Wood-Engraving Print - The Otter

Object: Wood-Engraving Print

Place of origin: Newcastle upon Tyne (printed and published)

Date: 1790 (first published)

Artist/Maker: Bewick, Thomas, born 1753 - died 1828 (engravers (printmakers))

Materials and Techniques: Wood-engraving print on laid paper

Museum number: CIRC.587-1964

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level E, case Z, shelf 2, box B

Descriptive line

Physical description
An otter standing at a waters edge, in front of an earth bank topped with foliage, viewed in profile, facing to the right of the image.

Dimensions
Height: 14.7 cm of sheet, Width: 17.7-17.8 cm of sheet

Museum number
CIRC.587-1964

Object history note
Formerly 'C' numbers 8980-8982 and 8998; a list showing both and old in 64/2371

This engraving featured in Thomas Bewick's first major independent publication, A General History of Quadrupeds, first printed and published in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1790. The publication contains illustrations of animals, alongside brief descriptions of their appearance, habits and habitats, accompanied by a number of illustrative vignettes, used mainly as tailpieces.

Historical significance: Thomas Bewick was the first engraver to exploit fully the advantages of end-grain wood (the wood is cut across, rather than along, the grain). Once it had been proved that the technique could rival the fine effects of metal engraving, the advantages of wood engraving to the book trade were quickly recognised. Allowing both text and illustration to be printed in one operation, it ousted the intaglio process as the favourite for book illustration and was only superseded at the end of the nineteenth century when methods of photomechanical reproduction were developed.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1107412/the-otter-wood-engraving-print-bewick-thomas/