



# John Constable: A Kingdom of his Own

*Anthony Bailey*

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Born in 1776 in East Anglia near the river Stour, John Constable was destined for his father's business of milling and grain-shipping. But he was obdurately opposed to this and persuaded his family he should become an artist instead. In the same determined spirit, he wooed Maria Bicknell in the teeth of opposition from her formidable grandfather, and persisted in painting landscapes at a time when history paintings and portraits were the fashion.

Sometimes sharp and sarcastic, and often depressed, Constable in fact possessed a warm gift for intimate friendship. This is revealed in his letters to John Dunthorne, village handyman and housepainter, and to his best friend and patron, archdeacon John Fisher, to whom he wrote: 'I have a kingdom of my own, both fertile and populous - my landscape and my children'.

In recent times, after a period of relative ignominy, Constable's influence on British landscape painting has been re-acknowledged, he has been more widely exhibited and his reputation has been reestablished as one of the masters of his genre. This important and absorbing biography explores his life and work, and highlights the dramatic tension between the two.

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