

A Cutmear conundrum

IS THIS A PRELIMINARY SKETCH FOR AN ICON?

Andrew Morris

Rarely, a single example of fine art achieves iconic status, becoming synonymous with a particular genre of painting. A distinctive example is *The Cutmear Twins*, drawn c. 1842 by the still confined convict artist Thomas Griffiths Wainwright (1794-1847).¹

Wainwright's portrayal of Jane and Lucy Cutmear is wonderful. This single watercolour epitomises what any art connoisseur, or anyone with even a passing interest, may regard as the definitive 'colonial' Australian drawing², sketched during an era when portraiture retained its allure. The modest size of the watercolour demonstrates that a work of art does not need to be grandiose to be grand.

Drawn when the Cutmear sisters were about 8 or 9 (Lucy was born in 1833 and Jane in 1834, see n. 1), the artist reputedly sketched their likeness in gratitude for kindness shown by their father towards Wainwright, while he remained incarcerated for forgery. Their father James Cutmear, while prison barracks gatekeeper, is reputed to have supplied rudimentary drawing materials to Wainwright while serving his life sentence. This simple but kind gesture was returned in kind by Wainwright.

The National Gallery of Australia watercolour illustrates the sisters essentially side by side, their heads confidently facing front on, each gazing directly at us with a poise that betrays their youth. The drawing retains some of the subtle blue-purple tincture that is but one telltale sign corroborating attribution to Wainwright's hand.

Now let us carefully consider the illustrated pencil drawing. Some intrinsic features tend to support the

hypothesis that this diminutive preliminary drawing was not only drawn by Wainwright but depicts either Jane or Lucy Cutmear.³ We know with certainty Wainwright produced preparatory drawings for his finished work;⁴ it is therefore not surprising that a pencil and wash preliminary drawing (on card) has surfaced 160 years after the convict artist produced his colonial *pièce de résistance* watercolour of the adorable girls in about 1842.



Thomas Griffiths Wainwright (1794-1847), *The Cutmear Twins, Jane and Lucy* c. 1842, pencil and watercolour on paper, 32.4 x 30.0 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia

The NGA watercolour and this preliminary drawing show facial similarities, even to the lay observer. The upright head is more easily and accurately measured on the Cutmear child drawn on the right in the NGA watercolour. If one measures the distance between the top of her head and the bottom of her nose, then the distance between the front part in her hair to her chin, the distance from the centre of her eyes and the base of her nose, the distance between the base of her nose and the bottom of her chin, and the distance between the bottom of her ear and her chin, when compared with the preliminary drawing, all are precisely in proportion to the drawing.

Each twin is blessed with brown eyes in the NGA watercolour. The same colour can be observed in the preliminary drawing (only just, given the age-toned card and evidence of handling). Wainewright has embellished and emphasised (probably fictitiously) each sister with luscious red cupid-bow shaped lips; and there is a hint of red ever so slightly replicated on the drawing.

The relatively high foreheads in the watercolour appear in the preliminary drawing and Wainewright has deftly painted Jane and Lucy with brown hair neatly gathered in delightful side and back plaits held securely by ribbons. The hair of the girl in the pencil drawing, while not similarly plaited, is sufficiently long (both at the sides and back) to be able to be tied identically as in the watercolour. Expressed another way, should either Jane or Lucy in the NGA watercolour untie their hair, in all probability their locks would look like the untied side and back-of-the-head ringlets of the girl in the petite sketch. The pencil strokes applied to draw the sketched sitter's ringlets, when viewed on an angle, are finely rendered.

The pencil illustration was acquired by the author from the Masterpiece Fine Art Gallery, Hobart (now Masterpiece @ IXL), who acquired it from a Sydney private collector, that collector firm in his belief that this portrait depicts either Jane or Lucy Cutmear. The Sydney collector



Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (1794-1847), preliminary sketch possibly of Jane or Lucy Cutmear, c. 1842, unsigned, pencil and wash on card, 10.7 x 9.6 cm. Private collection, Victoria



Engraving of 'Wainewright of 2 Misses Dumas Tasmania'. Private collection, New South Wales

recollects obtaining the portrait (since reframed) in the metal frame illustrated, from a lady who owned a property in Victoria, who in turn acquired it from the grand-daughter of a person named in a will. Intriguingly and importantly for this critique, that document accompanied the drawing, opening up the prospect for research.

The last will and testament of Beverley Beaumont is dated 2 August 1974. Ms Beaumont died 9 April 1975. Given relatively high precedence, the first legacy lists Ms Beaumont's two grand-daughters

and states that the eldest may select 'whichever one of my two Wainewright Portraits as she shall choose when she attains the age of twenty-one years ... and the other of the said Portraits to my (other) grand-daughter upon her attaining the age of twenty-one years.'

The will goes on ... 'I direct that my said Trustee shall during the infancy of my said granddaughters' loan the said Portraits as follows:- One to the Hobart Gallery Tasmania and the other to the Launceston Gallery Tasmania on such terms and conditions as my said Trustee shall in its absolute discretion determine.'

