

## Constable and the Six Footers

In October 1821, Constable wrote the following in a letter to John Fisher:

‘The sound of water escaping from mill-dams, willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts and brickwork, these scenes made me a painter and I am grateful for it. Still I should paint my own places best: painting is with me but another word for feeling. I associate my careless boyhood with all that lies on the banks of the Stour. They made me a painter and I am grateful; that is, I had often thought of pictures before ever I touched a pencil. But I will say no more – for I am fond of being an egotist, in what ever relates to painting.’

The sentiments conveyed through these words are very much in keeping with the prevailing mind-set of the Romantic movement, be it expressed through painting, literature, poetry, or music, that feeling of belonging, of delight in the familiar and oneness with Nature.

Earlier, in that same letter, he wrote:

‘That landscape painter, who does not make his skies a very material part of his composition – neglects to avail himself of one of his greatest aids. It will be difficult to name a class of Landscape, in which the sky is not the *keynote*, the *standard of Scale*, and the chief *Organ of sentiment*. The sky is the *source of light* in Nature – and governs everything’

It was in 1819, the same year as the exhibition of the first ‘six footer’, *The White Horse*, that Constable rented a house in Hampstead, as a second London home, the other at the time being in Keppel Street, within which he professed to Fisher had been the ‘happiest and most interesting years of my life....I got my children and my fame in that house, neither of which would I exchange with any other man.’



*The White Horse*, 1819, oil on canvas, 74x52 inches, Frick Collection

Possibly the most lyrical of the six footers, *The White Horse* was purchased by Archdeacon John Fisher, but later bought back by Constable in 1829. In 1825, he borrowed the painting and exhibited it at the British Institution and then without Fisher's permission sent it to Lille, where it was awarded a gold medal. By painting on this scale, Constable hoped to compete for public and critical attention with the many, often even larger historical narrative and maritime paintings, by academicians such as Turner and Augustus Wall Calcott. In preparation for these paintings, Constable produced full-size preliminary sketches, a unique practice, unprecedented in the history of Western Art. Nowadays these sketches are admired at least as much as the final works.

The painting depicts a barge horse being ferried across the River Stour, at a point near Dedham, where the tow-path changes from one side to the other. It is interesting to compare the finished painting and the full-scale sketch, with the additional point of interest, the thatched boat shelter being the principal alteration. The painting was critically well received and shortly after, Constable became an Associate Member of the RA and probably as a result, it is one of his least altered after completion.



*The White Horse*, oil on canvas, full scale study, N.G. Washington

1819-26, was a very important period for Constable, as it was during this time, that he sold twenty works, a number greater than he sold during the remainder of his life.

In an effort to improve his ailing wife's health, between 1819-25, Constable spent a considerable time with Maria and the family,

resident on Hampstead Heath, then well out in the country from his London home, where his studies of cloud forms were to become central to his work. In 1827, he took up more permanent residence, leasing a house in Well Walk. It was from the elevated position of Hampstead, that Constable painted over fifty studies of the sky, mostly oil on paper, with different cloud forms, with almost scientific precision, annotated with date, time, wind speed and direction.

*Stratford Mill*, exhibited at the Academy in 1820, depicts the area around about a paper-mill at Stratford St Mary, upstream from Dedham, just about the furthest extent of Constable's painting world in Suffolk. It depicts in the immediate foreground, two small boys and an elderly man fishing, with a little further away another man, also fishing with on the opposite bank a moored barge. The river Stour meanders away into the distance, under a typical Constable sky.

The painting was bought for 100 guineas by John Fisher, who presented it to his Salisbury lawyer, John Perne Tinney, in gratitude for a professional service. In July 1821, Fisher wrote to Constable: 'Your picture is hung up in a temporary way at Tinneys till his new room is finished. It excites great interest and excitement.' Constable's relationship with Tinney must surely have been strained, as the painter expected to have the right to borrow the work for long periods for exhibitions.



*Stratford Mill, The Young Waltonians*, 1820, oil on canvas, 72x50 inches, N.G. London

The third of the six-footers, *The Hay Wain* was originally exhibited at the R.A. in Spring 1821, as *Landscape Noon*. The composition is a variation of, *The Millstream*, but here Constable adapts his vantage point to include not only Willy Lot's house and the stream, which fed the family water-mill, but also the view beyond. Here the foreground details take precedence, whilst the agricultural details are placed in the distant background, where a team of mowers is seen and behind them hay is loaded into a wagon; the empty wagon in the foreground is seen to be fording the stream, on its way across the fields, where it to will be loaded up. According to Leslie, Constable increased the width of the stream considerably at this point.

