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Willem van de Velde the Elder
(Leiden 1610/11 – 1693 London)

*The departure of the Dutch fleet
from the Vlie Roadstead, 9 June 1645*

signed lower right on a piece of driftwood:
W V Velde

a *penschilderij* (pen painting): pen and ink
on oak panel prepared with a gesso ground,
in the original early 17th century Dutch ripple
profile frame with tropical hardwood veneer
85 x 114.5 cm.;
33 1/2 x 45 1/8 in.

Provenance

Charles Mannheim, Paris;

By descent within the Mannheim collection, until 1913;

Sale ('Property from the heirs of Charles Mannheim'), Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 14
March 1913, lot 22, to M. Ducrey for 3,000 Francs;

Comte Pierre de Chavagnac (1883 - 1957), 9 Rue Jean Mermoz, Paris;

By whom sold, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 15 March 1944, lot 14, to Jacques Normand Augustin for
215,000 Francs;

Anonymous sale ('Collection de Monsieur X'), Paris, Palais Galliera, 30 March 1963, lot 12
(as a 'Presumed view of Admiral Tromp's Fleet, at Katwyk'), for 32,100 Francs, where
acquired by

Private collection, France, and by decent within the family, from whom acquired by

Private collection, The Netherlands.

Literature

M. Robinson, *The paintings of the Willem van de Veldes: a catalogue of the paintings of the
Elder and the Younger Willem van de Velde*, 2 vols., Greenwich 1990, vol. I, p. 49-50, cat.
no. 290;

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J. van der Vliet, *Willem van de Velde & Son*, exh. cat., Bussum 2021, pp. 14-15, cat. no. 7, p. 70, reproduced.

Exhibited

Amsterdam, Het Scheepvaartmuseum, *Willem van de Velde & Son*, 1 October 2021 – 27 March 2022, no. 7.

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This pen painting by the master of this technique, Willem van de Velde the Elder (fig. 1), is a special work of art. Not only is this virtuoso draftsmanship, but it also offers an attractive picture of the maritime business of his time, in a beautifully balanced composition. Large-format pen-and-ink drawings (*penschilderijen* in Dutch) with maritime subjects, framed as a painting, formed a new element in the range of products seventeenth century artists could offer their clientele. The departure of the warship *Brederode* from the Vlie Roadstead is a fascinating story, full of vivid details. The artist was there himself, which makes this painting even more important as a key to Van de Velde's further career. But it is especially the many details that make this pen painting a feast for the eyes. The number of pen paintings by Willem van de Velde the Elder is not very large; there are estimated to be less than one hundred.¹ Today, most are in museums. This panel is one of the few important works that remains in private hands.

The picture

The main motif of this work is the departure of a squadron of warships of the Dutch Republic from the most northerly entrance to the North Sea, the Vlie, between the islands of Vlieland and Terschelling (fig. 2). Even the date of the event can be precisely determined: 9 June 1645. Van de Velde saw what happened with his own eyes from the eastern point of Vlieland, recognisable by the wooden beacon on the beach, on the left. On the far right, Terschelling is just visible, with its characteristic lighthouse the *Brandaris* (fig. 3), still a landmark in this area. The *Brederode*, the brand-new flagship of Vice-admiral Witte de With (fig. 4), fills almost the entire right-hand side of the panel.

De With had orders to escort some 800 merchantmen with 45 armed ships to the Sound, in order to enforce a better toll treaty with the Danish king. The Sound, the entrance to the Baltic Sea, was of vital importance to the Dutch economy, as Dutch merchant ships imported large quantities of grain, wood, iron and other bulk goods from the Baltic region. The *Brederode*, launched in Rotterdam in 1644, was considered a large and modern warship in its time. It had a length of 132 feet, about 42 metres, and was armed with 51 cannons. The crew varied in size. In 1652 there were 260 men on board.² On the stern of

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the ship is the coat of arms of Stadholder Frederik Hendrik of Orange, flanked by two lions. A large Dutch flag flies from the main mast, signalling that this is the squadron commander's ship. The dark flag at the ensign staff is possibly a blue flag, a signal to the other ships to weigh anchor. The expedition to the Sound was the *Brederode's* first major action. It is ironic that in 1658 the ship was sunk in the same strait in a battle with the Swedish fleet. Witte de With was also killed in the fighting.

