A Drawing by Canaletto of Richmond House Terrace

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IT IS GENERALLY HELD that Canaletto’s decision to visit London in 1746 was influenced by the news that Charles Labalaye’s Westminster Bridge, which was among the most important building enterprises of the century, was nearing completion.1 George Vertue, chronicler of the London art world, reports that Canaletto arrived in the latter part of May. The Venetian view painter apparently had not been invited, as he had no commissions in hand, but Vertue observed that on account of “the Multitude of his works done abroad for English noblemen & Gentlemen” he had already “procured... great reputation.”2 The problem was that Canaletto needed someone to represent his interests in London as Joseph Smith, British Resident and lately consul, had done for the artist in Venice. Smith, therefore, had provided Canaletto with a letter to the entrepreneur Owen McSwiney, who early in the Venetian painter’s career had acted as his agent, offering his work and that of other Italian painters to potential patrons in England. Smith hoped that McSwiney would once again bring the painter to the attention of the duke of Richmond, for whom Canaletto had worked years before. On May 20 McSwiney dined with Tom Hill, the duke’s former tutor, at the home of the duke’s neighbor, the duke of Montagu, and thereafter Hill wrote to the duke of Richmond: “I told [McSwiney] the best service I thought you could do [Canaletto] wd be to let him draw a view of the river from yr dining-room which would give him as much reputation as any of his Venetian prospects.”3

Charles Lennox (1701–1750), second duke of Richmond, already owned examples of Canaletto’s work. In the early 1720s, through the agency of the same McSwiney, the duke had contracted for a series of very large canvases by Venetian and Bolognese artists dedicated to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which had brought William and Mary to the English throne. Each painting was to show an allegorical tomb commemorating a revolutionary hero. The subject matter, strange as it may have seemed to the Italian artists who received the commissions, was meaningful to the duke, whose father, born illegitimately to Charles II and Louise de Keroualle, was a cousin of queens Mary and Anne. Of the ten paintings the duke ultimately bought to decorate the dining room of his country house, Goodwood, one—dispatched from Venice on February 25, 1727—was by Giovanni Battista Pittoni and Canaletto, assisted by Giovanni Battista Cimaroli.4

On November 28, 1727, McSwiney first referred to selling the duke two of Canaletto’s views: “I send yr Grace by Captain Robinson... who sails from here tomorrow. Two of the finest pieces, I think he ever painted... done upon copper plates: They cost me two and twenty sequens each. They’ll be delivered to your Grace... as soon as they arrive in London.”5 The allegorical-tomb paintings were eventually sold off, but two copperplates—either the pair described above or slightly later ones—are still at Goodwood.6 Notable for their blond tonality and for the delicacy and finesse of their handling, the Goodwood copperplates represent the Grand Canal looking north from the Rialto Bridge and the opposite view, that looking toward the bridge from the north.

Twenty years later, in the summer of 1747, the duke of Richmond took up Hill’s proposal that Canaletto should paint the Thames from Richmond House.7 There were to be two pictures rather than the single one originally envisaged: Whitehall and the Privy Garden (Figure 1) and The Thames and the City of London (Figure 2). These large, topographically accurate canvases vividly evoke mid-eighteenth-century life in Whitehall, of which little but the Banqueting Hall now remains. Hill had proposed that Canaletto “draw a view of the river from [the duke’s] dining-room,” and in fact, of the few drawings surviving from Canaletto’s English period, two relate to the painted views and were taken from windows of the house. The first, in pen and brown ink with gray wash, includes all the streets, lawns, and buildings represented in the two paintings and rather more, from the houses to the west along King Street to a broad expanse of Richmond House terrace.8 While Canaletto imagines a bird’s-eye view, the drawing can only have been

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Figure 1. Canaletto, London: Whitehall and the Privy Garden from Richmond House, 1747. Oil on canvas, 42 x 46 in. (106.7 x 116.8 cm). By courtesy of the Trustees of the Goodwood Collection (photo: A. C. Cooper, London)

Figure 2. Canaletto, London: The Thames and the City of London from Richmond House, 1747. Oil on canvas, 42 x 46 in. (106.7 x 116.8 cm). By courtesy of the Trustees of the Goodwood Collection (photo: A. C. Cooper, London)
made looking north from a second-story window of the main part of the house. The stable block and court anchor the design in the foreground. Abutting the line between the duke's property and that of his neighbor (where Hill and McSwiney had dined), the blank south wall of Montagu House offers nothing of topographical interest and interrupts the panorama. Perhaps for this reason Canaletto was inspired to paint two canvases. The view of Whitehall was adjusted toward the left, while that of the Thames was adjusted toward the right: the former is less, the latter more comprehensive than in the drawing, and a slice in the middle was omitted from both. The lack of centrality in the pictures contributes to their immediacy of effect.