Although not purchased, the French critic Nodier saw the work and on his return to Paris, published an enthusiastic appreciation. By this time, in fact earlier in 1820, Gericault, who had been a guest of the RA, relayed his appreciation of Constable's work to his friend Delacroix; who stated that, *This man Constable has done me a power of good*, and even compelled him to retouch sections of his, *The Massacre at Chios*. In the longer term Delacroix may have passed his enthusiasm on to Theodore Rousseau and Constant Troyon, two of the principal Barbizon School painters. Surely, it is no accident that East Bergholt and Barbizon are now twinned towns.

The painting is the first major work, in which Constable's personal style becomes unmistakable; the Hampstead Heath sky studies, undoubtedly informed the sky. He had always been impressed by the manner in which the Dutch Golden Age landscape masters, Ruisdael, Hobbema and Koninck had exploited the low horizon and cloudscapes to enhance the visual and emotional appeal of their paintings, but his careful study of cloud forms took this element of painting to another level altogether. Dr Kurt Bahdt has demonstrated how important was the changing sense of landscape and its spiritual connection with human experience in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, given the pictorial studies of Constable and Dahl, the scientific research of Luke Howard, the writings of Goethe and Ruskin and the poetry of William Wordsworth, as in his *Prelude*, which the following illustrates:

*The Sky was never more so beautiful, sank down into my heart and held me like a dream.*



*The Hay Wain*, 1821, oil on canvas, 73x51 inches, N.G. London



*The Hay Wain Study*, 1821, V&A.

The early history of this full-scale study and the later, *Leaping Horse* study, also in the V&A is unclear.

Constable was very keen to retain his studies, stating that 'he had no objection to part with the corn, but not the field in which they grew.' However, it is most likely that they were retained for some time in his estate after his death. The ghost image of the boy on the pony by the water's edge is visible in the finished painting, indicating that this was a late alteration.

It is not too much to suggest that, through a more responsive and dynamic treatment of the sky, not merely the iconography, the expressive scope of landscape painting was greatly extended. Constable may well have been the first landscape painter to apply the term Chiaroscuro, the faithful representation of light and shadow in relation to the Natural landscape and in this painting perhaps we see the beginning of such ambition.

In November 1822, the French dealer, John Arrowsmith saw the painting, then valued at 150 guineas, at the British Institute and offered 70 guineas, which was refused. However, when Arrowsmith returned again in the Spring of 1824, he was successful in purchasing the work and two other paintings for £250, the second major one being, *View on the Stour*, named at the time, *The Bridge*. John Fisher had first refusal on the *Hay Wain*, but when he realised how important it would be to have Constable's masterpiece seen on the continent, he encouraged Constable to sell it to Arrowsmith.

A few months later at the 1824 Paris Salon it was praised by Theodore Gericault, generally caused quite a sensation and was awarded a gold medal by Charles X, a cast of which was incorporated into the frame. Later in May, Arrowsmith introduced Charles Scroth, a further potential patron; during their four-year association with Constable, the painter sold them over twenty works, more paintings than he sold in his remaining years.

In 2005, *The Haywain* was voted as the Nation's second best loved painting, behind Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire*. This choice, or opinion is interesting in itself, as it represents a complete reversal of popular opinion as it would have been in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Take for example as a more relevant comparison, Turner's *Crossing the Brook* of 1815. *The Hay Wain* appeals today, but singularly failed to do so in 1821. On the other hand, Turner's painting was well received. It succeeded on two levels, by appealing to the intellectual taste of the Royal Academy and by virtue of its technical skills and cross-reference to old master paintings; moreover, it appealed to popular taste by virtue of its picturesque quality.

Both Turner and Constable were united in seeking to raise the status of landscape painting, rather as Joshua Reynolds had raised the status of portraiture a generation earlier. Turner did this not by convincing people that the hierarchy was wrong,

which was Constable's approach and it failed, but by allying landscape with History painting. Turner knew exactly what the conventions were regarding History painting and Landscape and he was prepared to play the game to the limit within the rules.

