

Thomas Cook after William Hogarth, *The Polling*, 1801, engraving on paper, 402 x 537 mm (image, plate trimmed), 437 x 571 mm (sheet), inscribed recto above right "Pl. III.", and below „Designed by W Hogarth“, „THE POLLING.“ and „Engraved by T. Cook“, unframed. Condition: good, but with various mold stains on the front and back sides.

The picture was provided – in museum quality – with a new passe-partout (65 x 80 cm) of the company HALBE. A fitting frame – in museum quality – with museum glass (anti-reflective, very high UV protection, anti-static, abrasion resistant) of the company HALBE can be provided on request.

William Hogarth (London 1697 – 1764 London) was, alongside Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) and Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), the most important English artist of the 18th century. Coming from an impoverished background, he differed from both of them in that, as a painter and graphic artist, he often held up a mirror to the customs and traditions and protagonists of his time with biting irony in his satirical picture series and as a precursor to later caricaturists.

Nevertheless, Hogarth was extremely successful as an artist, so much so that his famous series of paintings—such as the conversation pieces and *A Rake's Progress*—and individual engravings such as *Beer Street* were so widely forged or pirated during his lifetime that he felt compelled to take action against it. In 1735, he obtained the introduction of a copyright law in court, which is still associated with his name today as the *Hogarth Act*. It was not until late in his life (1757) that he was appointed court painter by King George II (1683–1760), but under his successor, George III (1738–1820), he no longer played a role at court.

In the series *Four Prints of An Election* from 1755 to 1758, Hogarth satirically depicts the four phases of a chaotic and riot-filled by-election in Oxfordshire in 1754. The Duke of Marlborough, a prominent politician in the Whig Party, challenged an established Tory seat. Each of the four prints shows politicians from both parties treating the electorate with contempt and exploiting their gullibility with bribery and underhanded tricks to win their votes. The result in the fourth print is ultimately irrelevant: it is the incredibly corrupt and debauched process by which this result was achieved that makes this wonderfully entertaining series of prints so appealing. The latter is based on a series of paintings by Hogarth, now housed in Sir John Soane's Museum in London, and has been reprinted several times, including by Thomas Cook for the publisher G. & J. Robinson from 1800 onwards.

The third sheet in the copperplate engraving series, *The Polling* (1801), parodies a completely corrupt election process. It shows a scene full of cynicism, confusion, and fraud, in which mutilated, mentally ill, and dying people elect a member of parliament. On the far left is a soldier who has lost three of his four limbs, the first to take the oath. Sticking out of his pocket is a *Milicia Bill*, a bill to introduce compulsory military service, to which even this helpless man is subject. The clerk tries to hide his amusement at the man's hook resting on the Bible. On either side of him, two lawyers from opposing parties argue about the validity of his oath.

In the middle, a mentally ill man, who is tied to his chair with a stick, takes the oath. He is urged to do so by a man with a bound leg. The letter in the prompter's pocket, labeled "The 6th Letter to ... from ...," suggests that he is its author, Dr. Shebbeare, an enemy of the Hanoverians. Behind the mentally ill man, a dying man wearing "True Blue" ribbons is being pulled up the stairs by his nurses. The first of these, who has a pipe in her mouth, has lost her nose to a

venereal disease; the second, who laughs at the political intrigue, has an oversized nose with warts. They are followed by a blind man with a cane, led by a boy, and a cripple behind him.

At the back of the polling station, the two candidates sit with a sleeping court clerk between them. One candidate is unsettled, the other—presumably the one in the lead—is calm. Three men are amused by a caricature of the figure next to them. In front of the other candidate sits a group of men looking at a ballad with a picture of a scaffold, which the old woman at the front of the balcony has sold them. Another group of men are drinking cheerfully together.

In the background, a boisterous crowd crosses a bridge. At the end of the procession, Britannia's carriage has broken down and is in danger of tipping over because the inattentive, deceitful coachmen, just like the politicians, are not doing their duty. The tree next to the carriage resembles a human face with a pained expression.

Thomas Cook (1744–1818) was an outstanding engraver of caricatures and portraits of his contemporaries. He studied under the French engraver Simon François Ravenet (1706–c. 1774), who had been one of Hogarth's assistants, and was employed by John Boydell (1720–1804), one of the most important engravers, etchers, and publishers of the 18th century, who had also worked closely with Hogarth. Based on this influence, Cook masterfully succeeded in reproducing and capturing the original engravings from Hogarth's series. His series of engravings therefore lose none of the wit and detail of Hogarth's original plates.