The man in a blue jacket.

John Glover's Van Diemen's Land paintings: a clue, or just coincidence?

Andrew Morris

As is often the case, once an artist's work has been showcased so spectacularly, such as in the 2004 tour-de-force exhibition of John Glover (1767-1849), his work has been re-appraised for what it is: superb. Auction results are but one tribute to that proposition.1

Although 63 years old when he voluntarily emigrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1831 to join other members of his family, and already an extremely wealthy man, Glover continued to paint for the apparent joy that it brought him.

One of the poignant outcomes of this concentrated display of Glover's efforts is that his landscapes painted while in VDL are now collectively (and uniquely) referred to as the Colonial Picturesque.2 Glover is regarded as Australia's first colonial artist to portray our quirky eucalypts accurately, and to render them with an almost reverential admiration that seems to suggest a kind of iconic status as Australia's national bush symbol.

Others have critiqued the idiosyncrasies surrounding a Glover work when objectively attempting to date a European panorama to his post-emigration period, while he was living in Van Diemen's Land. The Antipodean

1 Patterdale Landscape with Rainbow.  
2 John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque catalogue no. 68.
influences on Glover's post-1830 European landscapes are many and varied, and were certainly profound when compared with his understandably preconceived pre-1831 palette.

He was a prolific sketcher. Based upon rough drafts made while travelling in Europe, Glover's VDL-painted European subjects include oddities such as trees that take on something of the 'openness' of eucalypts, or hills with the blondness of many of Glover's Tasmanian landscapes. Intense blue skies often make for a striking backdrop (which in reality would elude many an English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh day), as does the artist's colonial habit of including a tree stump reminiscent of foreground logs in his Australian topography.

At times, framing might provide the primary point of VDL-attribute. The ornate gilt frame surrounding Conway Castle (private collection, Victoria, ex Sotheby's 24 November 2003, lot 62) was made by the largely unheralded VDL colonial framemaker William Wilson (1810-69). The spiral-shaped, overstated corner cartouches, the moulded compo patterned and ornamented inner slip, the outer frame edge and the frame's domed profile, all match Wilson's known handiwork. The cedar stretcher supporting Conway Castle's canvas was most likely manufactured by Glover's son, John Richardson Glover, providing a further link to Van Diemen's Land.

Provenance of a Glover painting of a European scene may substantiate that he painted a picture in VDL between 1831 and 1846. Conway Castle can be traced reliably to one of its original owners, Thomas Daniel Chapman (1815-84) of 'Sunnyside', Newtown, Hobart. Chapman was Premier of Tasmania from 1861-63.

By the end of 1834, Glover had painted and amassed an exhibition-sized batch of pictures, 68 in all, which he consigned to his son-in-law John Lord in London during January 1835. Thirty of these were of British or Italian subjects; the rest were 'descriptive of the scenery and customs of the inhabitants of Van Diemen's [sic] Land'. The catalogue noted that 'with the exception of a Portrait (No. 57 of 68) and the last four numbers (No's 65-68 of 68), the whole of the pictures enumerated in the foregoing Catalogue have been Painted by Mr Glover, in Van Diemen's [sic] Land'.

The 1835 exhibition included two pictures, either of which could be the Conway Castle illustrated here. Number 42 is the strongest candidate, listed as Conway Castle, North Wales, while number 61 is The River Conway near its Source, North Wales. Apart from the
presence of Conway Castle, the bright blue sky upper left quadrant, the original and still current William Wilson frame and a link to one of the work's original Tasmanian owners, all confirm that Glover created this Claudean painting in VDL. It is probably one of the two that travelled back to England for his 1835 exposition. Glover continues to pay tribute to his mentor, as the large framing tree speaks volumes about the earlier influences of Claude Lorrain (1604/5-82) on him.

Conway Castle may have contributed a lot more though, something far more tangible. I suspect that Glover has painted a direct and obvious clue within Conway Castle that positively identifies other European-subject paintings to his post-1830 colonial VDL period.

