of the painting; subsequently Sisley added a few colour accents in the immediate vicinity of the signature, which in places slightly encroach on the inscription (fig. 6)
Autograph signature	the handwriting shows significant agreement with Sisley's autograph signatures
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

The stretcher shows a slight trapezoidal deformation; small losses and occasional retouching, slight abrasion due to varnish-removal in the past; microscopic inspection reveals eruption of paint through early shrinkage cracks; occasionally paint is embedded in the varnish; it is not clear whether this is due to the artist's painting technique or to the use of solvents during the varnish removal procedure which could have caused softening and swelling.

Additional remarks

There is a possibly autograph inscription on the stretcher verso (fig. 13).



Literature

- Daulte 1959: Françoise Dault, *Alfred Sisley. Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, Lausanne 1959, cat. no 123
- Catalogue Zürich 1999: *Sisley und die Brücke von Hampton Court* (exhib. cat. Stiftung Sammlung E.G. Bührle, 15 September - 19 December 1999), Zürich 1999
- Winsor & Newton 1863: *Winsor & Newton, Retail List*, London 1863
- Von Saint-George/Schaefer 2008: Caroline von Saint-George, Iris Schaefer, "Bildplanung und Unterzeichnung von Gemälden der Impressionisten und Postimpressionisten aus der Sammlung des Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung*, No. 2 (2008), 261-273

Source of illustrations

Fig. 14: Winsor & Newton 1863, p. 117

All further illustrations: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud

Examination methods used

- | | |
|--|--|
| ✓ Incident light | ✓ VIS spectrometry |
| ✓ Raking light | – Wood identification |
| – Reflected light | – FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy) |
| ✓ Transmitted light | – EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis) |
| ✓ Ultraviolet fluorescence | – Microchemical analysis |
| ✓ Infrared reflectography | |
| ✓ False-colour infrared reflectography | |
| – X-ray | |
| ✓ Stereomicroscopy | |

Author of examination: Katja Lewerentz
Author of brief report: Hans Portsteffen

Date: 10/2003
Date: 05/2008



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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso, with detail of
the Winsor & Newton
company stamp (turned
through 180°), on the
painting verso can be
seen traces of fastening
and remains of a fasten-
ing system dating from
the 1860s/70s: two tinfoil
strips stuck on with a
wax mixture





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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light



