

FROM SUTHERLAND TO DERBY investigating a Derby 'named' view vase



Description: A Derby porcelain pedestal vase of shield shape with twin scrolled handles moulded with gilt acanthus leading to gilt satyr mask terminals, the cobalt blue ground reserved with a hand-painted view of Loch Naver within a wide gilt border surrounded by gilt rococo scrolls, the reverse side undecorated.
Mark: 'DERBY' within a ribbon surmounted by a crown, printed in red to interior of base, with 'Loch Naver' in red italic script c.1834.
Size: 29.2 cms. (11.5 ins) (height)

This heavy and thickly potted vase dates from the Bloor period and was probably the central vase in a garniture of three. A vase of the same size and shape, featuring a painted view of Derby, reserved on an apple green ground, with two smaller (23 cms./9 ins.) companion vases, painted with views of Kedleston Hall and Repton, was in the Anthony Hoyte collection, sold by Neales of Nottingham on 1 May 2003 [lot 148].

Loch Naver [National Grid ref. NC 618 368] is situated in the parish of Farr, in the former district and county of Sutherland, and now within the area of the Highland Council. It will be unfamiliar to many but a place at its western end, Altnaharra, often features in weather reports as having the most extreme weather in Great Britain. It is also well known for its Inn or Hotel and for fishing. The Naver, which flows north towards the Atlantic from the eastern end of the loch, is considered one of the finest salmon fishing rivers in Scotland.

The print from which the painted view derives is a steel engraving from a painting by John Fleming, engraved by Joseph Swan, originally published in Select views of the lakes of Scotland . . . , with historical and descriptive illustrations by John M. Leighton (Glasgow, 1830-1833), with the full set of sixteen part issues published in 1834. The present engraving is taken from Swan's Views of the Lakes of Scotland (Glasgow, Joseph Swan, 1836) but there are later editions [see Sources at end]. The caption on the print reads 'Loch Naver/SUTHERLAND-SHIRE/From Craig-a gharrow looking south'. From the accompanying text (pp.183-186) we know that the view is taken from the north side of the loch 'from the shoulder of a rather picturesque hill', looking towards the mountain of Ben Klibreck which is over 3,100 feet high [961 metres]. The more eagle-eyed will spot a structure at its foot on the shoreline and this is the Loch Naver Broch, known by the Gaelic name of Coill' Ach A'Chuil. In the 1830s theories and dates of brochs' origins varied widely, but more modern research suggests that the vast majority were built from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD although some are earlier. Estimates vary as to their number, from about one hundred to seven hundred plus, and they were principally located in the Northern Highlands and Islands. The best preserved is the Broch of Mousa in the Shetlands, which at forty-four feet in height is the tallest prehistoric building in Great Britain. There is still no consensus as to their use but one authority describes them as 'Huge, windowless towers, ingeniously engineered, they represent the pinnacle of dry-stone wall building and remain one of the finest construction achievements of Iron Age Europe'. Other writers point out a resemblance to pottery kilns or cooling towers.

Unfortunately the Loch Naver broch has suffered badly since the 1830s and only very limited remains survive. Before passing on we should also note that this area of Scotland was notorious for the Highland Clearances, including the settlement of Grummore, where sixteen families lost their homes in 1819, with several others evicted earlier. The extensive remains were first scheduled as a monument in 1962.

Given the wide selection of prints available in the publication, Loch Naver seems an odd choice. Did the painter only have some individual prints available to him or the entire volume, which includes better known locations such as Loch Lomond and Loch Ness? Thanks to research by Andrew Ledger it is known that Zachariah Boreman, the factory's most important painter and a considerable watercolourist with many Derby landscapes to his credit, had to resort to a print to paint the distant Dawson Grove (Co, Monaghan, Ireland) on a mug. The single image is recorded in an inventory of prints, engravings etc. owned by the factory among the Bemrose papers- 'Dawson Grove 7x5 inches'.

It is well known that the flower painters had access to numerous printed sources, notably Curtis's Botanical Magazine, and many copied the hand-coloured prints faithfully. Others were capable of independent work of a high standard such as Billingsley and Pegg. It is therefore no surprise that landscape painters used prints as a useful tool as well. A.W. Coysh has drawn attention to engravings as a source of inspiration and copy material for painting on porcelain and pottery, as well as transfer prints on ceramics and Scottish woodware, and John Twitchett notes the Derby landscape painters' use of such sources as J. Hassell's Tour of the Isle of Wight, and S. Middiman's Select Views of Great Britain. It is also recorded that the factory in 1787 purchased from a print seller Mr. Byrne's Six Views all in Westmorland. I am aware only of one other print from The Lakes of Scotland used as a source for the

painting on a Derby vase and that is based on a smaller oval view of ‘Glen-Ogle looking towards Loch Earn’, painted on one of the smaller vases of shield shape. This was sold as a matched pair, with another vase with a view of Derby, as part of the Freeman Collection by Mellors & Kirk of Nottingham in their Fine Art Sale of 1 & 2 March 2012, lot 220. There may well be others._

It is possible to attempt an educated guess as to the ceramic artist. By the 1830s many of the best known painters had left Derby, but John Haslem gives the names of employees from a list made in 1832. Among the painters there are only three recorded as landscape painters, namely Richard Ablott, Daniel Lucas senior and his eldest son John. The latter, however, must have moved to the Rockingham works in Yorkshire shortly after this list was compiled and died at Swinton in 1833. Haslem, a Derby painter himself at this time, described Lucas as the principal landscape painter and noted that he was previously employed at the Davenport factory. Various dates have been suggested for his arrival in Derby, one as late as c.1823, but David Manchip has pointed to very strong evidence from the christening records of the Lucas children that Daniel was in Derby as early as 1812-1814, at which time he was in his late 20s.

There is a strong probability that this vase, the garniture in the Hoyte collection and the Freeman vases mentioned above were all painted by him. Haslem is not very complimentary about his ability, stating that ‘His colouring lacked variety, and his style was heavier than that of the painters before his time’. He also mentions that he also painted in oils and was responsible for some of the best public house signs in Derby, including the ‘Plough’ and the ‘Peacock’, both on the Nottingham Road, where the factory was located. Despite these criticisms we can still appreciate the skill of Daniel Lucas and the other Derby landscape painters, given that they were often working on a curved surface, as on this vase, with only their professional judgment and the expertise of the kilnmen and others to ensure that the colours would turn out perfectly.

Jim Sewell

February 2021

Sources

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