To the left of the *Brederode* lie four other warships, one of which bears the coat of arms of Amsterdam on its stern, with the three St. Andrew's crosses.³ No ship called *Amsterdam* or *Wapen van Amsterdam* (Arms of Amsterdam) was found in the fleet lists of this expedition. It is possible that this was one of the ships that the Admiralty of Amsterdam had made available for this convoy. In the distance, Van de Velde has briefly indicated the vessels around which this whole operation centered: the merchantmen who had to pay the toll to the Danish king. Those ships, waiting to depart, have the typical bulbous hull that characterises the most common type of Dutch cargo ship, the flute.

The *Brederode*, like the warships in the distance, is almost ready to sail. Van de Velde had the happy thought of depicting precisely the final preparations for departure. A trumpeter gives the signal for departure and in various boats men are brought on board, sometimes accompanied by women, who have apparently postponed saying goodbye until the very last moment. In a sketch that Van de Velde made in preparation for his series of pen paintings of this event, he has noted next to a rowing boat: 'De With's wife brought on shore'. That rowing boat is not to be found in this pen painting, so it seems that Mrs de With has yet to alight, and this picture perhaps records a slightly earlier moment in the preparations for departure.⁴ The crowd is busiest around the three single-masted vessels in the left in the foreground, next to the trap on a pole that serves as a beacon. The vessel in the foreground is a galliot; Van de Velde the Elder would later regularly sail this type of ship with the war fleet during the Anglo-Dutch wars, but this was not yet the case with regards to the voyage that is about to commence here.⁵

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Van de Velde on Vlieland

In the hustle and bustle on the beach, several things stand out. There are a few tents, of which the foremost served as a temporary inn, with a wreath and a double Dutch flag as a sign. The two other tents seem to have served as a shelter for soldiers. And then there are the occasional curious people with dogs and horses who have run out to see and discuss the excitement.

Willem van de Velde the Elder depicted the roadstead of Vlieland many times in pen paintings, as his son did later in oil paint. This was of course an obvious location for a maritime artist, but there were also personal reasons. Willem van de Velde had an older sister, Maertgen, who had married Jacob Agges, Commissioner of the Admiralty of Amsterdam on Vlieland. This official position supervised the shipping traffic that arrived and departed here. The family relationship with Agges was of great importance to Willem van de Velde the Elder. During visits to his sister in the village of Oost-Vlieland, he could easily make contact with potential customers – admirals and other high-ranking naval officers – for his pen paintings. On the beach, a group of five people is depicted in the foreground: three gentlemen in distinguished costumes, a lady and a girl. Perhaps Van de Velde depicted himself, his sister and his brother-in-law, talking to a gentleman with a feathered hat. Could that be Vice-admiral Witte de With, pointing with his stick to his own ship? Van de Velde's niece Eva Agges in 1645 was almost 9 years old, and could have been the model for the girl on the right.

Van de Velde made at least five pen paintings of the departure of the fleet from the Vlie Roadstead.⁶ One archival source suggests that they are all to be dated shortly after the event in 1645. According to an Amsterdam notary's deed of May 1648 Van de Velde had a conflict with a certain Jacques Marijn, who denied that he had commissioned Van de Velde to make pen paintings for him with the same scenes as two works that had earlier 'gone to Genoa'. One of these works is described in the deposition as 'het uijtseijlen van Vlieland' (Sailing from Vlieland).⁷ This tells us that Van de Velde had already made at least one and possibly two pen paintings of the fleet off Vlieland, one that was sold to Genoa and the other that was the subject of the argument with Marijn. Unfortunately, nothing further has been

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found about these pen paintings. One of them could be the painting discussed here, but also could be one of the other four; for example, the painting in Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden (fig. 5), or the one in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich (fig. 6).

