

William Tasker (1808-1852)

‘MILLIPEDE’ ON THE ROODEE, CHESTER, 1843

Oil on canvas 63 x 78 cm

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‘Roodee’ means ‘Rood island’, and it seems probable that there was a cross (or ‘rood’) on an island in the Dee, which once flowed beside the western city wall. Organised horse-racing on the Roodee began in 1540. The races were held on Shrove Tuesday until 1609, when the date was changed to St George’s Day. In the 18th century the races took place during the first week of May and became a major social event. Race meetings are now held on the Roodee from May to September. ‘Millipede’ won the Chester Tradesmen’s Cup in 1843. This race had been introduced in 1824 and became the Chester Cup in 1893.

The Chester artist William Tasker exhibited regularly at the Liverpool Academy. He was patronised by the 1st Marquess of Westminster, and was particularly well-known for his portrait of winners and jockeys at the Chester Races. During the 1830s and ’40s he made drawings and

watercolours of the city, many of which were reproduced as lithographs in travel books and on cards. He painted some portraits, and also set up as a teacher of painting and drawing. He became master of the art classes at the Chester Mechanics' Institute shortly before his death.