Perhaps seeking to further modify the scheme for the Thames painting, Canaletto made a smaller panoramic drawing (Figure 3), again in pen and brown ink with gray wash, from upstairs in the northeast corner of the main block of the house. While omitting Montagu House altogether, the drawing shows the corner of its raised terrace and the walled passage to the water stair shared by the two properties. The composition is closed off at the right by the north facade of a projecting wing of Richmond House. The sheet is conceived in broad horizontals: the narrowest band is reserved for the lawn; the middle one for the river, with the silhouettes of buildings in the city and on the south bank; and the widest for the cloudless sky. The drawing includes the projecting terrace at the center of the river frontage, which appears also in the corresponding painting.

Canaletto's Whitehall and Thames canvases are modern in feeling partly because the angles of view are precipitous. It is worth noting why this is so: once Canaletto omitted the south wall of Montagu House, Richmond House afforded him no other broad outlooks. To the west, the house abutted Loudon House, while to the south, both stood close to a public right-of-way, at what must have been the perimeter of the royal property at Whitehall. The land, once an orchard, briefly a bowling green, had been part of an extension of the Privy Garden of the old Tudor palace. Excepting Inigo Jones's Banqueting Hall, completed in 1622, Whitehall had largely burnt in the fire of 1698, with some property later let out for private redevelopment. The prospect to the north and west was therefore open, while toward Westminster Bridge lay warehouses, some of them quite tall, and tenements.

Constable and Links identify the drawing that is the subject of this note as London: Westminster Bridge, the Western Arch with Adjacent Buildings and follow F.J.B. Watson in suggesting that "the terrace corresponds in position to that of Old Montagu House" (Figure 4). They continue: "Canaletto has departed a long way from the facts..." The façade of Montagu House has been divided into two buildings, one of them...
Figure 4. Canaletto, London: Westminster Bridge, the Western Arch, from Richmond House Terrace, ca. 1747. Pen and brown ink over graphite, 7 3/8 x 12 7/8 in. (20 x 32.4 cm). Private collection, Switzerland (photo: courtesy of the owner)

Figure 5. Canaletto, verso of the drawing in Figure 4
being given a bow window, the other a pediment; while sixteenth-century buildings at the end of the terrace have been replaced by others of more formal character. The drawing's title is accurate—the westernmost arch of the bridge is identified in Canaletto's characteristic hand as pon. nouo / londra—but the description is not, and there is little of the capriccio in it. The medium is pen and brown ink over graphite, with notes on colors and materials sprinkled about, and the sheet is a spread of the sort Canaletto used for making sketches at the site. That it comes from a sketchbook there can be no doubt, as the artist held the book facing toward him with the spine at the back and drew on the reverse of each page (Figure 5). The faintest of the drawings, little more than some squiggles, may show a figure leaning on a balustrade. Facing in the opposite direction are four motifs: a railing and abutment; a skiff with a mast and sail and a single passenger, rowed by an oarsman; a sailing skiff with a passenger and a boatman hauling on a line (drawn over in the same brown ink); and a railing over which leans a figure in a long coat. The mast, sail, and lines of the inked sketch are rather similar to the same features on the recto. A boatman, again with a single passenger, sails another similar skiff in the right foreground of The Thames and the City of London (Figure 2).

