

RICHARD GREEN

ENGLISH FOLLOWER OF CANALETTO

Fl. Mid-eighteenth century

Ref: CD 209

London, a view of the New Horse Guards from St James's Park



Oil on canvas: 25 1/8 x 43 7/8 in / 63.8 x 111.4 cm
Frame size: 30 1/2 x 49 1/2 in / 77.5 x 125.7 cm

Painted *circa* 1753



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Provenance:

George Iain Murray (1931-1996), 10th Duke of Atholl;
his estate sale, Christie's London, 15th November 1996, lot 39 (as English School, *circa* 1753);
where acquired by Manny Davidson (1931-2024)

The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48) disrupted travel in Europe, leading to a fall in the number of English *Milordi* visiting Venice on the Grand Tour. Canaletto decided to follow his clients and moved to London in late May 1746. He remained there, with an eight-month return to Venice in 1750-51, until 1755.

The advent of a view painter of such sophistication spurred the fledgling genre to develop among artists already domiciled in Britain. Most talented among these was Samuel Scott (1702-1772), who started his career as a marine painter in the tradition of the van de Veldes. His earliest drawing of Westminster Bridge, of 1742-44, just predates Canaletto's arrival. Increasing political and commercial confidence in Georgian England spurred artists to look anew at their capital city, revering ancient buildings such as the medieval Lambeth Palace, but also celebrating the sleek, classically-inspired buildings which were springing up in London's centres of government and haunts of the social élite.

This painting, by an as-yet-unattributed but highly accomplished contemporary hand, derives closely from Canaletto's *London, the New Horse Guards from St James's Park* (formerly Drury-Lowe Collection; whereabouts unknown)¹, c.1753. The Canaletto was engraved by Thomas Bowles III and published on 2nd November 1753². The Drury-Lowe painting shows the exterior of the New Horse Guards completed. In a slightly earlier work in a private European collection, probably painted between November 1752 and November 1753, Canaletto shows the cupola of the New Horse Guards still supported by scaffolding; the south wing has not yet been built³.

The Richard Green painting faithfully reproduces in their correct colours all the foreground figures in the Drury-Lowe and Buxton views, suggesting that the artist must have had access to one or more of the originals. There is unfortunately no early provenance for either of these *New Horse Guards* subjects, so how our artist saw them remains a mystery. Canaletto exhibited *The Old Horse Guards from St James's Park* at his studio in Silver Street (now Beak Street, Soho) from 25th July 1749 and it is possible that our artist could also have seen the *New Horse Guards* there. Canaletto's work, much to his annoyance, was being copied by artists in Britain even before he moved to London.

Our painting depicts one of the most elegant panoramas of mid-eighteenth century London, the mainly official buildings on the east side of St James's Park. The park was developed from the tilt

¹ Oil on canvas: 23 ¼ x 43 ½ in / 59 x 110.5 cm. In the Drury-Lowe Collection, Locko Park, Derbyshire by 1901 until at least 1975. See WG Constable, *Canaletto*, 2nd edn. revised by JG Links, Oxford 1976 (and 1989 reprint), vol. I, pl. 207, no.418; vol. II, p.411, no.418. See also New Haven, Yale Center for British Art / London, Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2006-7, exh. cat. by Charles Beddington, p.91, under no.18.

² Example in the British Museum Print Room, inv. no.1880.1113.2297.

³ Oil on panel: 23 x 43 ¼ in / 58.5 x 111 cm; owned by Mrs Robin Buxton of Itchen Abbas, Hampshire by the mid-twentieth century. See Constable and Links, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp.410-11, no.417.

yard and hunting ground of Henry VIII's St James's Palace to the north. Charles II had it laid out in a style influenced by the Versailles garden designer André Le Nôtre, its centrepiece the long strip of water known as the Canal, which is visible to the left of our picture. In the centre of the park's east side was the red brick Old Horse Guards, built 1663-5 as the headquarters of the General Staff, Horse Guards and some of the Foot Guards. By 1745 this was much decayed and was replaced by the splendid white stone New Horse Guards seen in the painting, designed by the Palladian architect William Kent before his death in 1748 and finished by his assistant John Vardy and William Robinson 1750-59.

It is flanked to the left, beyond some trees, by Admiralty House, residence of the First Lord of the Admiralty. In front of Admiralty House, on the edge of the park, is the Admiralty building, the heart of the Georgian Navy, designed by Thomas Ripley and built 1722-6. Behind it can be seen the spire of James Gibb's St Martin-in-the-Fields (1722-6). To the right of the New Horse Guards is William Kent's imposing white Portland stone Treasury building, 1733-6. At far right, forming a powerful repoussoir of shadow which contrasts with the sunlit government buildings, is the red brick block of numbers 1 and 2 Downing Street. Until 1749 1 Downing Street was the home of one of Britain's richest men, the Welsh landowner Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. 2 Downing Street was owned by the 3rd Duke of Bolton (1685-1754). Charles Beddington has suggested that Canaletto might have had either of these Maecenases in mind as a potential client when choosing the subject of his first painting in this series, *The Old Horse Guards from St James's Park*, 1749 (The Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber Art Foundation)⁴. Canaletto depicts servants beating a red carpet on the steps leading from Sir Watkin's house to the park, getting the mansion ready for the owner's return. This motif was carried over into the *New Horse Guards* paintings and the Richard Green view.

Our painter respects the distribution of the figures which Canaletto had arranged so cleverly to move the eye around the canvas. They include a group of off-duty soldiers from the Horse Guards in the right foreground, as well as a conference of three dogs depicted with Canaletto's characteristic affection and wit. Elsewhere ladies enjoy the sunshine and gentlemen idle on the broad pathway, talking politics. Left of centre a man is in earnest conversation with a clergyman, who has no doubt come from nearby Westminster Abbey. Near the Admiralty, a grand coach prepares to pass under the arch of Horse Guards. Only the King and certain officials and courtiers in possession of an ivory pass had the right to drive under the arch of Horse Guards, a tradition that endures to this day.

This painting presents Georgian London as it aspired to be: modern, elegant, efficient and ambitious. Symbol of a nation with ever greater geopolitical influence and military heft, the capital is bathed in benign sunshine borrowed ultimately from Venice, another great maritime empire.

⁴ Beddington, *op. cit.*, p.88.