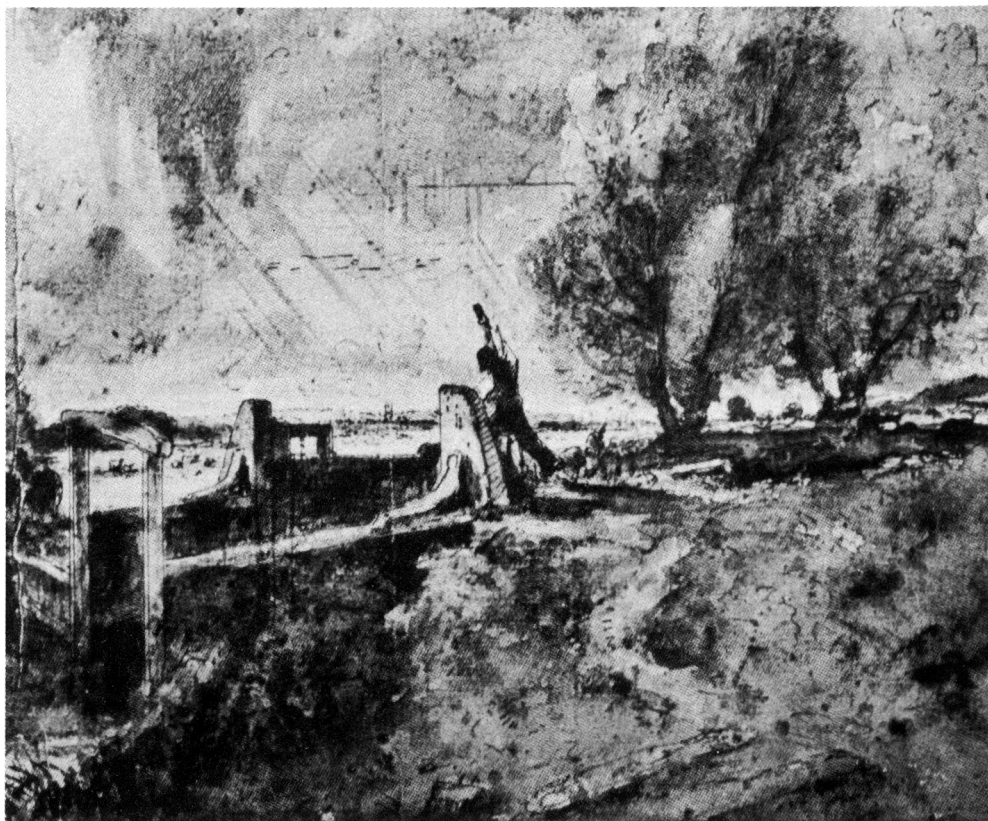




THE QUARTERLY BULLETIN OF THE
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JOHN CONSTABLE STUDY FOR THE LOCK.

Sepia drawing from the late P. M. Turner Collection.

THE LARGE "STUDY FOR A BOAT PASSING A LOCK"

by John Constable

In commenting on this great work which has come to us through the Felton Bequest, one cannot do better than quote the opening remarks from Mr. Andrew Shirley's admirable article in the May issue of "The Connoisseur", i.e., *'The authorities of the Melbourne Art Gallery are to be most handsomely congratulated on their purchase of the newly discovered Constable "Study for a Boat Passing a Lock"'. Its close relationship to his Diploma work establishes it as without question the most important Constable discovery, both artistically and historically, for a great many years.'*

It might be as well to consider some aspects of Constable's life and upbringing as a background to his work and this picture in particular. His father was a well-to-do miller and it was expected that John would follow in his father's footsteps, but from his early youth he had a passionate love for nature and the simple things of the earth. Wandering about the lanes and meadows of Suffolk, he was constantly observing the changing of the seasons, the growth of the crops, the play of sunlight and shadow on the landscape and the movement of the water in the locks and streams. From an early age he was taking notes and filling sketch books with careful drawings which were the basis of his great knowledge in later life.

Constable's father was a reasonable man and gave his son the opportunity to study, hoping, I dare say, that the urge to become a painter would wear itself out and that John would return to the fold and become an honest miller. But John had a tenacity of purpose that was not to be side tracked, and in spite of a slow beginning — a battle for many years against the prevailing fashion of the day — gradually, by sheer force of character, won his way to public recognition in late middle life.

