

Glover's homestead reborn

The Tasmanian home made famous by colonial artist John Glover has been restored with painstaking, meticulous pride

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Did the painter John Glover have a problem with possums? Evidence suggests otherwise.

When he painted the celebrated view of his house and studio at Patterdale in the summer of 1834, Glover depicted it with a front garden in wanton bloom. Exotic plants, subsequently identified as lilies, rosemary, verbascum, broom, hollyhocks and pink roses, flourished alongside native species. Had they known about it, those pesky marsupials would have moved in and the blooming roses might not have advanced beyond bud stage.

The present owner of this unique bit of Tasmanian history has found an ingenious way of keeping the possums at bay. She has surrounded the garden with tall wire mesh that curves outward and challenges the possums to climb upside-down and over to get to their favoured source of food. So far it's working.

That owner is Carol Westmore and all Tasmanians should feel gratitude and goodwill towards her and her late husband Rodney for rescuing the house and restoring it and its curtilage.

The Westmores purchased their property in 2005. It com-



Carol Westmore at Patterdale.

Picture: Rob Burnett



John Glover's A view of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains (inset above), accurately depicts the home, Patterdale.

est in John Glover following the major exhibition of his work at Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 2003.

TMAG director Bill Bleathman, and senior curator David Hansen, whose joint and several talents remained unmatched, were the prime movers of this landmark exhibition that toured to Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra. The show and the splendid catalogue, replete with images of surrounding hills and bushland, inspired the promotion of the area now branded and signposted as GLOVER COUNTRY, and sparked the inauguration of an eponymous art prize for landscape painting that has become a significant event on the international art calendar.

"Groups and individuals wanted to come to see where John Glover lived and painted," recalls Westmore.

"It took a number of years to commit to the restoration but when one of the side walls looked in imminent danger of going the same way as the front wall, I decided it had to be done."

Many people who take on rehabilitation of a historic building understand that it is not a role to be taken lightly. One owner has noted that an old house is like an open mouth, always demand-

ing to be fed. But expense aside, there is the challenge of finding relevant historic information, a handy guide to correct protocols.

In the case of Glover's house this was not a problem. There were seven other finished paintings of the surrounding countryside, letters, documents and sketches, and there was also that painting of house and garden. Now in the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide, it's arguably Glover's masterpiece and certainly the most famous painting of the colonial era, captivating, complex and freighted with meaning and interpretative possibilities beyond its postcard prettiness.

Glover was essentially a painter of landscapers. That was his trade in England where his contemporaries were Turner and Constable. House portraits were not his calling card. True he painted Cawood at Ouse and Montacute at Bothwell, both in private hands, Ratho, also at Bothwell, which hangs in the Tasmanian Club, and a view of Mount Wellington with the Orphan School in Hobart, now in the National Gallery of Victoria, but all of these pictures are general views. Actual buildings are reduced to minor, almost incidental elements of the composition. In the latter picture, one has to squint and scan to see the specified subject, a tiny pale inverted T-shape buried in verdant bush at the end of the rainbow.

But in the houses where he himself lived, far more detail is available. When he first arrived in Hobart in 1832 Glover lived in



Clockwise from top: External view of the property; bedroom in the restored home; and Carol Westmore in the sitting room. Pictures: Rob Burnett

a house in Melville Street, West Hobart. He and his family resided there as they awaited for the result of their application for a land grant. That house, later dubbed Stanwell Hall, was tickled up in the Art Nouveau manner in the early 1900s but underneath it's pretty much as Glover captured it, or at least part of the front and northeastern corner of it, set among scarlet geraniums and pink roses with a view looking south to Hobart Town beyond. That particular painting is now in the State Library of New South Wales.

In addition to Glover's own images of his house, his eldest son, John Richardson Glover, also an artist, sketched extensively in the surrounding countryside and created an interesting panoramic view of the houses, outbuildings and landmarks in the district which served as infallible data.

So you see, for intrepid restorers, and the Westmores must be counted as primus inter pares in this field, there was an abundance of visual and written evidence to guide them.

The land Glover was allocated was up north, an 11-day journey from the capital. Upon arrival, in short order he built a temporary time home followed by a simple provincial Georgian house like a child's drawing, two storeys, central door with fanlight, flanked on either side by two large 20-paned windows with three smaller ones with 12 panes apiece in line across the top. This typical form is sometimes known as the Welsh salt box.

I ask Carol Westmore whether the restoration of Glover's house is a long-hatched plan or a light bulb moment?

"It was really both," she says. "We spent years thinking about it and preparing the Conservation Management Plan and then, with the 25th birthday of Glover looming, I decided that I didn't want it to fall down completely on my watch."

"So with a large crack becoming worse and no fairy godmother sending money we just had to start straight away."

The restoration is meticulous. Nothing slapdash about this job. Lath and plaster walls were mercilessly skinned to the bare bones and re-set. Original paint colours were exhaustively researched. One of the adjunct structures shown in the main painting, the curious studio with skillion roof where Glover worked up his pictures, was completely re-created.

Importantly, the Westmores relied on expert advice throughout the years of work. Highly respected and experienced Tasmanian heritage specialist Graeme Corney headed the list of recruited experts. Mainland guru Clive Lucas was consulted as was Ron Radford, former director of both the Adelaide and National Gallery. All offered helpful suggestions.

Oh, and then there was the garden to tackle. The temptation

here might have been to follow the method adopted by the team restoring the garden created by the great Impressionist Claude Monet in his garden at Giverny. There, every species that appeared in his countless paintings of the place, every wayward nasturtium snaking across a gravel path, every waterlily floating under the Japanese bridge, every gaudy annual and perennial was slavishly copied.

"I have not attempted to slavishly recreate the garden of the painting," Westmore says.

"Glover painted a moment in time, viewed from one direction. In another season or when plants had grown it would have looked very different. Established elms and hawthorns planted during his years at Patterdale have now matured. Visitors come to the garden throughout the year and need to view it from all directions and walk through it."

To that end, Westmore commissioned Tasmanian landscape designer Catherine Shields to devise planting that is indicative rather replicative.

"Planting has a similar structure and colour palette, a naturalistic planting style with waves of colour moving through the seasons," she says.

"In winter the perennials are cut down ready to re-emerge in spring."

The funding of this ambitious project has been largely personal.

"We had \$300,000 from the Federal Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund," Westmore says. "It went a good part of the way to funding the rebuilding of the studio"

A condition of the funding was the Westmores undertook the restoration of the house, a condition to which they agreed.

"We lived with a building site for years of few highs and many lows," Westmore says. "Highs were definitely beginning to see the newly planted garden growing."

It was during the recent Glover Prize celebrations that I finally managed to motor from Evandale to Glover Country and see the Westmore works at first and to congratulate the chatelaine on her vision, a vision sadly lacking at state government level where, despite international recognition of the value of heritage to the tourism economies, there seems to be so little local support for preservation.

Think about this. One third of all the heritage properties on the Australian national heritage register are in this small island called Tasmania. Perhaps others, including governments or private individuals with the means or imagination to conserve the past will be inspired by the example up in Glover Country to get cracking before more glorious sites sink quietly into oblivion.