

**Pieter Tillemans (1684-1734)**

**CHESTER AND THE ROODEE, c.1710-34**

Oil on canvas 74.2 x 135.7 cm

Presented by the 1st Duke of Westminster 1894. Re-numbered 1965.200

Conserved with support from the Woodmansterne Art Conservation Awards



### **The Artist**

Pieter Tillemans was born at Antwerp in 1684 and died at Norton, Suffolk, in 1734. He trained as a copyist of the Flemish artist David Teniers the Younger and of battle pictures, and came to London in 1708. Tillemans developed a good practice in doing views of country houses and sporting prospects, painting for some of the greatest landowners of the day, and was one of the creators of the sporting conversation piece.

### **The Painting**

*Chester and the Roodee* is of great significance to the Grosvenor Museum. It is the earliest known oil painting of Chester. It was also the first painting to enter the collection, being presented by our founding benefactor, the 1st Duke of Westminster.

The view is taken from the south-west of the city. The knoll in the foreground rises high above the river Dee, and in the mid-19th century was developed as the suburb of Curzon Park. Between the river and the

city is an expanse of low-lying land called the Roodee. Officially organised horse-racing on the Roodee began in 1540, giving Chester a longer continuous history than any other racecourse in the British Isles. The painting shows horse-racing on the Roodee, the course marked by posts and crowds of spectators lining the western city wall, which had originally been constructed in the early 12th century.

The spire towards the left belonged to Holy Trinity Church, a building first recorded in 1188, whose medieval spire was dismantled in 1811. The spire in the centre belonged to St Peter's Church, which was founded in 907 and its spire taken down c.1780. Midway between the spires is the long roof of the Exchange with its central cupola, built in 1695-98 for the Corporation and demolished in 1862. Behind St Peter's is the Cathedral, which originated in the Dark Ages, was re-founded as a Benedictine abbey in 1092 and became a cathedral in 1541. Towards the right is the Castle, founded in 1070 and largely rebuilt 1788-1815. Behind the Castle is St Michael's, founded before 1180: the cupola on its tower was erected in 1710, so this view was painted between then and the artist's death in 1734. To the right of the Castle is St John's Church, founded in 689, whose great west tower collapsed in 1881. The smaller octagonal tower to its right, which was used to raise water from the Dee and pipe it into the city, was built in 1692 and demolished in 1781. At the far right is the Old Dee Bridge, built in 1387, linking the city with the suburb of Handbridge.