A few clues emerge from these extracts. Firstly, a second Wainewright portrait is revealed - could this literally be 'the twin', maybe the other Cutmear sister, to my pencil sketch? Secondly, the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery (TMAG) and the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery (QVMAG) might be able to shed light on these drawings.

Masterpiece Fine Art Gallery Hobart made enquiries of the TMAG during June 2005, which gained a reply. The QVMAG did not respond.

The TMAG letter says 'the Trustee considered the proposed loan of the Wainewright portrait on 2 October 1975. The decision was made not to accept the loan. The Director at TMAG at the time, Mr D R Gregg, informed the (Trustees) of this decision in a letter dated the 3rd October 1975.²⁵ Subsequent contact with Don Gregg, now retired, revealed the TMAG was reluctant to accept loans then (there were so many offers being made to them), the portrait was so small and for security purposes, it probably needed to be ensconced in a glass cabinet that was not ideal. TMAG did not doubt the portrait's authenticity.

Now to the second portrait. Might it be possible to track *her* down some 30 years after Beverley Beaumont's passing? Once again the will provided vital clues; a north-east Victorian location was named where the grand-daughters resided during 1974. This general locality could be verified on the slim chance they, or their relatives, still resided there. Of course the

grand-daughters almost certainly would have changed their surnames upon marriage, further complicating the slender chance of finding either of them.

The author undertook a routine exercise of writing letters to several persons that arose from a White Pages internet search, using the grand-daughters' surname from 1974. Remarkably within only two days, but 30 years after their grandmother had passed on, one of the letters hit the mark. A relative referred my enquiry to one of the grand-daughters named in the will.

The excited reaction during our first telephone conversation revealed the grand-daughter not only expected someone to contact her one day in relation to the two Wainewright portraits, but she still owned the other one (although this other sketch does not look like either Jane or Lucy Cutmear). The news got better given the grand-daughter's portrait was housed exactly the same as the author's, in a rather quaint contemporary gilt metallic frame, each possessing decorative scrollwork and a fairly crudely cut (off centre) gold embossed window for displaying each drawing. The grand-daughter's younger sister had chosen to dispose of her Wainewright portrait more than a decade ago; of course this is the one now in the author's collection.

A subsequent meeting in Melbourne with the grand-daughter confirmed our sketches are the two Wainewright portraits referred to in Beverley Beaumont's will. Intriguingly the grand-daughter was kind enough to bring an additional 'sketch' titled on the reverse 'Wainewright of 2 Misses Dumas Tasmania', with an exciting postscript that the grand-daughter's great great grandmother was a Dumas. As it turned out, this was an engraving rather than an original sketch; however more facts were surfacing that might provide further links to Wainewright during 1842, when he captured the likeness of the Cutmear sisters.

Given the distance, a professional researcher was now needed to pursue this Dumas information via Tasmanian State Archives in Hobart. That delving proved fruitful as the Dumas family was not only living in Hobart during the 1840s, they were from the right social milieu to commission a portrait of their daughters, all of whom would have been born before they settled in Tasmania.⁶

Captain (or Major) John Craig DUMAS, a native of County Kerry Ireland, arrived at Hobart Town in charge of the guard aboard the convict transport *York*, on 29 August 1829, accompanied by his wife, five daughters and two sons.⁷ He had received his commission in the 84th regiment in 1798, transferred to the 75th and served in India until 1807, being several times wounded. In 1812 he sailed with his regiment to Sicily where he became Assistant Adjutant-General to Sir Hew Dalrymple. Dumas became Governor of Ithaca and later of Paxos, Greece. He was subsequently stationed in Gibraltar and in 1828 was forced, it seems, to retire on half pay due to failing health. In 1829 he joined the 63rd regiment, then under orders for the Australian colonies, from which he sold out in 1830.⁸

We can pinpoint with reasonable certainty the following provenance of the two pencil sketches and the engraving of the 'Wainewright of 2 Misses Dumas Tasmania':

Captain (or Major) John Craig DUMAS (born 1771 died 6/11/1852). He married Dorothea PATON (born 1792 died 29/5/1853). By descent to their third daughter,

Anne Fanny Maitlan DUMAS (born c. 1819 died 1887 of apoplexy, as did T.G. Wainewright). On 1/1/1846 she married Captain Edward MARTIN of the 24th Madras Native Infantry (born 11/3/1809 died 24/12/1892). They had 7 children. By descent to their fifth child,

William MARTIN (born



Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (1794-1847), preliminary sketch, unsigned, pencil and wash on card, 10.7 x 9.6 cm. Private collection, New South Wales; being the other drawing referred to in Beverley Beaumont's will, the 'twin' to the author's

21/6/1856) married Kate WEEDON (born 1856) on 24/12/1879 in Launceston. They had 3 children. By descent to their second child,