Five paintings illustrated in this article are dated after Glover settled into colonial life in Van Diemen's Land; three of these are European scenes. John Glover may well have been a creature of habit, as all works include a curious-looking stock-keeper and his faithful dog. What links them is the stock-keeper's dark blue coat (or cloak), brown trousers and a black hat.

Checking the colour illustrations in the extensive catalogue of paintings and drawings that accompanied the 2003-4 exhibition confirms that of about 35 pre-1831 Glover paintings with staffage (not just of stock-keepers or drovers), at a stretch about five were dressed in blue and only one of those appeared to be a stock-keeper or drover. Of all the stock-keepers depicted by Glover post-1830 in the catalogue, only a couple show him dressed differently, such as Mouling Lagoon and Great Oyster Bar, from Pine Hill (c. 1838), where he is wearing a red jacket and is identified as a convict.

The stock-keeper and his dog in Patterdale landscape with rainbow (c. 1832) and Patterdale Farm (c. 1839) are both eerily comparable to the stock-keeper and canine painted in Conway Castle.

Is this just pure coincidence or has Glover repeatedly left some kind of colonial VDL clue? Enchantingly, the latter appears closer to the truth. Could the man in the blue jacket be a representation of Glover himself?

Andrew Morris is an accountant with particular interests in Australia's early banking institutions and their banknotes, and more recently in colonial convict artists and their art (primarily from Van Diemen's Land). He is Treasurer of the Australiana Society.
NOTES

1 Australian Art Sales Digest - www.aasd.com.au - 2005 auction results for John Glover include (1) House on the Derwent, Van Diemen's Land (Australian scene) c. 1835 oil on canvas, 48.2 x 98.0 cm, Sotheby's Melbourne 23 May 2005 lot 6 estimate $700,000-1,100,000, sold for $1,450,500 (2) Hayfield Near Primrose Hill (British scene), c. 1817 oil on canvas, 77.0 x 115.0 cm, Christie's Melbourne 19 April 2005 lot 42 estimate $120,000-180,000, sold for $167,300 and (3) Landscape with Buildings on Hill (European scene), oil on canvas, 49.0 x 69.2 cm, Christie's Melbourne 22 March 2005 lot 23 estimate $40,000-60,000, sold for $59,750.


3 Ibid pp 266-267 'Table of Surviving or Recorded Sketchbooks', where the highest numbered book is 102.

4 Tim Bonyhady, The Colonial Image: Australian Painting 1800-1880, Ellysynd Press, Chippendale 1987, p 29, referring to Castles in Italy near Orvieto: a Brown Friar and a Thief being taken to prison, 1841 oil on canvas, 78.6 x 114.6 cm, National Gallery of Australia.

5 John McPhee, 'Glover, John', in Joan Kerr (editor), Dictionary of Australian Artists - Painters, Sketchers, Photographers and Engravers to 1870, Oxford UP, Melbourne 1992, p 304. A good example of both of these attribution points is Durham Cathedral, 1838 oil on canvas, 76.7 x 114.5 cm, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart.


7 Advice from Nevin Hurst of Masterpiece @ IXL Hobart (when specifically commenting on the stretcher used for Conway Castle, North Wales); John McPhee The Art of John Glover, Macmillan, Artarmon 1980, p 30 and Erica Burgess in Hansen op cit, p 244.

8 Though he died in 1849, the artist's last known watercolour is dated 1846: Corroboree of Natives in Van Diemen's Land, 1846 watercolour, 9.5 x 17.1 cm, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart.

9 Sotheby's Melbourne 24 November 2003 lot 62. 10 McPhee op cit, pp. 32-35, where the catalogue that accompanied the 106 New Bond Street London exhibition is included.

11 Ibid.

12 Hansen op cit, pp 135-241.


Left: Promissory Note illustrating Glover's signature. Courtesy John Pettit of John Petit Rare Banknotes

Opposite page:

Top: Patterdale Farm, c. 1840, oil on canvas 76.6 x 115.2 cm stretcher, 98.0 x 136.5 cm frame. Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1974. John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque catalogue no. 87

Bottom: [Italian Landscape] 1841, oil on canvas 77.0 x 115.0 cm. Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, gift of Robert Scott 1924. John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque catalogue no. 90