But it was no easy battle, he suffered the torments of all sensitive men and it was only after years of hard work and the support and encouragement of a few close friends that he gained his objective and became one of the greatest landscape painters of all time.

Landscape painting in England, in spite of what had been done by Wilson and Gainsborough, prior to the latter part of the 18th century was not taken seriously as a major art.



TOP
JOHN CONSTABLE A BOAT PASSING A LOCK.
Diploma Gallery, Royal Academy, London.



LOWER
JOHN CONSTABLE STUDY FOR A BOAT PASSING A LOCK.
Oil on canvas, 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. x 51 in. Felton Bequest.

As evidence of the distinct prejudice against pure landscape, Reynolds in his Discourses made it plain that even Claude could never be considered in the front rank.

The criterion of great painting was based on the subject picture — the epic work that derived its inspiration from mythology, history, or the bible story. The great Italians had set the standard and aesthetic aim of what constituted a great work.

Claude and Wilson steeped in the classical tradition of Italy were at the half way house — both were on the threshold of pure landscape in their analysis of light and understanding of perspective — but apart from Claude's magnificent drawings made straight from nature their finished work was still in the epic and traditional manner of Italian classical landscape painting.

It was not until the arrival of Turner (born in 1775) and Constable (born in 1776) that the true revolt against the studio landscape picture of the 17th and 18th century really set in. Both were strong individualists, keenly aware of what was going on round them, and refused to succumb to the fashion of the day. Turner's imaginative genius was reaching for the stars, he was one of those rare spirits whose expression is universal, belonging to no one time or country. But it was John Constable, an Englishman to the marrow, with his feet firmly planted on his native Suffolk soil, who was mainly responsible for the direct approach to nature, of painting what he saw and felt, and was the real founder of the modern school of landscape painting and the forerunner of the French Impressionists.

It is an object lesson to most painters today to see how Constable set about making a picture. This was no week-end affair or a hit or miss method, but an event that was considered from every angle. There is ample evidence in all the great Constables, "The Cornfield", "The Haywain", "Salisbury Cathedral", "The Leaping Horse", "The Lock" and many others, that the painter made innumerable drawings and studies in oils before he began on the major work completed in the studio.

Here we are concerned with "The Lock", of which there are to my knowledge eight versions in existence. First there is the inspired pen and wash drawing in the collection of the late P. M. Turner, on which all the Lock pictures are based, then comes our large study, and

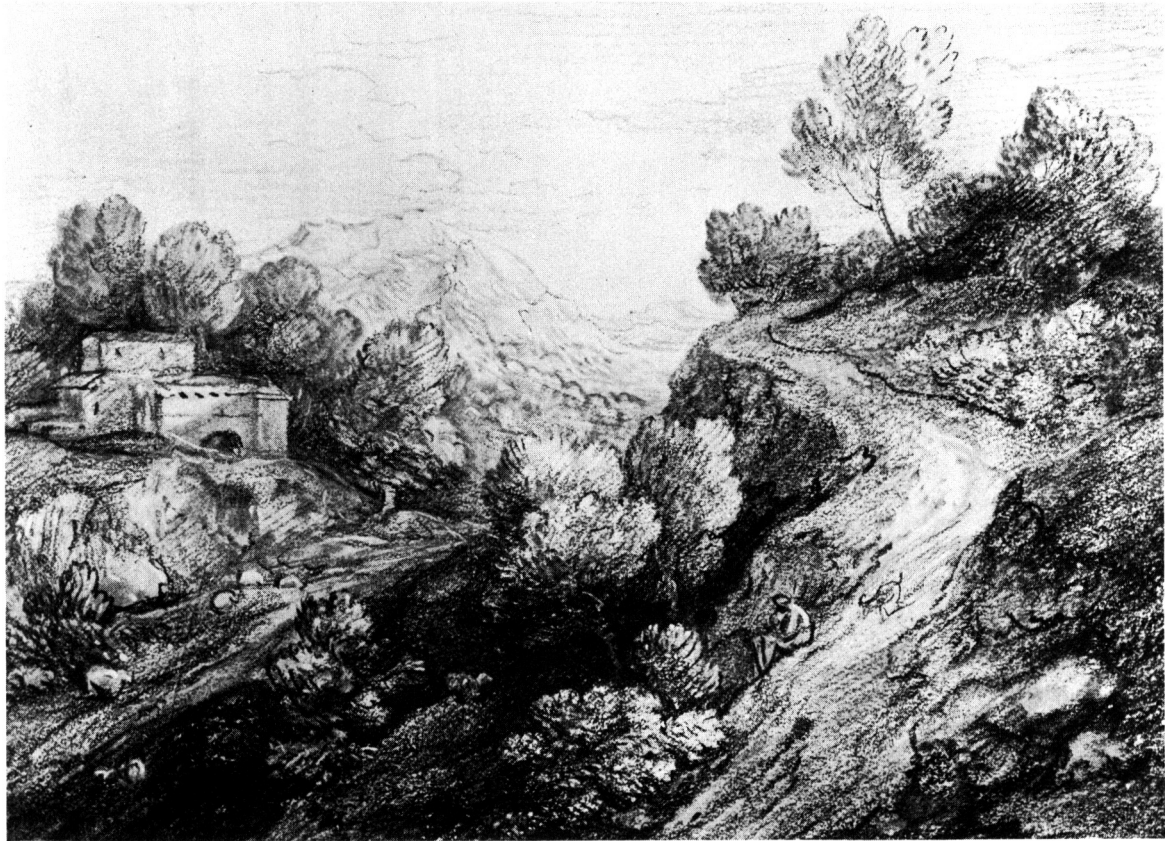
finally the Diploma work at Burlington House (all three reproduced here). There is an upright version of the subject in the Morrison Collection and one of the studies for it is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art which we also reproduce here as it is of interest to see how Constable substituted a different group of trees on the right.