All these pen paintings show the events more or less from the same spot on the beach at the eastern tip of Vlieland, but the details throughout the foreground and gathered vessels vary significantly (as is to be expected of a master with an original and capricious eye for the minutiae). The pen painting under discussion here is the largest of all five versions. At 85 x 113 cm. it is slightly larger than the panel in Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden and much larger than the other pieces, which vary in width from 32 to 64 cm. Moreover, compared to the others, it is richer in detail. The beach, for instance, with the inn and the tents with soldiers is broader and more elaborately drawn than in the Lakenhal painting or the version in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. The aforementioned company in the foreground is also absent from those other paintings.

Van de Velde worked with the aid of drawings, which he had executed on the spot with the express purpose to be worked from later in his studio. His drawings of this event early in the summer of 1645 have not survived, except for one, the aforementioned sketch with the note about De With's wife. It is an elongated sketch of the same location on two sheets pasted together, measuring 17 x 81.4 cm. (fig. 7). Some details recur in the pen painting discussed here, such as the pole with the fish trap in the foreground, the dunes on the left and the high palisade that served as a beacon at the foot of the dune. This drawing is not dated and could also have been made a year earlier, when another fleet under Witte de With had also departed from Vlieland. Van de Velde undoubtedly made many more drawings of this event, but they do not seem to have survived.

Penschilderijen

Van de Velde the Elder was not the first to make pen paintings like this. Hendrick Goltzius, for example, is known to have made several pen paintings (fig. 8), and contemporaries of Van de Velde, such as Heerman Witmont and Experiens Sillemans, also used this technique, like him, exclusively for maritime subjects.⁸ But none of these

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colleagues developed the pen-painting to such a high level as Van de Velde. In his case, the *penschilderij* was a logical continuation of his refined drawing technique on parchment. That material already offered the possibility of making drawings that could be hung on the wall for a long time. But parchment had its limitations, particularly in terms of size. Therefore, around 1640 Van de Velde switched to working on prepared panels and later, in order to achieve even larger formats, to pen paintings on canvas. From around 1655, Van de Velde the Elder worked predominantly on canvas, but occasionally he returned to panel, possibly because a client specifically requested that support. His largest pen painting is a canvas from around 1665, of the naval battle in the Sound (1658), 143.5 x 295.5 cm.⁹

Van de Velde worked on a surface with a preparatory layer coloured to resemble vellum. This was done by applying a ground consisting of an initial brown layer topped with two white ones that were a mixture of lead white and chalk. It was a ground that took a long time to dry. In 1672 Pieter Blaeu, son of the famous cartographer Joan Blaeu, noted that Van de Velde told him that 'it takes two or three months to prepare, that is to say apply the underlying colour, otherwise the ground isn't hard enough to take a drawing done with a sharp pen'. The scene was then applied with the brush and pen in a special ink over a graphite underdrawing. The ink was made of animal glue and lampblack. Van de Velde used the brush to paint the clouds and shadows and followed this up by filling in the details with the pen. He probably used a reed pen and not a quill, as was previously thought. Finally, a layer of varnish was applied to preserve the drawing so that it could be cleaned with a sponge if necessary. A few years after Van de Velde witnessed the departure of the fleet from the Vlie, another acquaintance of Van de Velde, Michel le Blon, used this eminently practical detail as a recommendation for possible buyers: *His [Van de Velde's] work or drawings put pieces on copper to shame as regards curiousness and perfection, on white canvases or panels that are prepared in such a way that one can hang them up in rain and in wind and wash them off with a sponge, just as one can with oil paintings.*¹⁰

