



WILLIAM POWELL FRITH, R.A. (1819-1909)

Claude Duval

Signed and dated 'W.P FRITH 1886'

Oil on canvas

20 ³/₄ x 28 ¹/₂ in. (52.7 x 72.5 cm.)

32 ¹/₈ x 40 ¹/₈ in. (81.5 x 102 cm.) (framed)

Provenance

John Hick JP DL (1815-1894) of Mytton Hall, Whalley, Lancashire;

Sold at Christie's, June 18, 1909, lot 44 for 105 guineas (£110 5s) to Messrs Gooden and Fox, 57 Pall Mall.

Literature (of this version)

'Mitton Hall (sic) Pictures, Mr John Hick's Collection Sold,' *Burnley Express*, 23 June 1909, p.5.

Aubrey Noakes, *William Frith Extraordinary Victorian Painter: A Biographical & Critical Essay*, London, 1978, caption text in between pages 56-7.



Claude Duval is an important painting within Frith's career and there are numerous studies for the composition, the background and individual figures. The prime version of the painting (Manchester Art Gallery) was conceived and painted between 1858-1860 and was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1860, where it was exhibited in the East Room as no.162. Frith recalled that 'the picture proceeded pretty satisfactorily, and was purchased during its progress by Mr. Flatow, the picture-dealer, at the agreeable price of seventeen hundred pounds, which sum also included the sketch and copyright.'¹ On January 3 1859 he signed a contract with Louis Victor Flatow for this picture (£850), a smaller version (£250), and a third from which the engraver would work, to be started by an assistant and finished by Frith (£250). Flatow also purchased the copyright in the composition for £300, and Frith undertook not to make any further copies, however after Flatow's death in 1867 he is known to have made two replicas: this version of 1886 and a smaller copy in 1903 (whereabouts unknown).

¹ William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences*, in two volumes, Bentley & Son: London 1887, volume 1, pp.306-7.

CLAUDE DUVAL

'I am doing the most successful picture of its class that I have ever done.'

Frith on *Claude Duval*²

Frith was always in search of historical subjects that gave him the opportunity of depicting the costume and social mores of another age. 'No doubt human nature is always the same,'³ he wrote of *Claude Duval*, 'but manners are forever changing.' The subject is Claude Duval, a 17th century highwayman who distinguished himself through his supposed fashionable attire and gentlemanly behaviour when holding up carriages. 'The story goes,' Frith recounts, 'that on a wild heath, a carriage in which the beautiful Lady Aurora Sydney was travelling was stopped by Duval's gang.'⁴ The source for the story he found in volume 1 of Thomas Babington Macaulay's *History of England from the Accession of James II* (1848): 'It was related how Claude Duval, the French page of the Duke of Richmond, took to the road, became captain of a formidable gang, and had the honour to be named first in a royal proclamation against notorious offenders; how at the head of his troop he stopped a lady's coach, in which there was a booty of four hundred pounds; how he took only one hundred, and suffered the fair owner to ransom the rest by dancing a Coranto with him on the heath; how his vivacious gallantry stole away the hearts of all women; how his dexterity at sword and pistol made him a terror to all men.'⁵ After a ten-year career as a highwayman, Duval was tried and hanged in 1670. The inscription on his gravestone at St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden, London summarises his legend:

*Here lies Du Vall: Reader, if Male thou art,
Look to thy purse; if Female, to thy heart.
Much havoc has he made of both; for all
Men he made stand, and women he made
fall.
The second Conqueror of the Norman race,
Knights to his arms did yield, and Ladies to
his face.
Old Tyburn's glory; England's illustrious
thief,
Du Vall, the Ladies' Joy; Du Vall, the Ladies'
grief.*

If the picturesque historical tableaux appealed to Frith, where 'the dresses of the period were very picturesque,'⁶ the drama and interactions of the characters were also an important factor for the artist. 'The dramatic character of the subject attracted me,' Frith wrote, 'I thought if I could succeed in retaining the beauty of the lady, combined with the terror that she would feel, I should perform a feat well worthy of achievement.'⁷

Frith began work on the painting in the summer of 1858 just following the enormous success of his second great modern-life panorama, *Derby Day* which was shown to great acclaim at the Royal Academy, a month or so earlier. He was on a shooting and hunting holiday in Weymouth and noted that 'in the absence of a modern-life inspiration, I proceeded with the preliminary drawings and the oil-

² Ibid, volume 1, p.317.

³ Ibid, volume 1, p.305.

⁴ Ibid, volume 1, p.304.

⁵ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James II*, London, 1848, volume I, chapter 3.

⁶ William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences*, in two volumes, Bentley & Son: London 1887, volume 1, p.304.

