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EST. 1817

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Willem van de Velde the Younger
(Leiden 1633 - 1707 Westminster)

An English two-decker at sea surrounded by other ships and yachts in a moderate breeze

Signed on a piece of driftwood (lower edge center): 'W v Velde J' and signed and dated (on the reverse of the original canvas): 'W. vande Velde J / 1684.'

Oil on canvas

95 5/8 x 137 3/4 in. (243 x 350 cm.)



Provenance

Commissioned by Admiral Edward Russell, 1st Earl of Orford (1652-1727 for Chippenham Hall, Cambridgeshire;
by inheritance to his great-niece, Letitia Tipping (1699-1779), wife of Samuel Sandys, 1st Baron Sandys (1695-1770);
by descent to their son, Edwin Sandys, 2nd Baron Sandys (1726-1797);
by inheritance to his niece, Mary, Marchioness of Downshire and 1st Baroness Sandys (1764-1836);
by descent to her second son, Lieutenant-General Arthur Hill, 2nd Baron Sandys (1792-1860);
by inheritance to his younger brother, Arthur Marcus Sandys, 3rd Baron Sandys (1798-1863);
by descent in the family to Richard Hill, 7th Baron Sandys (1931-2013) at Ombersley Court, Worcestershire; The Sandys Trust; until offered for sale, Christie's, London 29 November 2023, lot 52, as Willem van de Velde the Younger and Studio and unsigned.

Literature

Celia Finnes, *Through England on a Side Saddle*, ed. Robert Southey, 1888, from her manuscript recording a visit to Chippenham in 1698 ("very noble, fine Pictures, there is ye battle at la Hogue a Large sea piece with an inscription of ye admirals valour when ye great ship ye Gunn was burnt and mightily valued by ye ffrench King")

J. Grego, *Inventory of Pictures: Portraits, Paintings, etc.*, Ombersley MS 1905, where listed in the Great Dining Hall;

Journal entry by Oliver Millar, at the Paul Mellon Centre, London, 25 August 1950, p. 29;

Oswald, "Ombersley Court, Worcestershire – II", *Country Life*, 9 January 1953, pp. 95 and 97, pp. 7 and 9;

Ombersley Court Inventory, annotated Ombersley MS, June 1963, where listed in the Dining Room;

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M. S. Robinson, Van de Velde: *A Catalogue of the Paintings of the Elder and Younger Willem van de Velde, II*, Greenwich, 1990, p. 969, no. 637 as 'a work by the Younger, but much of it is probably by the studio'; *Ombersley Court Catalogue of Pictures*, undated, Ombersley, MS., p. 28, where listed in the Ballroom; Remmelt Daaldler, *Van de Velde & Son. Marine Painters. The firm of Willem van de Velde the Elder and Willem van de Velde the Younger, 1640-1707*, Leiden, 2016, pp. 177-173 (Russell commission).

This impressive painting depicting an English two-decker at sea is Willem van de Velde the Younger's largest painting. He and his father Willem van de Velde the Elder (1610-11 1693) are regarded as the most important marine painters in the history of art. Training alongside his father in his studio in Amsterdam, his talent soon became clear and in 1672 the van de Veldes arrived in England on the invitation of King Charles II, who provided them with an annual salary, lodgings in Greenwich and allowed them to use the Queen's House as their studio. Father and son revolutionised marine painting in England and their work established the importance of the genre in the cultural and artistic identity of the nation. They inspired future generations of artists for centuries to come, reaching a height in J.M.W. Turner who, on being shown a print of painting by van de Velde the Younger, is said to have exclaimed, *'That made me a painter!'*

Despite its monumental scale, this painting has gone relatively unnoticed, since it was commissioned by Admiral Edward Russell, the First Earl of Orford (1652-1727) for his residence, Chippenham Hall. The painting enjoys an unbroken family provenance, having passed from Admiral Edward Russell to his great-niece, Letitia Tipping (1699-1779) the painting passed into the family of her husband, Samuel Sandys (1695-1770), the First Baron Sandys. This painting, as well as the remaining six canvases by Willem van de Velde that had been commissioned by Russell, must have moved at some point in the first half of the 18th century to Ombersley Court, the residence of the Baron Sandys, where it hung in the great dining room (Fig 1).¹ Upon the death of the Seventh Baron Sandys, Richard Hill, in 2013, the painting passed to the Sandy's Trust, which offered it for sale at Christie's London in November 2023.