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Panel and frame

The panel is well preserved, although some retouching has been done along the horizontal panel joins. What distinguishes this pen painting from most others is the extent to which the original depiction has been preserved, not only the ships and the activities on the beach, but also the sky. In other pen paintings, careless cleaning has often caused the thin original drawing of the clouds to largely disappear. This is not the case here. Also of great importance is the fact that the painting is still in a seventeenth-century frame, in all likelihood the frame it received after the panel was completed in or shortly after 1645 (fig. 9). That too is rare in work by Van de Velde the Elder. This frame is made of various types of wood, covered with a layer of veneer from dark tropical hard wood, not dark enough to be ebony, but probably rosewood.¹¹ The latter suggests that this was an expensive frame, fitting for a work of art that must not have been cheap either. Nothing is known about the prices paid for Van de Velde's pen paintings in this period, but there is information about prices in later years. In 1672, for example, he received five hundred guilders for a pen painting that was about one and a half times as large.¹² For a painting of this size, the price would have been about 350 guilders in the 1670s. But undoubtedly Van de Velde's prices in 1645 were much lower than in 1672, by which time he had become famous beyond the national borders.

Conclusion

Of the five pen paintings that Willem van de Velde the Elder made of the fleet on the Vlieland Roadstead in 1645, this is the largest and most detailed. In this *penschilderij*, he shows all his talents as an artist. The composition is refined, the execution virtuoso. And he is also a gifted storyteller, both of a major event - the departure of a squadron of warships for an action in the national interest - and of small anecdotes, told with humour. Sailors are busy making everything ready for departure, curious inhabitants of Vlieland are talking to each other and having another drink, their dogs and children are frolicking in between. This is a painting for which every captain or admiral in the seventeenth century was prepared to pay a considerable sum of money.

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Appendix: The Willem van de Veldes

Two artists, father and son, both called Willem van de Velde, dominated the field of Dutch marine painting during a long period of the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth century. Willem van de Velde the Elder (Leiden 1610 – London 1693) and his son Willem van de Velde the Younger (Leiden 1633 – London 1707) were famous for their drawings and oil paintings of ships, coastal scenes and navy activities at sea.

The Van de Veldes came from a family of inland bargemen in Leiden, Holland. One year after the son's birth, in 1634, they moved to Amsterdam, in those days the most important port of Europe and a centre of the arts, including maritime print making and painting. Van de Velde the Elder, a talented self-taught draughtsman, created a niche for himself by making so-called pen paintings, time consuming works, mainly sold to a wealthy clientele. Around the middle of the 1650s father and son worked together in their studio in Amsterdam, producing pen paintings and oil paintings. Willem van de Velde the Elder also regularly sailed with the war fleet in a small ship, a galliot, to sketch battles and manoeuvres. The drawings made at sea by the Elder, served as documentation for both artists. In 1672, in the middle of the Third Anglo-Dutch War, the Van de Veldes settled in England, on the invitation of King Charles II. The King granted them a royal pension and assigned them the Queen's House in Greenwich as a studio, in particular for making designs for tapestries. In England the careers of the Van de Veldes took slightly different directions. The Elder devoted most of his time to the marketing of their firm, whereas the son was in charge of the studio. Both father and son are buried at St James's Church, Piccadilly, where today one may find a plaque honouring their artistic achievements that was erected in the entrance to the church in 1929 by The Society for Nautical Research (fig. 10).

Amsterdam, 17 June 2022

Dr. Remmelt Daalder

Maritime Art & History

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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Figure 1. G. Sibelius, after Sir Godfrey Kneller, Bt. (1646 – 1723),
Portrait of Willem van de Velde I,
line engraving, late 18th century, 241 x 197 mm.
National Portrait Gallery, London

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Figure 2. Sea chart with the Vlie between Vlieland and Terschelling, c. 1700. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (The arrow indicates Van de Velde's direction of view)



Figure 3. The Brandaris Lighthouse on Terschelling

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Figure 4. Jan Daemen Cool,
Portrait of Vice-Admiral Witte Cornelisz. de With (1599–1658),
oil on canvas, 108.1 x 81.7 cm.
Maritime Museum, Rotterdam