All artists work in a climate generated by tradition, by academics and critics, patrons and collectors and to some extent by their peers. Few artists can afford to work in isolation and even when supported by private income like Constable, there is an understandable desire to seek recognition. Essentially, *The Haywain* failed to arouse enthusiasm and praise because there was no such precedent, no intellectual, or popular aesthetic into which it easily fitted in 1821. The cult of the 'Picturesque', was still the prevailing taste in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and only fell out of favour in the 1830s. As a consequence of the Napoleonic wars, the well-to do tourists of the period, made tours of England, Scotland and Wales, rather than the continent, in search of scenery that was deemed to be picturesque. Travel books and engravings, were published as guides and souvenirs and between 1827-38, Charles Heath published an ambitious series, *Picturesque Views in England and Wales*, in twenty-parts parts, with engravings based on watercolours, which he had commissioned from Turner. There were no cameras, but a conscientious traveller would take a 'Claude Glass', a convex mirror of a dark colour, to compose picturesque views; the diminished landscape reflected in it and gave it a brownish look, like that of an old master painting.

So, what were the criteria of a landscape that could be deemed picturesque? There had to be qualities of 'roughness' and 'wildness', found most accessibly in the Lake and Peak Districts and further afield in Wales and Scotland. Constable's Stour Valley, with its flat land, cultivated fields, agricultural activity and general absence of 'wildness' did not qualify. So, although *The Haywain* may seem more picturesque today, it just did not fulfil the aesthetic criteria of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. And yet, how paradoxical that the French Academic establishment should so much more enthusiastically embrace Constable's painting at the 1824 Salon. Indeed, the letter from John Fisher to Constable of 1824 appears to confirm this opinion:

'Let your Hay Cart go to Paris by all means...I would let it go at less than its price for the sake of the eclat it may give you. The stupid English public, which has no judgement of its own, will begin to think there is something in you, if the French make your works National property.'

Certainly there appears to have been a much greater sensibility to what Constable had achieved in his work, also undoubtedly influenced by the significant and rapidly growing acclaim of Richard Parkes Bonington amongst his French peers, the patrons, critics and collectors.



*View of the Stour near Dedham*, 1822, oil on canvas, Huntingdon Museum

In this the fourth of the six-footers, Constable has made considerable changes from the sketch, by removing the small rowing boat and children fishing in the foreground, replacing the

latter with a beached rowing boat, but adding another barge; in addition, depicting more of the right side of the bridge and adding the figure crossing it, rather than what appears to be a cow. Nevertheless, the removal of the rowing boat was a late change to the finished painting, as the ghost image, pentimento, of it is still visible. The full scale study, formerly in the possession of the Royal Holloway College, was sold at Christies in 2016 for £14 million.

The work was commenced in the Summer of 1821 at Hampstead, but soon transferred to his house in Charlotte Street. It was here that he made more substantial changes than ever before to the final picture. It was exhibited as *The Bridge* at the Academy in 1822, where it was generally well received by the reviewers, at the British Institution in 1823 and at the Paris Salon in 1824, where Arrowsmith acquired it with *The Hay Wain*.



*The Lock, The James Morrison, 1824, 56x48 inches, Private collection.*

*The Lock*, is one of two versions, the first painted purchased by James Morrison, an inn-keeper's son and a successful draper, from Balham Hill and Basildon Park. He acquired it on the opening day of the RA exhibition, for 150 guineas, the only occasion in Constable's career when a painting sold on its first day of viewing. The scene in a portrait format, is depicted as viewed from Flatford Mill, the lock keeper, with his upper body above the horizon. It would appear that the barge is moving downstream. This is the lower lock gate of Flatford lock and the view is looking West towards Dedham Church. Constable gives him monumental status as he operates the lower lock gate, whilst the barge is tied up.

Constable himself, described it as, *an admirable instance of the picturesque*; following the theories of Uvedale Price, the picturesque effects were those of unevenness, intricacy and the opposite qualities of roughness and of sudden variation, joined to those of irregularity. Many of these qualities are present in this painting, where they are rendered with an appropriately irregular and unevenly textured paint surface. It eventually ended up at Sudley Castle and was purchased by Baroness Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, but then sold in 2012 at Christies for £22 million to a private buyer. The second, Foster version is essentially identical in terms of composition, but with perhaps a more 'finished' appearance.