Edith Beresford MARTIN (born 14/4/1883 died 4/9/1967) married Reginald Charles GRUBB (born 26/2/1882 died 29/9/1946) on 21/4/1904. By descent to their daughter (the will maker),

Beverley Beaumont GRUBB (born 6/5/1908 died 9/4/1975, and who changed her name to Beverley Beaumont subsequent to divorce) married Kenneth Brian GOYNE (born 1/6/1904 died 7/9/1977). By descent to her grand-daughter,

Phillipa Kate CHISHOLM (born 10/7/1966)

Private collection, NSW
Masterpiece @ IXL, Hobart
Private collection, Victoria

By 1842, the year acknowledged for *The Cutmear Twins* portrait, John Dumas is listed as living at 'Lyn Grove', Coal River, to the north east and not far from



Contemporary metal frame, used to house both preliminary sketches

Hobart.⁹ He would have had ample opportunity to come into contact with Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, as did other local identities who sought Wainwright out in Hobart – either out of curiosity or to make use of, or maybe exploit, his artistic talents.

Dumas' widow Dorothea died (aged 61) at Westbury in 1853, and was likely to be living with her aforementioned daughter, Mrs Anne Martin, in the Westbury area.¹⁰ Previous ownership of the NGA's watercolour *The Cutmear Twins* lists the Misses Fitzpatrick of Westbury Inn (see note 1). Anecdotal evidence supports the contention that the pencil sketch was in the Westbury area of Tasmania during its ownership, as was the NGA watercolour of *The Cutmear Twins*.

Perhaps the Dumas family was the conduit through which the Cutmear drawings were originally passed from the girls' father, James Cutmear. Incidentally, Jane and Lucy Cutmear had younger sisters, and the identically framed pencil sketch (while unlike Jane or Lucy) may be either Eliza Sophia Cutmear (born 1835) or Sophia Elizabeth Cutmear (born 1836).

Research to attribute this relatively small drawing not only to T.G. Wainwright, but as his preparatory drawing of either Jane or Lucy Cutmear, continues. Of course we cannot discount that both sketches may be two of the five daughters who accompanied Captain John Craig Dumas on his 1829 journey to Van Diemen's Land aboard the *York*.

Alas Jane Cutmear died 14 March 1846 of inflammation of the lungs, aged only 12 years 7 months, and Lucy Cutmear died of consumption 20 December 1854, aged 21. Both lives cut far too short!

NOTES

- 1 Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, *The Cutmear Twins*, c. 1842, pencil and watercolour on paper, 32.4 x 30.0 cm. National Gallery of Australia (NGA). Originally acquired by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board for the national collection in 1969 from Clune Gallery Sydney, from The Misses Fitzpatrick, Westbury Inn, Tasmania 1954-1969, from Mrs Jean Saegar ?-1954. However, according to Tasmanian State Archives, the girls weren't twins at all, being born during 1833 (Lucy) and 1834 (Jane) – <http://portal.archives.tas.gov.au/menu.aspx?search=8>, then searching by inputting the surname Cutmear
- 2 This assertion is supported by *The Cutmear Twins* watercolour being reproduced in *Australian Art in the National Gallery of Australia*, Tim Bonyhady *The Colonial Image: Australian Painting 1800-1880*, Ellsyd Press, Chippendale 1987, front cover and page 25, Joan Kerr (editor) *The Dictionary of Australian Artists - Painters, Sketchers, Photographers and Engravers to 1870*, Oxford UP, Melbourne 1992, page 827 (Wainwright section contributed by Tony Anderson), Eve Buscombe *Artists in Early Australia And their Portraits*, Eureka Research, Sydney 1978, page 331.1-332, Robert Crossland *Wainwright in Tasmania*, Oxford UP, Melbourne 1954, frontispiece & page 152 (reissued edition 1960), to name but a few, and the recent *Moist, Australian Watercolours* Exhibition held 27 August-7 December 2005 NGA
- 3 Attributed Thomas Griffiths Wainwright (1794-1847), preliminary sketch *possibly of Jane or Lucy Cutmear*, c. 1842, unsigned, pencil and wash on card, 10.7 x 9.6 cm. Private collection, Victoria
- 4 Andrew Morris, "Thomas Griffiths Wainwright: dilettante, or simply misunderstood?", *Australiana* February 2005, pp. 22-27, where both the preparatory and finished drawings of Henrietta Maria Garrett are illustrated
- 5 Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery letter (from Sue Backhouse, Curator of Art) addressed to the Masterpiece Fine Art Gallery Hobart dated 14 June 2005
- 6 Per findings of the author's commissioning of a professional researcher, Margaret Glover, Hobart
- 7 *The Hobart Town Courier* 5 September 1829
- 8 *The Hobart Town Courier* 22 December 1852 p. 3 Obituary and the Dumas correspondence file, Tasmanian State Archives
- 9 Dumas correspondence file, Tasmanian State Archives
- 10 Per Margaret Glover's research