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Fig. 5
UV fluorescence

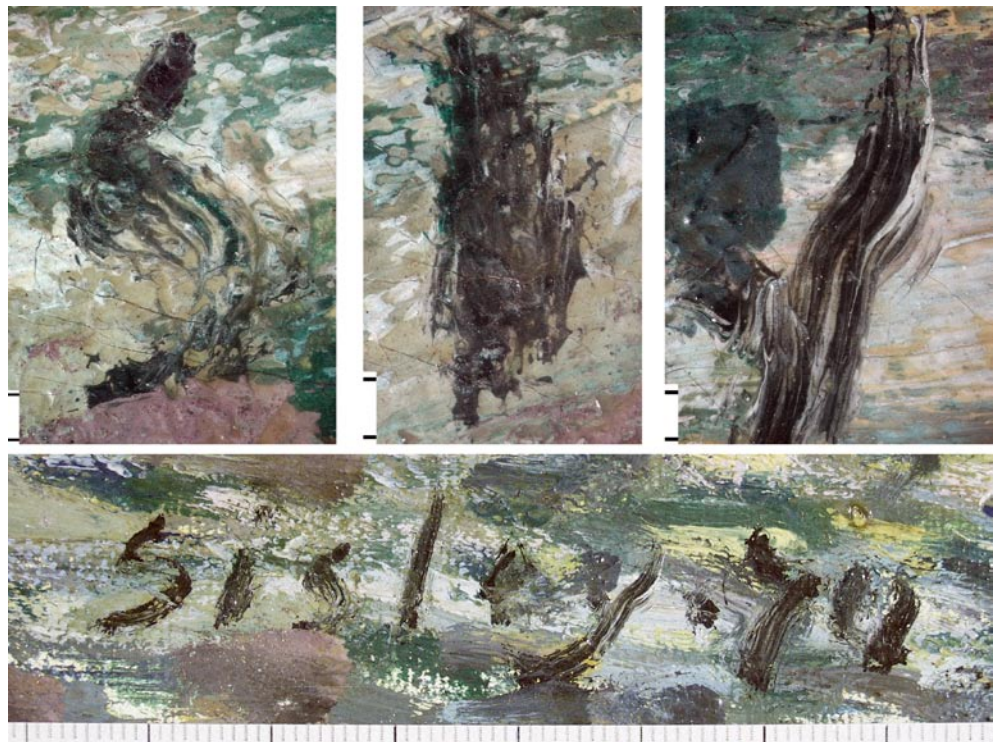


Fig. 6
Details of the signature,
which was applied wet-
in-wet, at the same time
as a few final colour
accents which overlap it,
microscopic photographs
(M = 1 mm)



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Fig. 7
Details of the turnover-
edge of the canvas
with the edge of the
size application (1) and
the two-layer ground
(2 and 3), microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)

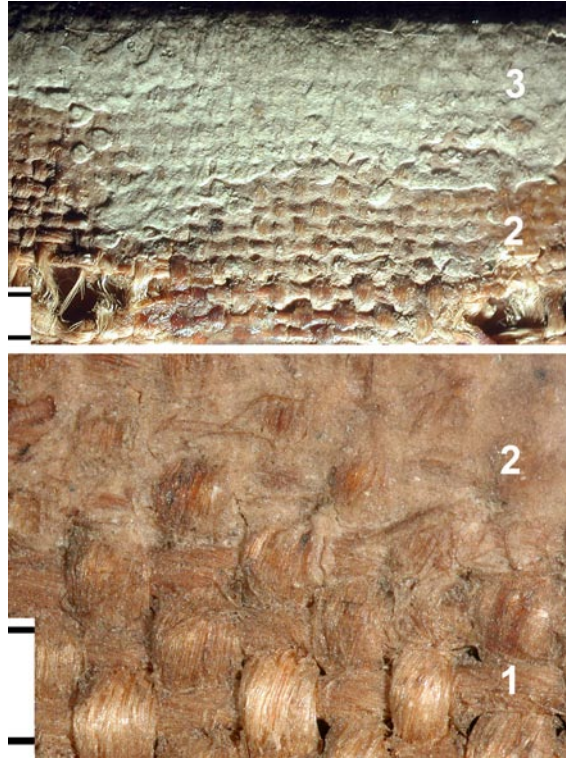
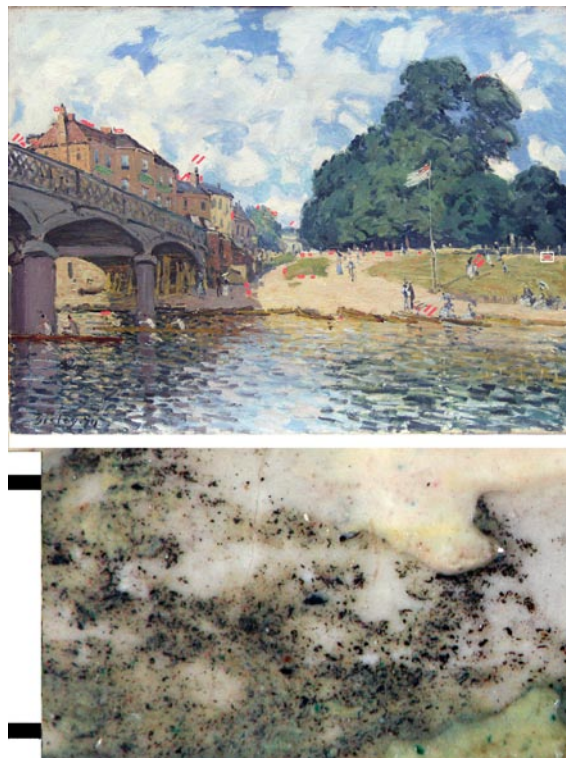


Fig. 8
Mapping of the places
where underdrawing
were noted, the charcoal
particles being clearly
visible under the stereo-
microscope, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)