When in 1958 John Hayes dated the duke of Richmond's views to the summer of 1747 on topographical and stylistic grounds, he reproduced a detail from a plan of 1761 showing Parliament Street and the land lying between it and the Thames (Figure 6). The layout of the duke of Richmond's house, to which Hayes did not draw attention, can nevertheless be plainly read. Francis Watson was the first to publish the drawing in Figure 4. Writing eight years after Hayes on a related subject, he was surely familiar with Hayes's article but failed to connect the drawing with the 1761 plan, which shows Richmond House to have been a building with two projecting wings. If the appearance of Richmond House is little known, that of Montagu House is by contrast well documented. Seen from the Thames, its centralized, pedimented Palladian main block standing upon a high terrace, Montagu House dominates the river frontage in several works by Samuel Scott, one of which, dated 1749, could have been painted as a competitive response to Canaletto's canvases. The plans of both houses are detailed in a map of London begun by John Rocque in 1737 and published for him by Pine and Tinney in October 1746 (Figure 7). Rocque's map, which agrees with the evidence provided by Canaletto's paintings, shows that Loudon and Richmond Houses backed up to Tod's Wharf, near a thoroughfare providing access to the Thames from Parliament Street. The map also indicates that an abutment extending farther out into the river just south of Richmond House Terrace would have obstructed the view of the bridge abutment beyond.

Canaletto made his drawing (Figure 4) from the middle of the terrace, fenced with an iron railing, that

Figure 6. Detail from a plan showing alterations made to Parliament Street, published 1761. The British Museum, London (photo: after John Hayes, "Parliament Street and Canaletto's Views of Whitehall," The Burlington Magazine 100 [1958], fig. 16)
overlooked the river. Facing south, he shows the wings of Richmond House to his right. They do not match: one has a Dutch roof, the other a peaked roof; one has a projecting bow and a horizontal course between the first and second stories, while the other does not. The chimney, for which there wasn’t room, is sketched below, on the near side wall of the house. The wings are the width of a single room and each has a door to the terrace on the ground floor. High-backed chairs stand before a high, blank wall at the sheltered end of the terrace in the shade. There are no trees (which would have blocked the view) but many plants in large pots. The topography agrees with Rocque’s plan. The last bay of Westminster Bridge, with its low arch, Portland and Purbeck stonework, solid balustrade, niche, and lantern is substantially correct, though the roadway and the balustrade slant downward more than was in fact the case. The sculpture of a standing figure facing the shore was Canaletto’s invention, however.

While the statue never existed, Canaletto’s idea was not entirely without precedent, nor was the presence of statuary on the bridge unique to this drawing. In a painting of Westminster Bridge on Lord Mayor’s Day (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven) he included, at the center of the bridge, statues of the river gods Thames and Isis, which, while intended in the plans for the bridge, were never executed.14 That painting may be dated to 1746–47. The abutments and landing stages of Westminster Bridge were finished late in 1746, while the last of the original centers (which supported the arches during construction) was struck in April 1747.15 The duke of Richmond was one of the original commissioners of the bridge, in which it may be supposed that he took an ongoing interest. The artist could have observed the bridge more closely only from the water; from the duke’s terrace he could have sketched in comfort. It seems reasonable to propose that this sheet dates from the summer of 1747, as the handling and labeling are similar to those of drawings made earlier in Italy, while the bridge was thought to be finished, and the duke’s paintings were undertaken if not completed in the course of that season.

Figure 7. Detail from John Rocque’s map of London, published 1746. The British Museum, London (photo: after W. Crawford Snowden, London 200 Years Ago [1948], p. 27)

Figure 8. Canaletto, London: Westminster Bridge with a Procession of Civic Barges. Pen and black/grayish black ink, brush and gray wash, over graphite (freehand and ruled) and pin-pointing, 10 1/2 x 19 3/4 in. (27.4 x 48.6 cm). The Royal Collection © 2000, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (photo: The Royal Collection)
Figure 9. Canaletto, *Capriccio: With Reminiscences of Westminster Bridge and Richmond House*. Pen and brown ink, brush and gray and light brown wash, over graphite (ruled), 9½ x 14 ¼ in. (23.8 x 37.9 cm). Städelisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt (photo: Städelisches Kunstinstitut)

Figure 10. Canaletto, *Capriccio: With Reminiscences of Westminster Bridge and Richmond House*. Pen and brown ink over graphite (ruled), 8 ¾ x 14 ¾ in. (22.6 x 37.4 cm). © Copyright The British Museum, London (photo: The British Museum)

Figure 11. Canaletto, *Capriccio: With Reminiscences of Richmond House*. Pen and brown ink, gray wash, over graphite (ruled), 9¾ x 15 in. (23.8 x 38.1 cm). The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: V&A Picture Library)
Canaletto spent many more years in England, but the duke of Richmond died in 1750, and there is no evidence of contact between them after 1747.