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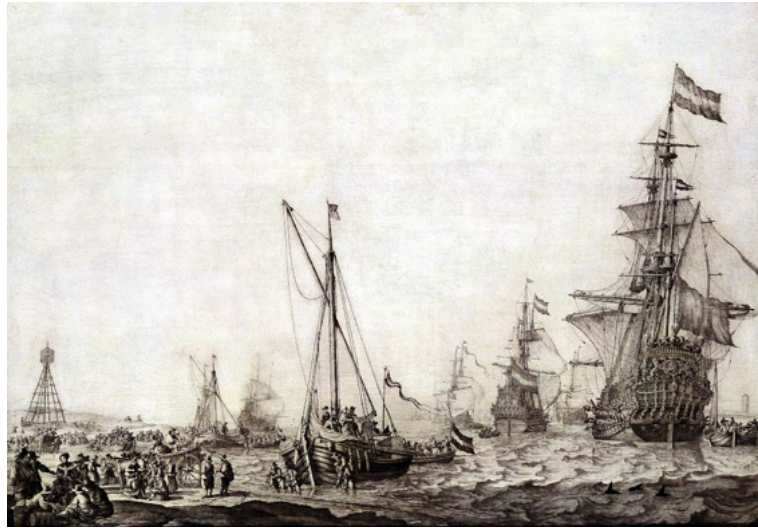


Figure 5. Willem van de Velde I, *Departure of the Dutch fleet from the Vlieree on the 9th of June 1645*, pen painting on panel, 74.3 x 105.4 cm.
Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden

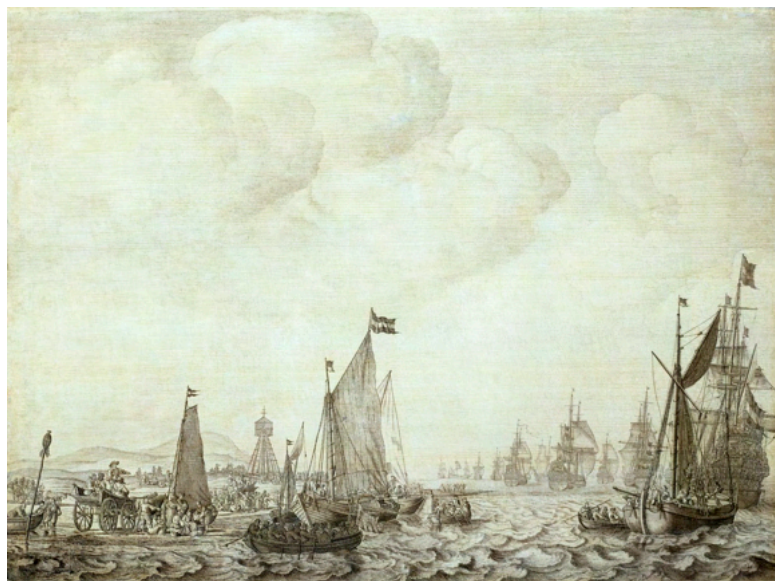


Figure 6. Willem van de Velde I, *A Kaag and a Galjoot Close to the Shore with Witte de With's 'Brederode' Leaving the Vlie, 9 June 1645*, pen painting on panel, 46.9 x 64.7 cm.
Royal Museums, Greenwich