¹ According to the website of Chippenham Park, Lord Sandy sold Chippenham in 1749, so the paintings must have moved before this date.

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Fig.1: The Great Dining Hall in the Regency wing at Ombersley, hung with the series of paintings by Willem van de Velde the Younger, commissioned by Admiral Russell.

At Christies, the painting was sold as an unsigned work, as Willem van de Velde and studio, however, the cataloguers failed to notice that the present painting is fully signed on a floating piece of driftwood on the lower edge of the canvas: *W v Velde J* (fig. 2), the “J” indicating “Junior”, for the Younger Willem van de Velde. Additionally, a 75 cm. wide signature and date on the back of the original canvas (fig. 3) was only discovered upon the removal of the lining canvas. It reads: “*W. vande Velde J*” and is surprisingly dated 1684 underneath this inscription.

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Fig.2: Signed on a piece of driftwood,
lower edge center: *W v Velde J.*



Fig 3: Signed on the reverse of the original canvas: *W. vande Velde J / 1684.*

The 1684 date is a fascinating find, not least as the mid 1680's are regarded as the height of van de Velde's powers, as seen in his large masterpiece *'The Golden Leeuw on the IJ by Amsterdam'* in the Amsterdam Museum, dated 1686. Additionally, it had generally been assumed that Admiral Russell commissioned the suite of all seven paintings for Chippenham Hall, the property he purchased in 1688, from Willem van de Velde in the mid to late 1690s.²

When Willem van de Velde placed his signature on the back of the canvas in 1684, he must have done so in the studio he shared with his father in the Queen's House, Greenwich. However, after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 the Van de Veldes lost their privileged position at the Stuart court and were required to leave the studio. It seems that the new King of England, William III of Orange, although he was a fellow Dutchman, did not share the enthusiasm of his predecessor and father-in-law, James II, for maritime affairs

² Daalder, LIT. 2016, p. 219, says there are seven in the series, all listed by Robinson, LIT. 1990, pp. 1074, no. 369; 620, no. 370; 606, no. 586; 215, no. 635; 968, no. 636; 969, no. 637; and 969, no. 638.

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and consequently, paintings depicting this subject matter. The father and son subsequently found two houses next to each other in Sackville Street in Westminster, London.

It is interesting to note that van de Velde's patron Admiral Edward Russell, 1st Earl of Orford, was instrumental in bringing William of Orange to the throne. Admiral Russell was an important naval commander during the Anglo-Dutch naval campaigns of the 1680s, having served in key roles during the later part of the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-1674) and afterward. In 1677, he was given command of the third-rate HMS *Defiance*. He then moved to the third-rate HMS *Swiftsure* in March 1678 and then to the fourth-rate HMS *Newcastle* in August 1680. The identifiable vessel on the left in our painting, known as two-decker because of the arrangement of cannons on two levels, is likely one of these ships. Working on the assumption that the painting depicted a ship commanded by Admiral Russell, Robinson suggested that this is the 64-gun *Defiance*, which was built in 1675 and was commanded by Russell in 1677-1678.³ However this identification cannot be confirmed, because there are no certain drawings of this ship by van de Velde or any other marine artist. Alternative and more plausible identifications are either the similarly sized *Swiftsure*, built in 1673 and commanded by Russell from March 1678, or the *Newcastle*, which he commanded from August 1680. There are drawings of both ships in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and from these it appears closer in resemblance to the *Swiftsure*, particularly in the positioning of the portholes and decorative elements of the quarter gallery (fig. 4). These 'ship portraits' favoured by van de Velde would have either been painted 'on spec' in the studio and later seen and bought by a client or commissioned by a patron as a way to memorialise favoured ships, fleets or commands. In our painting it appears that at least two of the ships are firing a salute and have their union flags raised, perhaps to their Admiral approaching in one of the smaller boats.

³ Robinson, *LIT.* 1990, p. 969.

