

Style Snapshot

A look at a frame, its characteristics, and history

by Louise Bradley

What style frame is this? This is a Neoclassical-style frame with a fluted scotia profile at its center. At the outer edge, there is ribbon and stick ornament. Working inward, there is next a torus profile with compo ornament of imbricated (overlapping) leaves directed from banded centers to banded corners. Next, we see the fluted scotia profile with miter leaf; then raised bead, and leaf and tongue ornament at sight edge.

Where is it from? This frame was made in Melbourne, Australia, and is in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne.



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Who was instrumental in developing this style of frame? It was made around 1880 by John Thallon (1848-1918). He was born in Scotland and may have served an apprenticeship with his father Thomas Thallon, a cabinetmaker, before immigrating to Australia in 1876. In 1878 he opened the framemaking business, J. and T. Thallon, with his brother Thomas in Melbourne.¹ The company grew quickly to become Melbourne's leading framer of paintings during the 1880s and 1890s.²

What design departures might be seen on some frames of this style? While this is a Neoclassical fluted scotia frame, look at the leaf ornament. Many other 19th century frames of this style have oak or laurel leaf and berry ornament. Here Thallon has changed the leaves of a classical ornament to Australian Eucalyptus gum leaves and the berries to tiny gum nuts. But these are not long, thin, gum leaves; they are short, thick, almost heart shaped leaves. I looked for Thallon's leaf all over Melbourne but could not find it. One can imagine the Thallon brothers exploring their new surroundings and collecting samples of the Australian vegetation unlike that of their native Scotland. Perhaps this chubby leaf was more appealing to their aesthetic sense and represents a synthesis of forms.

What type of artwork would this frame most likely house? This large frame, 181x151cm (71¹/₄"x59¹/₂") does not currently contain a painting but similar frames were used for paintings by leading Australian and European artists. The State Library of Victoria in Melbourne holds portraits with Thallon frames ornamented with laurel leaves.

Additional comments: John Payne, senior painting conservator at the NGV, has studied this frame for a forthcoming book on Australian frames. He notes that the torus leaf ornament is oil gilded, and other parts water gilded. The scotia profile area is matte gilded and a layer of glue size sits atop the gilded surface. The raised bead is burnished and lightly distressed; black bole is visible under the burnished areas. Payne believes that the reverse mold used to make the gum

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Louise Bradley is a conservation framer in Melbourne, Australia, specializing in works on paper. She can be reached by e-mail at louise_bradley2@unite.com.au