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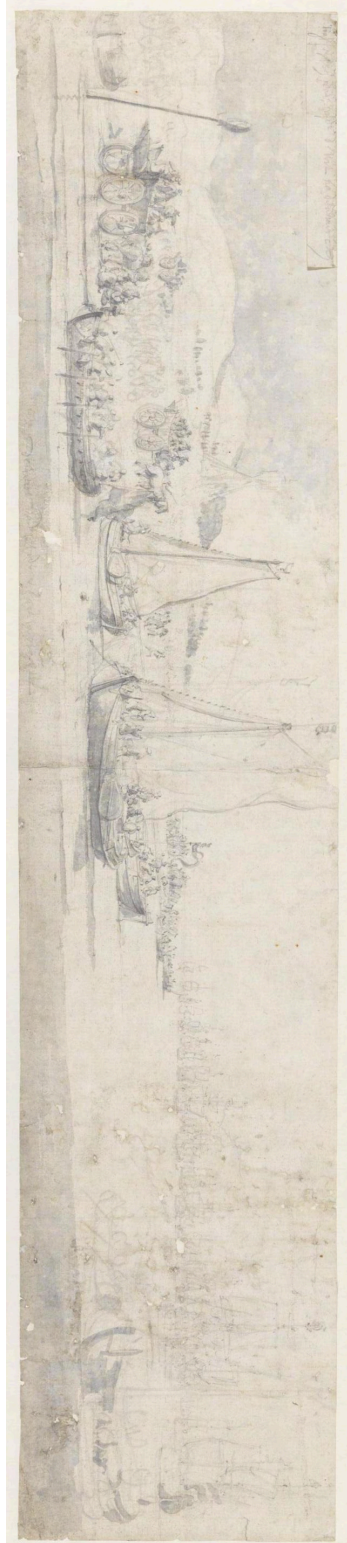


Figure 7. Willem van de Velde, *The Departure of the Dutch Convoy Fleet under Vice-Admiral Witte de With for Denmark*, pencil, brush and black ink, grey wash, 170 x 814 mm. Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

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Figure 8. Hendrick Goltzius, *Sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus*, c. 1600 – 1603,
ink and oil on canvas, 105.1 × 80 cm.

Philadelphia Museum of Art

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Figure 9. The present work in its original frame with a veneer of dark tropical hard wood, probably rosewood

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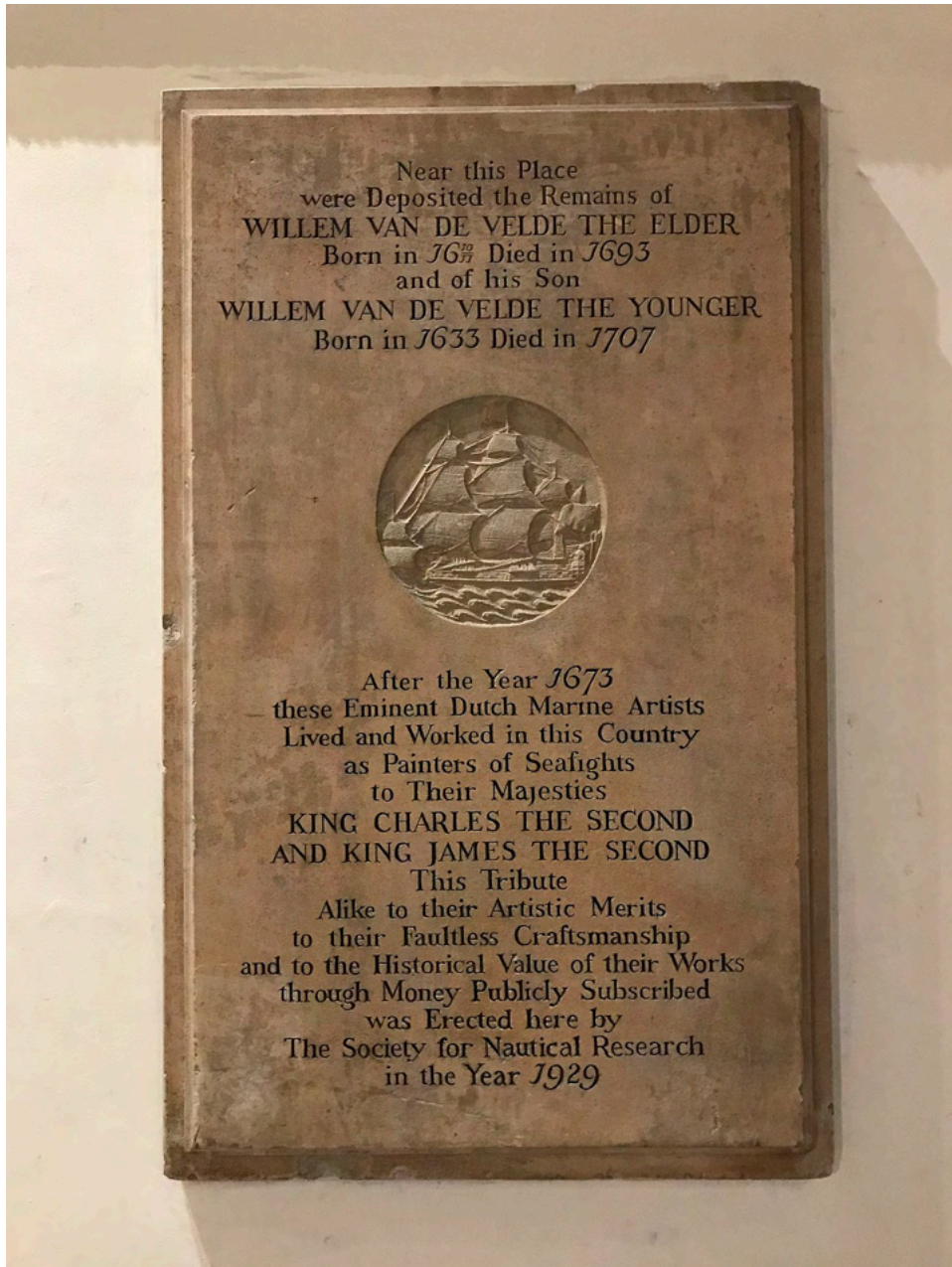