Other topographical details in the drawing that can be neither confirmed nor denied with certainty include the abutment, the two-story board house which seems to have a Venetian terrace, or altana, on its flat roof, and the warehouse buildings beyond and to the right. A drawing traditionally dated to about 1747 and entitled *London: Westminster Bridge with a Procession of Civic Barges* (The Royal Collection) provides a little additional information (Figure 8). The view is from the Surrey side of the Thames, and the buildings are much simplified but do seem to include, from the extreme right, the facade of Richmond House with its iron railing, a square board building with a pitched roof, a stand of trees in leaf, and various higher structures. The altana remains in doubt. By comparison with the drawing in the Royal Collection, the water level in the drawing illustrated in Figure 4 was perhaps shown higher than it actually was to bring the boat in the foreground into view.

The drawing relates to three others, all classified by Constable and Links as capriccios with reminiscences of Westminster Bridge and Old Montagu House (Figures 9–11). All in fact show Richmond House. Each departs further from the facts in the interest of a more pleasing, less chaotic, and increasingly Italianate effect. In terms of the development of the thematic material, the closest to Figure 4 is the drawing belonging to the Städelisches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt, a finished sheet in brown ink with gray and brown washes over graphite, which is signed by the artist on the reverse *Io Zuane Antonio da Canal, detto il Canaleto, feci il detto Disegnio* (Figure 9). Next in the sequence is the less accomplished British Museum view, emphatically drawn in brown ink over graphite (Figure 10). In both, the arches of the bridge have been raised to a structurally unsustainable height, and the balustrade has been replaced by a flimsy railing. Paving has been introduced in the foreground; the truncated railing finishes with a high pedestal, square in plan, to support the statue, which faces in the opposite direction; and in place of the blank wall at the end of the terrace a Palladian portico has been introduced. In each, the bridge abutments have been tidied up—but in slightly different ways—and provided with an additional railing. In the British Museum drawing, a building with a chimney in the near distance and a door under the portico have been added as well. The Victoria and Albert’s drawing, which is the largest and most ambitious in the sense of open space, water, and sky that the artist conveys, is in brown ink with gray wash (Figure 11). Canaletto transports Richmond House to the lagoon. He includes the door under the portico but omits the bridge, the abutment, and most of the buildings in the background. He truncates the largest building and, as André Corboz points out, introduces a window at the corner of the uppermost story, in the Venetian fashion. Corboz observes that Canaletto may have been inspired to draw these motifs because they reminded him of the view of the Fonteghetto della Farina from the Molo, and there are indeed drawings of the Fonteghetto that are similarly structured.

The drawing Canaletto probably made standing on the terrace at Richmond House in the summer of 1747 is of the sort he usually retained as a source for future work. Insofar as is known, this drawing never inspired a painting but was certainly the basis for the capriccios, which have been dated to after his return to Venice in 1755. However, few of Canaletto’s imaginary views, whether painted or drawn, contain English motifs. And among those that do are three paintings from a set of six, known as the Lovelace capriccios, one of which is signed and dated 1754. The set was sold in 1937 by the fourth earl of Lovelace, whose ancestor, the third lord King, is said to have commissioned them, and there is reason to believe that until that date they had always been in England. The present group of drawings provides further evidence of Canaletto’s association with one of his most important patrons, the duke of Richmond, and the capriccios may perhaps also be assigned to Canaletto’s English years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The thought that is the kernel of this note occurred to me while I was working with the late J. G. Links on the catalogue of the “Canaletto” exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum in 1989–90. Since then the drawing has changed hands. I am grateful to the current owner for photographs (I had not previously seen the photograph of the reverse) and for his permission to publish the sheet.
NOTES

1. Giovanni Antonio Canal was born in Venice in 1697 and died there in 1768. How he came to use the diminutive Canaletto is not recorded. He lived in England from May 1746 until at least 1755, returning to Venice once—for eight months ending not later than 1751—and possibly twice. W. G. Constable, *Canaletto*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. rev. and with suppl. by J. G. Links (Oxford, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 1, 8–9, 32–33, 37–39, 44. According to R.J.B. Walker, *Old Westminster Bridge: The Bridge of Fools* (North Pomfret, Vt., 1989), p. 166, "the last stone of the bridge, except for balustrade and pavement," was laid on October 25, 1746. Theoretically, the bridge had been passable since July 20, 1746; in fact, because two of the arches subsequently subsided, it was not opened to the public until November 1750.