As was the case so frequently in Constable's life, success was attended by cause for concern. His wife, Maria's health was now so vulnerable that the family's life was being constantly disrupted by it. In May 1824, he was obliged to send her and the children to Brighton, where she remained until the end of the year and in 1825 she had to be there again, between August and September. In these periods and whenever they were separated thereafter he sent her an account of his doings in the form of a journal. He wrote movingly to a friend:

'I have a wife in delicate health and five infant children. I am not happy apart from them even for a few days, or hours and the Summer months separate us too much and disturb my quiet habits at my easil.'

A further letter to John Fisher, reveals just how conflicted he had become between his love for his family and his need to keep working:

'I am now thank God, quietly at my easil again. I find it a cure for all ills besides its being the source of all my joys and all my woe. My income is derived from it and now that after 20 years hard uphill work – now that I have disappointed the hopes of many –and realised the hopes of a few – now that I have the public into my hands – and want not a patron – and now that my ambition is on fire – to be kept from my easil is death to me.'



*Brighton Beach*, 1824, oil on paper, V&A



*The Leaping Horse*, 1825, oil on canvas, Royal Academy

*The Leaping Horse* was the last of the Stour six-footers, probably begun the previous year, the barrier the horse is jumping is one of those placed to prevent cattle from straying onto the Stour towpath. The view depicted with Dedham Church on the far right, is further upstream than the various versions of, *The Lock*. This, the last in the Stour Series, pays the greatest attention to surface and texture. The principal alterations from the sketch, are the moving of the willow stump to the middle of the composition behind the horse and the elimination of the second barge, just entering the picture frame on the right: however, the ghost image of the original placement of the willow stump is still apparent in the composition in front of the horse. Further less obvious changes are the addition of a lowered sail and changes to the disposition of figures on the barge. This is another important example of how Constable, continued to make changes and 'improvements', before and after exhibitions.

*Boat Passing a Lock*, in the R.A. (image of Study), is the fifth of the six-footers, an expanded version of *The Lock*, with a landscape rather than portrait format, where in the final painting the ubiquitous sheep-dog has been added to the foreground and which Constable decided to use as his diploma piece on being elected to full membership of the Academy in 1829. Even the fastidious Fuseli, by now President of the Academy, praised it.

A barge waits to enter the lock before moving upstream, as threatening rain clouds pass overhead, with the same monumental figure of the lock keeper in his red jacket. It is tied to a post, while the lock keeper lowers the sluice gate, so that the barge can enter the chamber before being lifted up to the upper level of the river. This is the lower lock gate of Flatford lock and the view is looking West towards Dedham Church. In the background at the far right is Flatford Old Bridge, which also appeared in, *View on the Stour near Dedham*, of 1822.



*Boat Passing a Lock*, full scale study, 1826, 55x48 inches, N.G. Victor



*Hampstead Heath,  
Branch Pond*,  
1828, V&A.

Constable painted many works around Hampstead Heath between 1821-28. Many of these were oil sketches on paper, but *Hampstead Heath, Branch Pond* is one of the finest of the paintings on canvas.



*The Cornfield*, 1826, oil on canvas, 56x48, N.G. London

Above all his major works, this is possibly the most sentimentally and biographically inclined. It is also the painting that was selected in 1837, after Constable's death to be put forward for national subscription, ahead of, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*. According to Constable's son, Charles, this image represents the lane leading from East Bergholt to the pathway to Dedham across the meadows, a quarter of a mile from East Bergholt Church and one mile from Dedham Church as the crow flies; the distant Church is an invention. Constable would have walked along this lane as a boy on his way to and from school at Dedham. In composing it, he enlisted the advice of a botanist friend. The scene is set in July around noon on a bright and sunny day and the boy is undoubtedly Constable and in the middle ground can be seen a Swing Plough. In a letter to Fisher he wrote: 'I do hope I sell this picture, as it certainly has got a little more eye-salve than I usually condescend to give to them.'



***Marine Parade and Old Chain Pier, Brighton, 1827, oil on canvas, 50x73, Tate Britain***

The first of a less cohesive group of large works, than those of the Stour, this was painted at Hampstead, from Sketches made in Brighton in 1824, at which time Constable took the family to Brighton for the sea air; it is unique amongst the six-footers, in that Constable did not prepare a full scale sketch. When exhibited at the National Gallery in 1827 and at the British Institution in 1828, it was not regarded that highly and indeed Constable himself had reservations, despite John Fisher's attempt to persuade the painter to keep it on his easel for further improvement; it remained unsold in his lifetime. In truth, Constable was not by inclination a Marine painter as such, unlike Turner, for whom it became of immense importance and prestige. In fact, it may well have been just the fact that his arch rival was so successful with all genres, that Constable felt he had to at least attempt to compete. In letters to Fisher, he called Brighton, *Piccadilly by the Sea* and made it quite clear that he thought little of Brighton, the town itself and the fashionable people, following in the wake of the Prince Regent. Note the bathing station on the left.