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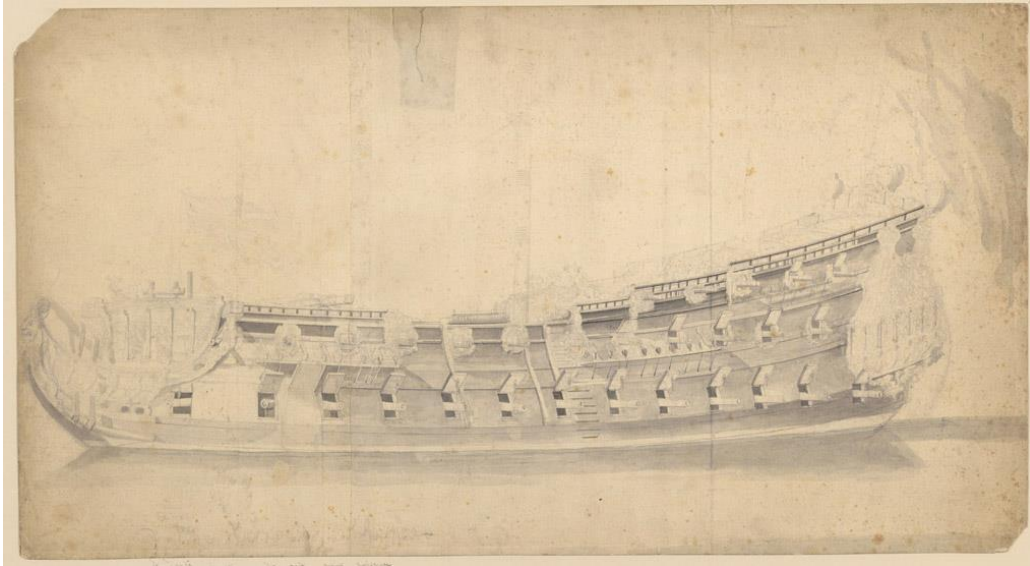


Fig.4: Willem van de Velde the Younger, *Sketch of the 'Swiftsure'*, 1673, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

Later in the 1680's, Admiral Russell was one of the Immortal Seven, a group of English noblemen who issued the Invitation to William, a document asking William, Prince of Orange, to depose King James II in June 1688. Based in the Netherlands, he served as Prince William's secretary during the planning of William's invasion of England and subsequent Glorious Revolution. Russell is chiefly remembered today for his triumphs at the naval battles of Barfleur and La Hogue, on 29 May and 4 June 1692 respectively. This battle marked a turning point in the Nine Years' War between the British and the French. Henceforth French pretensions to supremacy evaporated, and the British ruled the seas. These confrontations irreparably damaged the French Atlantic fleet and made the proposed invasion of Britain by Louis XIV and the deposed English King, James II, impossible, thereby securing the position of William III. The scale of this double battle was enormous; 126 ships in total – over twice the size of the Battle of Trafalgar. It was this victory that led to Russell's promotion to Admiral of the Fleet in November 1693, First Lord of the Admiralty in April 1694 and creation as 1st Earl of Orford in 1697.

Admiral Russell was also a sophisticated and extravagant patron of the arts. This was especially the case at his country estate, Chippenham Hall in Cambridgeshire, halfway between Bury St. Edmunds and Ely. Drawings of the exterior or interior of the house do not survive, but a map of the estate shows how

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the trees in the park were planted to evoke the battle formations at La Hogue and Barfleur, on the permission of the King, William III. A full-length portrait of the Admiral, by Godfrey Kneller, painted in 1693, shows him pointing with his right hand, inviting the viewer's gaze towards the naval action in the background, his victorious battle at La Hogue (fig.5).



Fig. 5: Godfrey Kneller, *Admiral Edward Russell, 1652-1727, 1st Earl of Orford*, circa 1693, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

Admiral Russell's extravagance stretched also to entertaining and among his many other achievements he is also thought to hold the record for history's largest cocktail party. In 1694, after being requested to overwinter in Cadiz, Spain, he threw an officer's Christmas party for 6,000 people that employed a garden fountain as the punch bowl. The mixture included 250 gallons of brandy, 125 gallons of Malaga wine, 1,400 pounds of sugar, 2,500 lemons, 20 gallons of lime juice, 5 pounds of nutmeg and 300 toasted biscuits.⁴ A series of bartenders paddled around in a small wooden canoe, filling up guests' cups, working in 15-minute

⁴ Per Wondrich, the *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 1772

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shifts to avoid being overcome by the fumes and falling overboard. The party continued nonstop for a full week, pausing only briefly during rainstorms to erect a silk canopy over the punch to keep it from getting watered down. It is said that the festivities did not end until the fountain had been drunk completely dry.

