

Westgate, Winchester by Michael Angelo Rooker: painted in 1779

Welcome to this audio guide. We shall be spending a few minutes looking at this picture and noticing details in it.

Our view is of an ancient gateway in the City of Winchester. This is one of Winchester's fortified entrances through which everyone came and went at one time. Incidentally it still survives today, but the road has been re-routed around it as it's so narrow.

There's lots to notice in this picture but first let's think about the overall feel of the painting. It's a sunlit scene, showing a quiet, even a sleepy street. The range of colours is fairly warm and gentle, the sky a pleasant shade of blue studded with a few clouds. The temperature looks like it might be quite warm. What feeling do you get from looking at the picture? Do you like it?

What season is it? We can take a look at the foliage to the left and in the far background. It looks at first glance dark green, so perhaps this is summer. But is there just a hint of browning leaf on the tree to the left? And if you look closely, it also seems it could have some berries on it. So this might show we're at the end of summer, or even early autumn.

What time of day is it? Again we have a clue in the painting and this is the shadows. They're short rather than long, so we're probably here at around midday.

Look at the foreground now and notice all the abandoned tools. It seems as if the workmen have stopped mid-job, so this could give us another clue. It looks likely they've perhaps gone for lunch leaving all their tools behind, rather than clearing up at the end of the day.

Evidently they're working on the houses to the right of the picture. There's a pile of tiles at floor level that would match those on the rooftop, and we can see the V shaped hod carrier that would be used to carry the tiles up the ladder. The shovel looks like it's stuck in a pile of mixed up mortar. We might wonder if this will do the shovel any good if it's left for long!

The building being worked on is not really visible so we don't know what it is. Next door we can see a whole building. Does this look like a house to you, or maybe something else? It's rather intriguing to see that there's been a lot of alteration to this place. Spot all the patchwork of bricks on the upper and lower floors. Notice all the different colours of brickwork and pointing, as if the alterations have taken place at different times. Upstairs you might be able to see that there are two styles of window, one appearing to be a more modern sash style, whilst all the other windows in the house have small diagonal leaded panes. A door and window have been removed altogether on the ground floor and bricked up, and there must have been a step up to the door at one point as the bricked-up space is floating above the ground. If you can zoom in to the bottom corner of the house where it meets the Westgate you may see a pile of broken stone. Could this be the door step?

Looking at the chimney, see how it's been extended with a long flue that has a cockerel on top. This looks like it could be of a later era to the original building. The red brick patches don't at all match the original stone and look like what we might refer to as a cowboy job these days.

Do you think the two buildings are interconnected and the whole lot is being modified for some reason?

The road is cobbled with large stones that gleam in the sunlight. This narrow little road would have been a main road leading into the town. Imagine yourself jolting along in a cart on this cobbled street. How excruciating it would be if you had no suspension on your cart and no cushion on the seat. And think of the noise all day of those horses and carts passing by. Perhaps the house owner couldn't stand the noise anymore and sold up to a developer.

If you were the homeowner, your view out of your front window may not have been very nice either. Opposite the house front is a crude plank fence and a roughly covered culvert set into a pavement. Something that looks like a shed sits right up against the Westgate itself, but it's hard to make out what it is. An interesting detail, if you can see, is that the painter has painted in his signature on the pavement next to the culvert, and also it looks like he's painted in the title of the picture on the lower left hand side of the Westgate itself.

Now to the archway. This is very solid and impressive, and dates from medieval times. See the carved shields above the arch, and the inverted keyhole gun portals - these were used for the firing off a deadly-sounding firearm called a hand cannon. A point of interest is, that though this picture was painted many years ago, already these structures, even at this time, were very old and in need of repair. Notice the tufts of greenery growing out of the stonework in several places, and the damage to the stonework around the crests. It all underlines the feeling of it's being an ancient and perhaps rather romantic relic.

You may find that your eye is repeatedly straying through the gate and off into the distance. Perhaps this is the first thing you did – look through the gateway and try to make out the figures in the background. Would you like to walk through and see what's on the other side? Yes? Well, you're supposed to want to!

There's something quite irresistible to us about views through doorways – why is that? You'll no doubt have noticed that many painters and photographers use this technique and it's effective in drawing us into a picture.

So let's walk through now. Are we walking into the city or out of it? Watch out for the little boy running past, and take care when you pass those soldiers. Will they stop you, or are they too busy chatting to bother with you?

What's on the other side of the gate? Look around - what do you see?

Where are you going? Perhaps you're looking for a tavern for lunch, a shop, or somewhere to stay the night, or are you meeting a friend, or maybe you're going home?

Lift your face to the sun and feel its warm rays on your skin. Notice the feel of the cobbles beneath your feet. Now set off, you don't want to be late!

We've come to the end of this audio guide now, although you're welcome to spend more time looking at the painting on your own.

Next, you might like reflecting on what you most enjoyed about this brief activity so scroll down to **Wrap up your painting** to have a go at this