***Beaching a Boat, Brighton, 10x12 inches***

This fresh and vigorous study, with red ground clearly showing through in the sky, was in Constable's London studio at his death, when it passed to his daughter Isobel, eventually forming part of the Cheramy and Hatvany collections, when it was heralded as anticipating Impressionism in its truth to Nature and in the spontaneity of its handling. This sketch is thought to be contemporaneous with the Brighton painting. Did Edouard Manet see such works early on in his career?



*The Vale of the Stour with Dedham in the Distance*, 1828, oil on canvas, 56x48, N.G. Scotland.

*The Vale of the Stour with Dedham in the Distance* was being completed for exhibition at the RA in 1828, at a time when his father in law, Charles Bicknell died, leaving him a bequest of £20,000. In this picture, Constable undoubtedly referred back to his much smaller version of the same subject in 1802 and also refers directly to Claude's, *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel*. The comparison confirms just how much Constable's style had matured in the intervening quarter century. There is also the addition of farm buildings, or perhaps a mill in this version, absent in the *Dedham Vale* version of 1802. The detail of the gypsy and child in foreground is the first occasion on which in any of Constable's

paintings, he depicted any reference to rural poverty. Apart from a single reference, in a letter to John Fisher of April 1822, ‘My brother is uncomfortable about the state of things in Suffolk. They are as bad as Ireland – “never a night without seeing fires near, or at a distance”, there are no comments to be found upon any of the conditions, which were altering the identity of the contemporary English countryside. No mention of the effects of the mounting social effects of the Industrial Revolution, the Enclosure Acts driving hundreds of thousands off the land (with associated social unrest) to become the underpaid and exploited resource of mines, factories and mills. As it happened, the limited area of ‘home’ countryside, which is represented in Constable’s work, was at the time affected less by change than those to the West, in the Midlands and North; essentially, the rural scenes he painted were unchanged for generations. Constable was not only conservative by temperament in his attitude to Society, but seems, quite unlike Turner, to have been unaffected by the transformations occurring in the world around him. Notwithstanding, his art though conservative in subject, became evermore revolutionary in form.

In the opinion of many, this is one of Constable’s finest works and the painter was obviously similarly convinced, when he wrote to his friend Archdeacon Fisher, ‘Perhaps my best.’ Indeed, this was the painting that Constable would use for his Diploma work in 1829. The view taken from Gun Hill, using the portrait format, has allowed him to give the viewer this magnificent expanse of Summer sky, with rays of sunlight passing through, utterly persuasive in comparison with the small 1802 version. As one reviewer marvelled, ‘A shower has apparently just passed over and a few flitting clouds throw their flickering light and shades over the country.’ This was Constable’s chiaroscuro of Nature. On this occasion, the appearance of the cumulus clouds is much more in tune with those of Jacob Ruisdael’s monumental *Harlem with the Bleaching Grounds*. However, even here, Constable far surpasses the Dutch Golden Age master. One can almost feel the rustle of the leaves on the trees to the right, whilst in the valley below, the river Stour winds its way through Dedham and on to the sea.



*Dedham Vale*, 1802, oil on canvas, V&A

Shortly after Constable began work on the painting, his great friend, advocate and patron died, gifting his treasured *Hagar and the Angel* to the newly founded National Gallery. By recreating his 1802 study of *Dedham Vale*, Constable is not only referencing his own personal journey as a ‘Natural’ painter, but also paying homage to his friend and to a classical landscape tradition that they both admired and found exemplified in Claude Lorrain’s work.

It has been plausibly argued that Constable intended the painting as a riposte to those, who preferred Etty’s 1828 diploma work, *Sleeping Nymph and Satyrs*, to Constable’s serious domestic landscapes. As the impending Academy election loomed in early 1828 and would be Academicians would go through the humiliating canvassing of support, Constable became evermore resigned and with good reason, as he lost out comprehensively to Etty by 18 votes to 5. His time was yet to come.