Figure 10. The plaque honouring the artistic achievements of the Van de Veldes at St. James's Church, Piccadilly, erected in 1929 by The Society for Nautical Research

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Footnotes

¹ R. Daalder, *Van de Velde & Son, Marine Painters*, Leiden 2020, p. 191.

² J. Bender, *Dutch Warships in the Age of Sail 1600–1714*, Barnsley 2014, pp. 49, 148–149.

³ Michael Robinson, who described the painting on the basis of a reproduction, thought he saw a ship here with the arms of Dordrecht. However, the city arms of Amsterdam with the three crosses are unmistakable, and there was no ship bearing the name Dordrecht present in the *Vlie* in 1645. See M.S. Robinson, *The Paintings of the Willem van de Velde*, Greenwich 1990, p. 49.

⁴ M.S. Robinson & R.E.J. Weber, *The Willem van de Velde drawings in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum Rotterdam*, Rotterdam 1979, vol. I, p. 19 and vol. II, pp. 6, 7, cat. no. 1866/T1.

⁵ The 'List of Pictures' of 1678, an inventory of drawings made by Van de Velde during his sea travels, does not mention a sea journey from Vlieland to the Sound in 1645. See Daalder 2020, pp. 81–82, 194–5.

⁶ Apart from the pen painting described here (Robinson 1990, vol. I, cat. no. 290, p. 49), these are the Robinson cat. nos. 288, p. 47 (Lakenhal Leiden), 291, p. 108 (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum), no. 817, p. 44 and no. 820, p. 110.

⁷ Daalder 2020, p. 115.

⁸ On pen paintings see: F. Lammertse, “... What one can do with a pen”. Pen paintings of maritime scenes’, in *Praise of ships and the sea. The Dutch Marine Painters of the 17th Century*, exh. cat., Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Rotterdam 1996, pp. 45–58.

⁹ Robinson 1990, cat. no. 328, p. 29–30.

¹⁰ Michel Le Blon to the Swedish General Wrangell in a letter dated 1652; Daalder 2020, p. 110.

¹¹ See the report on the restoration of the frame by Bart van der Spek, Santhill Frames, London 2021.

¹² This was a commission from Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici for a painting of a naval battle; Daalder 2020, pp. 119–126.