It is this same year of 1694 that van de Velde was invited on board the Admiral's ship and may therefore even have been present during this famous party in Cadiz. As Russell was on the point of departing to the Mediterranean with a fleet of 63 ships, to do battle with the French, he received this order from the Admiralty Board:

“Orders to Adml Russell to cause Mr Wm Vande Veld junr to be borne aboard some of ye Ships in the Fleet in order to his making Draughts & Figures or Imitations of what shall pass & happen at Sea by Battle or Fight of ye Fleet, and that he have such an Allowance for the same as his Father had in Holland, upon some Proposals from him now read [Russell also had to ensure that] Mr Vande Veld & a Serv[ant]t ... be born in Victuals on board such ship as he desires.”⁵

The sixty-year-old artist finally went to sea as an “embedded journalist,” like his father had done before him, and must have been very eager to witness and record battles in the open sea between two formidable marine powers. By 1695 Admiral Russell retired from the navy and must have desired that van de Velde would depict more of the great events of his career.⁶ Other paintings in Van de Velde's series record Russell's escort of the Queen of Spain along the northern coast of Galicia, as seen in another large work sold at Christies in the same sale, lot 51, and of course the victorious Battle of La Hogue in 1692, when the French flagship, *The Soleil Royal*, was set on fire and sunk.⁷ His character made him a perfect patron for marine pictures celebrating his great naval commands. One biography describes Admiral Russell as: “*Heavy-featured and ruddy-cheeked, with a forthright manner and an irascible temperament, Russell might in some superficial respects have fitted the caricature of the professional sea-captain. In fact, he was no bluff ‘tarpaulin’ but a scion of the landed aristocracy,*

⁵ Daalder, LIT, 2016, p. 170.

⁶ The website of Chippenham Park states that the 17th century mansion was thought to have been built in about 1690 by Admiral Edward Russell, who acquired the land from a distant kinsman, Sir William Russell, 4th Baronet, in 1688. Presumably the series was complete in 1698, when Cecilia Feinnes visited the house (see LIT. 1698) and described one of the paintings as depicting the Battle of La Hogue.

⁷ This was the bird's-eye-view painting that was included in the Christie's sale as lot 52. Christie's gave 22 May 1692 for the burning of the *Soleil Royal*, but Daalder (LIT. 2016, p. 171) says it occurred 1 June 1692. Robinson, LIT. 1990. P. 215 says that six ships were burnt by the boats and fireship squadron led by George Rooke, between May 23rd and June 2nd, 1692. As Robinson points out the *Soleil Royal* was burnt at Cherbourg, not La Hogue.

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with courtly connexions, a taste for material luxury if not for learning or literature, and, above all, high ambitions.”⁸ With an understanding of his love for extravagance, luxury and ambitious nature it stands to reason that he would have been interested in acquiring the largest marine painting executed by the greatest marine painter of the time.

In his catalogue of paintings by Willem van de Velde the Elder and the Younger, M. S. Robinson would often describe the large paintings as products of the workshop, which implies the participation of studio assistants. In reference to this particular painting, Robinson wrote, “This picture may be a work by the Younger, but much of it is probably by the studio, like other works painted, c. 1698, for Admiral Russell’s new house, Chippenham Hall near Cambridge.” Unfortunately, Robinson wrote these typically disparaging remarks about the attribution of the painting based solely upon black-and-white photos. Similar assessments appear throughout his 1,153-page book. It is plausible that, if he were speaking about another artist who ran a large studio, such as Peter Paul Rubens, he would not be parsing up the paintings as workshop products in the same way. After all, the sixty-year-old Willem van de Velde the Younger was still capable of wielding his brush, and he had the prevailing hand in all the paintings executed for Admiral Russell. There are passages in the skies and in the sails in all seven paintings that must have been painted by the master. Clearly, all the works in the Russell commission passed out of the studio of Willem van de Velde the Younger as products of his hand, and in this case in particular he signed the work on the front and back, to indicate precisely who was responsible for its execution.

In his very readable monograph on the Van de Veldes of 2016, Remmelt Daalder, who examined most of the paintings in the Russell commission at Ombersley Court first-hand, refers to them simply as by Willem van de Velde the Younger, without indicating any studio participation.⁹ To be clear, it is not proposed that there is no workshop assistance in the present painting whatsoever, rather that Willem van de Velde would have gone over the painting, overpainting any imperfections, and he and his patron regarded the painting as the product of his hand.

We are grateful Dr. Remmelt Daalder for assistance with this catalogue entry.

⁸ RUSSELL, Edward (c.1652-1727), of Chippenham Hall, Cambs. | History of Parliament Online

⁹ Daalder, LIT. 2016, pp. 169-172.