*Harlem with the Bleaching Grounds*, 1660s, oil on canvas, Jacob Ruisdael, Rijksmuseum

Constable could indeed look at the works of Claude, or Ruisdael, we may be sure with tears in his eyes, as his letter to his friend Archdeacon Fisher of 1836 confirms:

‘In Claude’s pictures, with scarcely an exception, the sun ever shines. Ruisdael, on the contrary, delighted in and has made delightful to our eyes, those solemn days, peculiar to his country and to ours, when without storm, large rolling clouds scarcely permit a ray of sunlight to break the shades of the forest.’

He objected to the concept of a National Gallery, because it contained pictures and certified the heresy that the art of painting could be advanced through connoisseurship, which fixed Nature in a rigid artistic mould. His sense of the conflict, was, of course extended into matters more immediate and practical to himself than this. The first of the two important changes in the painting of landscapes, which was to occur between then and the 20<sup>th</sup> century was to be the abandonment of scenic prejudice.

Landscape painting had hitherto been dominated by a scenic approach to Nature, whose physical and temporal infinitude had been composed and reduced into a finite scene. The very term 'Landscape', derived from the Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century 'Landskip', implies something different from the word Nature, the one being boundless and indefinite, the other organised and confined. Here Ernest Gombrich's words are especially insightful:

*'A landscape, cultivated, or wild is already artifice before it has become the subject of a work of Art. Even when we simply look, we are already subconsciously shaping and interpreting. Artist, or not, we have been making this conversion for at least 500 years. The habit is part of our relationship with the world around us. Landscape is what the viewer has selected from the land, edited and modified in accordance with certain conventional ideas about what constitutes a good view'* Gombrich goes on to say; *'In judging a good view, a view worthy of recording, we are preferring one aspect of the countryside to another. We are selecting, editing, suppressing, or subordinating some visual information in favour of promoting other features. The process of marking off one particular tract of land, whose features are subjectively considered as aesthetically superior to another, is already converting that view into terms of Art; it's what we do when we aim the camera viewfinder'.*

Another renowned art historian Norbert Wolf, produced a more succinct, but nevertheless valid definition of landscape and its relationship to Nature: *Landscape represents a Nature that on the one hand has passed through the filter of ideas, values, or norms and on the other, is based on modern subjectivity.*

The 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century English sightseers and landscape fanciers had instinctively and compulsively, transferred their appreciation of what was natural into the sphere of art, by immediately converting what they saw into scenes, views and prospects, carrying an artistic seal of approval. And not content with that, those aristocratic landowners went so far as to employ the likes of Capability Brown to produce their own versions of the perfect Claudian Italianate landscape on their estates.

The second path of change was Constable's desire to close the traditional gap between Nature and art, not allowing the example of landscape pictures, as it were to disrespectfully intervene, his wish to bring Nature and human self closer to one another. A passionate art of feeling, the hall-mark of Romanticism, had in the century before and still in his own time, meant a recourse to what was considered Sublime. Constable claimed that all Nature could be equally productive of strong emotional association and be so without claiming intellectual guarantees.

In January 1828, Maria's seventh child, Lionel Bicknell was born. The pregnancy and birth put an unsustainable strain on Maria's already extremely delicate health. By April, her tubercular coughing became very much worse and Alfie, her sixth child contracted whooping cough. In May, Constable sent Maria with Alfie and the other children to Brighton again for the air, but after six weeks with no improvement to their health, the family returned to London. Maria finally succumbed on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, dying at the age of forty-one. The final stages must have been unbearable for Constable to witness, painful, with fever, constant coughing, bleeding and lassitude, with Maria's voice reduced to a whisper. He wrote to the portrait painter friend Pickersgill:

'My loss, though long looked for, now it has come, has overwhelmed me, a void is made in my heart that can never be filled again in this world, my dear departed angel died in my arms on Sunday morning'.

And in a letter to his brother Golding Constable, he wrote:  
'Hourly do I feel the loss of my departed Angel – God only knows how my children will be brought up...the face of the world is totally changed to me.'

So, as we come to the end of 1828, Constable is left on his own with seven children to provide and care for. A new chapter in his life will commence in 1829, with his long overdue election as a full Academician and a change in his painting style, no doubt much influenced by the emotional turmoil, following the death of his wife and the onerous responsibility of providing for his children.