3. Ibid., p. 33.


6. For the Goodwood copperplates, see Baetjer and Links, *Canaletto*, pp. 104–8, cat. nos. 14, 15, colorpls. 14, 15.


9. Ibid., p. 70, cat. no. 11, ill., Birmingham, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, inv. no. 1994 P28. The drawing was acquired for the museum in the year following the exhibition. See also Constable and Links, *Canaletto*, vol. 1, pl. 138, fig. 744, vol. 2, p. 575, cat. no. 744, and p. 744, cat. no. 744, where it is noted that the drawing is inscribed in black chalk on the verso, possibly by Canaletto: "Vista del Tamigi / dal Duca de Richmond, a Londra."

10. Constable and Links, *Canaletto*, vol. 1, pl. 142, fig. 753, vol. 2, p. 581, cat. no. 753, transcribe the inscriptions in full. The drawing was first published by F.J.B. Watson, "Some Unpublished Canaletto Drawings of London," *The Burlington Magazine* 92 (1950), pp. 316–19, fig. 13, opp. p. 315, as Veduta ideata based on the Riverside Terrace of Montagu House. Watson observes that the "Veduta di Tamigi da Duca de Richmond, a Londra." Although the drawing was made at the end of a sketchbook, it was not annotated, "possibly by Canaletto: "Vista del Tamigi / dal Duca de Richmond, a Londra.""

11. A single sketchbook (Accademia, Venice) by Canaletto survives intact. It measures 9½ x 6½ in. (23.5 x 17.5 cm). See Giovanni Nepi Scirè, *Canaletto’s Sketchbook*, 2 vols. (Venice, 1997), of which one volume is a facsimile reproduction. Most often dated to the 1730s, the sketchbook was certainly completed before Canaletto left Venice in 1746. For the most part the drawings are in graphite or in graphite retracted in pen and brown ink. They are annotated by Canaletto with names and locations as well as with letters and other abbreviations, words, and phrases denoting colors and materials. The artist marked sketches made in situ, but not finished or imaginary drawings, in this way.

12. Richard Kingzett, "A Catalogue of the Works of Samuel Scott," *Walpole Society* 48 (1982), pp. 52–54 and pl. 18, fig. 18a, catalogues four versions by Scott of *A View of the Thames with Montagu House*. Kingzett suggests that version a, which is signed and dated S. Scott 1749, and version b, which he reproduces, were probably both painted for the duke of Montagu. Kingzett’s version c is reproduced by Liversidge and Farrington, *Canaletto & England*, p. 121. At the end of Richmond House Terrace Scott’s pictures show an imaginary brick wall in a rather poor state of repair, much truncated and without a railing. In version c, in place of the bench, he introduces a mother with a baby, two workmen, one of them wheeling a barrow, and a pile of rubble.


17. Constable and Links, *Canaletto*, vol. 2, pp. 594–95, cat. nos. 786 and 786 (a–c). This note omits from the discussion no. 786 (b), which has the same design as the Victoria and Albert Museum sheet, with, according to the authors, "some minor differences in detail." For a reproduction, see George A. Simonson, "Skizzen und Zeichnungen des Francesco Guardi," *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, N.F., 18 (1907), fig. 6.


22. Corboz, Canaletto, vol. 1, p. 352. For illustrations of drawings of the Fonteghetto from the Molo, see Baetjer and Links, Canaletto, pp. 302, 303, colorpls. 97, 98.

23. For example, see Corboz, Canaletto, vol. 2, p. 756, who dates the two capriccios that he illustrates to the years 1756–68. The author of the entry in Das Capriccio, p. 321, follows his example.

24. For the Lovelace capriccios, see Baetjer and Links, Canaletto, pp. 256–67, cat. nos. 75–80, colorpls. 75–80.