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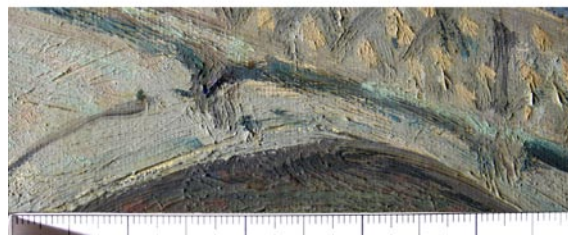


Fig. 9
Detail of the bridge
in incident light (top),
transmitted light
(middle) and raking light
(bottom): the outline of
the arch was scratched
into the wet paint



Fig. 10
Detail of the group of
figures in raking light
(top) and transmitted
light (bottom)



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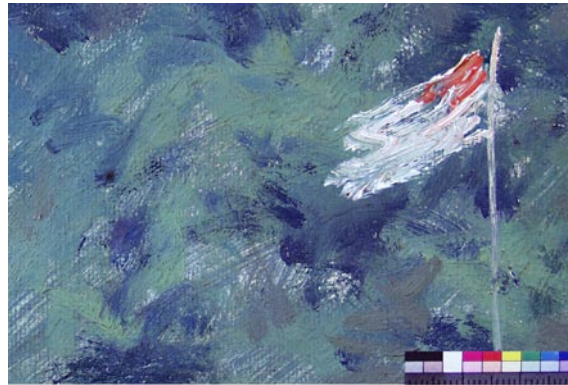


Fig. 11
Detail of the tree in incident light (top) and transmitted light (bottom); the first large-area lay-in with brisk green brush-strokes can be clearly seen beneath the subsequent paint applications



Fig. 12
Mapping and detail of the paint-layers subsequently manipulated or removed to reveal the ground in many places



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Fig. 13
Detail of the inscription
verso on the turnover
edge and the stretcher in
incident light (top) and
in the IR reflectogram
(bottom)

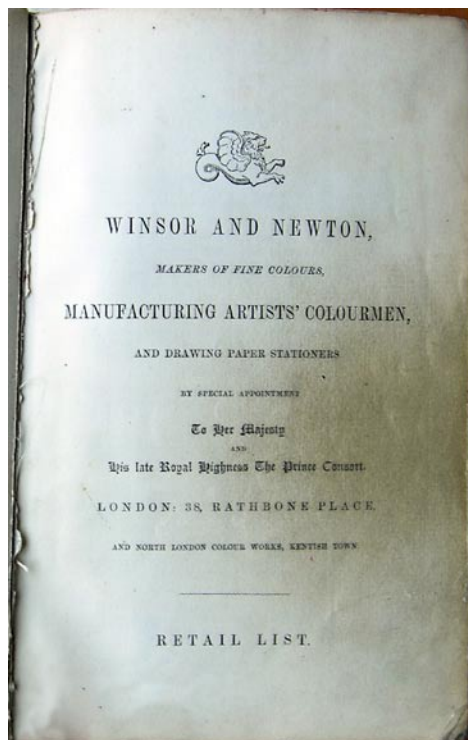
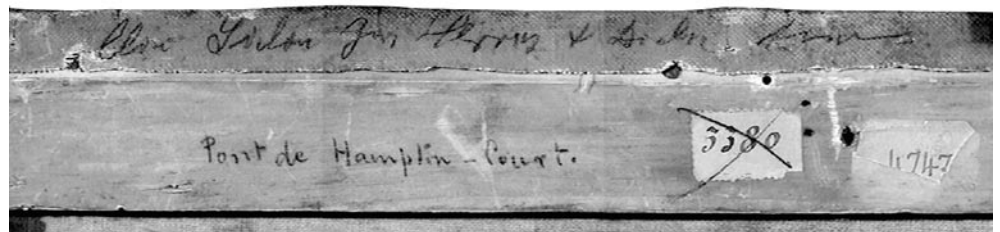


Fig. 14
Excerpt from the 1863
Winsor & Newton sales
catalogue with the
dimensions of their com-
mercially prepared and
primed canvases

