

Monet's Scientific Skies

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A scientific study carried out at the University of Birmingham's School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences has shown that Monet's paintings of the Houses of Parliament were firmly based on actual observations made during the artist's visits to London rather than created from his imagination back in his studio in Giverny.

By careful analysis of his paintings, letters and architectural drawings, scientists have also discovered that the exact location of Monet's vantage point was a second floor covered terrace of the former Governor's Hall at St. Thomas's Hospital.

The depicted scenes in Monet's paintings have been compared with solar geometry calculations to determine the dates and times of the represented scenes to within minutes. The results are consistent with information in Monet's letters and the period that he was in London.

Monet made three trips to London in the autumn of 1899 and the early months of 1900 and 1901 to paint his London series. There are 95 paintings in the series in total showing three views of central London; two views from the Savoy Hotel, a southward view across Charing Cross Bridge towards Westminster on the west and Lambeth on the east and a Southwesterly view across Waterloo Bridge towards the industrialized South Bank. A third view is of the Houses of Parliament westward from St. Thomas' Hospital.

Dr John Thornes, from the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, says, 'We have demonstrated that Monet's paintings contain accurate quantitative information, providing support to the theory that Monet's aim was to capture as accurately as he could, the visual effects that observed while he painted the pictures in London. We are confident that these paintings show an accurate visual record of the urban atmosphere of Victorian London.'

Dr Jacob Baker, says, 'Monet's letters state that he observed the sun on at least four separate occasions and these coincide with the main dates we have attributed to the paintings. We know that it would have been quite difficult to see the sun due to cloud and pollution so Monet had to be very patient for the sun to appear. Using the information we have gleaned in this study, we can now go on to assess the information that Monet's paintings may provide on the atmospheric state and pollution of Victorian London'.

Ends

Notes to Editors

The paper relating to this study entitled "Solar Position within Monet's House of Parliament" by Dr J Baker and Dr JE Thornes (doi:10.1098/rspa.2006.1754) is published online today (9th August 2006) in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences.

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For further information or for copies of the research paper please contact: Kate Chapple, Press Officer, University of Birmingham, Tel 07789 921164.

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