It is generally considered by experts that Constable achieved something as a creative painter in the large studies that is missing in the elaborately and highly finished Academy works; splendid as these are they lack the spontaneous attack and sparkle of the energetically applied paint that is so noticeable in the large studies, and Melbourne is fortunate in possessing a top note example of his work in this manner.

DARYL LINDSAY.



JOHN CONSTABLE THE LOCK, DEDHAM.
Philadelphia Museum of Art.



THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH LANDSCAPE.

Chalk drawing, 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Felton Bequest.

The drawing reproduced here is an example of the landscape tradition which, as was shown in the previous article, was brought to an end by John Constable. Unlike Constable's "The Lock", Gainsborough's drawing is not based on scenery observed by the artist and does not record the local characteristics of a particular spot. Gainsborough follows in this drawing, more closely than usual, the tradition of the picturesque, heroic conception of nature which was evolved in Italy in the 17th century.

On the mount of the drawing there is the following note: "Original chalk drawing by Gainsboro given by him to my father Richard French after the style of Gaspard Poussin". Gaspard Dughet, called Poussin, pupil and brother-in-law of Nicolas Poussin, was one of the most famous 17th century painters of heroic landscapes. Spectacular rock formations, distant vistas, noble buildings, dark forests, combine in his work to effects of dramatic grandeur. In the drawing shown here, Gainsborough has composed his scene from similar motifs. A serpentine pass rises to the cliff edge on the right; a precipice falls away to the left; in the middle distance a noble building nestles under trees and far away a mountain soars to the skies.

The picturesque, heroic conception of nature is represented in the Gallery by another recently acquired work, the "Landscape with Mercury and Argus" by Salvator Rosa. Rosa's precipices, shaggy trees and mountain torrents opened the eyes of travellers to the beauty of a wild type of scenery hitherto excluded from aesthetic appreciation. Rosa's and Gaspard Poussin's work was widely collected in England in the 18th century and had a strong influence on the beginnings of English landscape art.

URSULA HOFF.

GEMS FROM THE ART MUSEUM

(English 17th Century Silver)



1. FLAGON, SILVER GILT.
Maker R. C., London 1688.
Engraved with Queen Anne's Coat of Arms.
Height, 14½ in.

2. TANKARD, SILVER, COMMONWEALTH.
Maker's Mark Illegible, London 1655.
Height, 6½ in.

3. TANKARD, SILVER, CHARLES II.
Maker S. R., London 1680.
Height, 6⅛ in.

4. TANKARD, SILVER, CHARLES II.
Maker E. N., London 1683.
Height, 6½ in.



THE FLAGON AND THE TANKARD

It is prosaic fact that fine taste is formed by study, reflection and comparison. To the connoisseur of antique silver his aesthetic indulgence surely must lean towards the grace and simplicity of contour usually associated with the dignity of the flagon and the tankard.