⁷ Ibid, p.304.

sketch for Claude Duval. The time unoccupied by shooting and hunting during my Weymouth holiday was devoted to a careful oil-study.⁸ In his diary he recorded the importance of what he painted and reflected that although the painting had greater artistic merit than his modern-life panorama, it would not receive the same acclaim: 'I am doing the most successful picture of its class that I have ever done —, he wrote, 'better in art than the 'Derby Day'; but it will not be so popular by a long way.'⁹

If the periods in between shooting gave him time to develop a new subject, the landscape of Dorset, provided the landscape background for the painting. 'I painted the "blasted heath",' he recalled, 'from a study made in Dorsetshire, where I also found the withered tree which plays a prominent part in the composition of the picture. I have elsewhere told the student to go to nature for every detail in his picture; I cannot repeat the advice too often, that no dependence should be placed on memory whilst a possibility exists of referring directly to nature.'¹⁰

Frith also sought to go to nature in the capturing the historical detail in the painting and drew the carriage from one in Lord Darnley's possession at Cobham. 'I went and found the quaintest old thing you can conceive,' he wrote, 'all begilt and carved, with such great leather straps and buckles, and the queerest seat for the driver and for the footmen behind. To think of the old carriage outliving its occupants so long! How they must have gone to Court in it, in their flounces, swords, and ruffles.'¹¹ When it came to depicting the manners of the period, with his customary attention to detail, Frith sought information on the *Coranto* from the costume historian F W Fairholt as 'no such dance, or anything like it, exists at the present time.'¹²



Detail

Elements such as the bandit menacing the coachman with his pistol were treated with graphic and frightening clarity and the use of masks is particularly sinister. Duval himself is a central figure, his face almost in silhouette, in a bright red jacket cutting an elegant if wild figure. The terror of the female victims, Frith has succeeded in rendering in the greenish pallor of Lady Aurora and her fainting companion. In reviewing the painting at the Royal Academy, the *Illustrated Times* worried that the frightened face of Lady Aurora, 'conveys to us too keen a sense of the torture that is being inflicted on the victim.'¹³ Frith had clearly achieved his aim of 'retaining the beauty of the lady, combined with the terror.'¹⁴ In 1862 gave a finished individual study of Lady Aurora Sydney to the dealer Flatow who had commissioned the work. The model for the figure was a Miss K-, an artist's model who visited him some years later in order to commission him to paint her portrait for her husband. Frith did not recognize her at first and only on confirming the name he knew that 'Miss K was certainly an ordinary artist's model, and on further inquiry I found that she acknowledged to having sat for several friends of mine, whose names she mentioned.'¹⁴

⁸ Ibid, p.305.

⁹ Ibid, p.317.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.306.

¹¹ Ibid, p.306.

¹² Ibid, p.305.

¹³ *Illustrated Times*, 26 May, 1860, p.332.

¹⁴ William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences*, in two volumes, Bentley & Son: London 1887, volume 2, p.242.



Tragically the former model, now married, had absconded from her care as she was considered an incurable 'lunatic,' although Frith reflected that 'it is strange to me that, beyond an excited manner, to be accounted for by other causes, I never discovered anything exceptional in the poor lady's conduct.'¹⁵

This painting of Frith's *Claude Duval* is a replica made by the artist in 1886 after his agreement with Flatow not to make copies had expired. It is a fine version that retains the energy, threat, and charm of the original work.

William Powell Frith, R.A.

Lady Aurora Sydney

Oil on canvas, painted oval
9 7/8 x 8 1/8 (25 x 20.5 cm.)

1862



Detail

¹⁵ Ibid, volume 2, p.247.

Compositional Sketches

Three small pen and ink compositional sketches were made for *Claude Duval*, two of which were part of an album of 84 compositional sketches compiled by Frith. The third is sketched on the back of a letter addressed to Frith. A landscape study also survives in a private collection of the 'blasted heath' where the scene takes place.



William Powell Frith, R.A.

Compositional sketches for *Claude Duval*, c.1859,

Pen and ink,

Private collection.

From an album of 84 compositional sketches compiled by Frith



Institution of Civil Engineers,
25, Great George Street, Westminster, S.W.
19 May 1858

P.S. I could send your van on
Saturday morning if you could
order us - on hearing to that effect

Dear Sir,

We hope to have several of your
works at the President's four o'clock
on Sunday evening next. But as yet
we have none coming direct from
yourself. I believe you have, on
several occasions, presented Mr C.
Manby, who is abroad at present,
by the loan of one or two pictures for
his annual obituary. If you could
do so in the present instance, you
would be conferring an obligation on
the President & members of the Institute
as well as on your friend.

W. P. Frith
10 Pembroke Villas
Bayswater W.

Wm Powell
Assistant Secretary

William Powell Frith, R.A.

Compositional sketch for *Claude Duval* on the reverse of a private letter, 1858,

Pen and ink

Private collection.

Print

An engraving was made of the work by Lumb Stocks (1812-1892) commissioned by the Art Union of London. According to the lettering on the print it was: 'Published July 1st 1864 at 444 West Strand.' In his *Autobiography* Frith wrote: 'In the engraving from my own picture of Claude Duval by my old friend Stocks, R.A. — of whom it is not too much to say that he is one of the best engravers in this or any other country — my friend has added a charm to the composition, by his exquisite rendering of every part of it, that I fail to find in the original picture.'¹⁶



We would like to thank Mark Bills for writing this note, and Scott Thomas Buckle for providing additional information.

Mark Bills

Mark Bills is Director of Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Suffolk, where he led a landmark development to create a National Centre for Thomas Gainsborough that opened in 2022. Previously, he was Curator of Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey, and Senior Curator of Paintings, Prints and Drawings at the Museum of London. He has written widely about Victorian art and has a special interest in John Atkinson Grimshaw and William Powell Frith. He has written on both artists and was involved in major retrospective exhibitions of their works.

*Scott Thomas Buckle is an independent art historian and collector, with a particular interest in 19th century British drawings and Victorian artists' models. He provides advice to museums, galleries and auction houses around the world and has had articles published in the *The British Art Journal*, the *Pre-Raphaelite Society Review* and on *The Victorian Web*.*

¹⁶ William Powell Frith, *Further Reminiscences*, Bentley & Son: London 1888, p.160.