Flagons have been made for both ecclesiastical and domestic purposes primarily for containing wine. They are usually tall and are generally quite plain. Some rather elaborate silver gilt ones appeared during the Elizabethan era (1558-1603) of conventional design depicting arabesque and scrollwork motifs, together with a subtle use of delicate engraving, a style that had emerged from renaissance influence.

The silver gilt flagon of regal heritage represented from the gallery collection bearing maker's mark R.C. and the London assay date letter of 1688 is a noble example of the silversmith's craft of the 17th century. Its symmetry of line so admirably expressed, reflects beauty without a redundancy of embellishment and thus typifies the zenith attained by the English craftsmen.

The prototype of the silver ale tankard, essentially a drinking vessel with a cover on a moving hinge, was the water tankard which was used for carrying water from the conduits in London to the houses. Ancient inventories dating from the thirteenth century make note of such vessels. They were most commonly made of wood bound with metal bands; others were of horn and leather in varying sizes; latter ones illustrating the drinking tankard in its embryo. The silver-lidded one probably had its inception during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) when ale was becoming popular; however few tankards extant date before 1575. The hanap, an early drinking vessel in the form of a cup on a stand, was later superseded by the tankard. Both were formerly one of the most valuable properties of an ale house for in an Act of Edward I (1272-1307) it says: "if a tavern keeper keep his house open after curfew he shall be put on his surety the first time by his hanap of the tavern or by some other good pledge there found!"

Of the small collection of tankards arranged in harmonious juxtaposition in the gallery the earliest flat-lidded one of the squat cylindrical form dates from that austere and cataclysmical period of the Commonwealth (1649-59) when history relates that very little silver was wrought. This veritable rarity made in London in 1655 is unique; the double acanthus leaf motif en repousse which predominates on the body and foot rim and the thickness of the metal is usually associated with the restoration period.

Chief characteristics to be noted in the 17th century tankard are the flat overlapping lids usually projecting and fretted in the front, tapering cylindrical forms and "S" shaped handles and the thumb piece. A good example is the plain Charles II specimen, maker S.R., London, 1680. Note the finely engraved feathered mantling surrounding the coat of arms. The superb Charles II tankard, maker E.N., surmounted with a crown, London, 1683, displays in its excellency the Chinoiserie motifs which can be ascribed in particular to a decade 1683-93. Later anglo adaptations of Chinese influences more especially during the 18th century lose their delicacy. Attention is drawn to the interlocked dolphin thumb piece.

Tankards of the 18th century have a slightly domed lid gradually becoming more pronounced, the bodies taking on a bulbous form and the handles were usually of an "S" and "C" shape and were decorated to suit the idiosyncrasies of the time.

S. LIPSCOMBE.



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RECENT ACQUISITIONS TO THE ART GALLERY INCLUDE:

OILS

Study for a Boat Passing a Lock	John Constable	Felton Bequest
The Virgin Enthroned; Altarpiece Triptych	Justin O'Brien	Felton Bequest
Channel Crossing	Eric Wilson	Purchased
Still Life	Constance Stokes	Purchased
Portrait of a French Officer	Rupert Bunny	Purchased
Man and Sea	Alan Warren	Purchased
The Avenue, Canberra	Douglas Dundas	Purchased
Landscape, Brownhill Creek	Louis McCubbin	Purchased
Camellias	Esther Patterson	Purchased

DRAWINGS

Young Girl with a Basket	G. Morland	Purchased
Working Drawings for the Altarpiece	Justin O'Brien	Presented by the artist

PRINTS

Sketch of Two Figures and a Head	G. Morland	Purchased
Heron	Murray Griffin	Purchased

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National Gallery lunch time talks are given on every second Thursday of each month. (There is, however, a lecture or film every Thursday, arranged by the Public Library or the Museums.)

The following publications and reproductions are on sale at the Swanston Street entrance:

Catalogue of the Gallery (5/-). Catalogue of Selected Masterpieces with 30 illustrations (1/6). Gallery Guide (6d.). Six large coloured reproductions of the following pictures: Buvelot, Waterpool at Coleraine; Roberts, Shearing the Rams; Lambert, Sergeant of the Light Horse; Cameron, Durham Cathedral; Pissarro, Boulevard Montmartre; Sisley, Hills behind St. Nicaise; Monet, Vetheuil (25/- ea.). A selection of small reproductions of varying sizes including Christmas cards and some reproductions of important pictures from the National Galleries of New South Wales and South Australia.

Cover Design in this issue is a detail of "Study for a Boat Passing a Lock" by John Constable.