

RCEWA – *The Adams Shipyard* by John Cleveley the Elder

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the painting meets Waverley criteria three.

Further information

The 'Applicant's statement' and the 'Note of Case History' are available on the Arts Council Website:

www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item(s)

John Cleveley the Elder (c.1712-1777)
The Adams Shipyard from the Isle of Dogs, with His Majesty's new frigate Ambuscade 'on the stocks', dressed with flags and ready for launching, 17 September 1773, signed and dated 1774
Oil painting on canvas, 89.5 x 150.2 cm

The painting is in good condition.

2. Context

Provenance

... Alan James Montagu-Stuart-Wortley-Mackenzie, 4th earl of Wharnccliffe (1935-1987); Sotheby's, London 12 March 1986, lot 14; Richard Green, London; Geoffrey and the Hon. Carole Lawson, Surrey; Christie's, 4 July 2019, lot 52.

Exhibited

Free Society of Artists, London, 1774, no. 46, as 'A view from the water of Messers Barnard and Dudman's Ship-Yard, Deptford'

Literature

David Cordingly, *Marine painting in England 1700-1900*, London 1974

James Taylor, *Marine painting: Images of Sail, Sea and Shore*, London 1995

John E. Barnard, *Building Britain's wooden walls: the Barnard dynasty c. 1697 – 1851*, Oswestry 1997 (repr. p. 38 and on cover).

Michael E. Leek, *The Art of Maritime Illustration: A Visual Tribute to the Achievements of the Classic Marine Illustrators*, London 1991 (reprinted 1998)

E.H.H. Archibald, *The Dictionary of Sea Painters of Europe and America*, 3rd edn, Woodbridge 2000

Sarah Monks, 'The Visual Economies of the Downriver Thames in Eighteenth-Century British Art', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 71: 1 (2006), pp. 1-20

Pieter van der Merwe, "Cleveley family (per. c. 1747–1809), marine painters." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. May 27, 2010. Oxford University Press (digital)

Pieter van der Merwe, 'Artists and the Thames Shipyards', in Chris Ellmers ed., *Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium on Shipbuilding on the Thames, Docklands History Group*, London 2013, pp. 73-100

A.B. and A.M.G. McLeod, 'John Cleveley the Elder's "The Floating Out of the Cambridge": Problems and patrons', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 100: 4 (November 2014), pp. 449-454

Eleanor Hughes, *Spreading canvas: eighteenth-century British marine painting*, Yale Center for British Art 2016

Brian Lavery, 'Art and Craft in a Dockyard Town: The Naval Career of John Cleveley the Elder (c.1712-1777)', *British Art Journal*, 19: 2 (Autumn 2018), pp. 3-12

3. Waverley criteria

The objection is based on *Waverley 3*

The painting is a major example of the work of John Cleveley the Elder, one of the most important marine artists of the eighteenth century and a figure who, as a practising ship's carpenter, was unusually well-placed to provide insight into the shipbuilding industry. It is highly significant as a topographical view of a private shipyard on the Thames, that at Grove Street, Deptford, rather than the royal docks that were more often represented. It was produced and publicly exhibited at a critical moment in British naval and imperial history. It is of outstanding significance for the study of British maritime, industrial and imperial history, for the local history of London, and for the study of eighteenth century marine and topographical painting.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

The painting shows a view across the Thames from the Isle of Dogs, looking west towards the dockyard at Grove Street, Deptford, with the frigate HMS *Ambuscade* being prepared to be launched. The *Ambuscade* was ordered to be built by the yard in 1771 and completed in October 1773. Although ordered in response to the threatened war with Spain, the new frigate was first commissioned only in 1776, serving then in the American War of Independence. HMS *Ambuscade* was subsequently employed in the French Wars, before being broken up in 1810. The painting is signed and dated 1774 and appears to be the work shown at the Free Society of Artists' exhibition in London that year. It was painted by John Cleveley the Elder (c.1712-1777), a ships carpenter and artist, and one of the most important and distinctive of marine painters of the eighteenth century. The picture is an outstanding example of eighteenth-century maritime art and a rich document of the business of shipbuilding during a period of dramatic international conflict which saw Britain become established as the dominant world power.

There are around 30 paintings by Cleveley the Elder in UK public collections, mainly showing ships at sea and naval engagements but including several shipyard scenes. The most immediately comparable are the *Shipyard on the Thames* (Glasgow Museums; Appendix, fig. 2), and the several versions and repetitions of launches at the Royal Docks at Deptford (fig. 4). There are further dockyard scenes by Cleveley which have appeared on the art market, but the present painting is distinct in its subject matter and outstanding in quality.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).

The painting is exceptional as a contemporary view of a London shipyard at work at the height of the 'age of sail'. There are relatively few paintings and watercolours showing such scenes: van der Merwe (2013, p. 73) notes that 'however wide the artistic representation of shipbuilding as a whole ... Thames views are fairly rare'. It is of special interest as a view of an independent shipyard, rather than the Royal Dockyard more often taken as subject matter by painters (including Cleveley). The Grove Street yard was unusually large, with a 450-foot wide river frontage and commercially advantageous combination of dry and wet docks, 'situated at the very heart of merchant shipbuilding in the UK' (Barnard, p. 38; see Appendix, fig. 5). The shipyard was owned by William Barnard, William Dudman, and Henry Adams of Beaulieu, who together took out a thirty-year lease in 1763. (Barnard notes that 'the firm was addressed in a variety of styles by different organisations or even differently by the same organisation' but that the partnership was constant at Grove Street to 1791; p. 40). Dudman had died in 1772 and Adams finally moved to Deptford to take a more direct interest in the business, as he had promised to do since 1763. So, at the time this painting was executed and exhibited the yard was in a period of change. It was also

entering a phase of intense activity. Having launched seven ships in its first eight years (a 'dry period' following the end of the Seven Years' War), as many as twelve were completed and launched between 1772 and 1779. The painting thus bears eloquent witness to the British military-fiscal state in a renewed state of preparedness, on the eve of the extended global conflicts of the American War of Independence and French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

This view complements the several paintings by Cleveley of the industrial scenery of the Thames shoreline. Following Brian Lavery's identifications, this includes the individual paintings of Well's Yard, Randall and Brent's Yard as well as the Royal Dockyards (see Appendix, figs.2- 4). Taken together with the painting of *Adams Shipyard* these form a complete visual survey of the eighteenth-century industrial landscape from Deptford Creek to Rotherhithe. The shipyard at Grove Street does not otherwise appear to have been represented in the period, and so this painting forms an essential link in this remarkable chain of images.

In addition to its documentary interest, Cleveley's painting is a substantial work of art. Using an address in Deptford, he exhibited the painting in London in 1774 in one of the earliest public exhibitions. In that year there were three rival shows, organised by the Royal Academy, the Society of Artists and, as utilized by Cleveley, the Free Society of Artists. At a moment of fractious competition between different artistic groupings, the Free Society represented a distinct alternative to the hierarchical, even elitist Royal Academy and showcased work associated with 'low' traditions and genres, and aimed towards a more modest, middle-class audience. The patronage of maritime painters remains an area of research, but the evidence is that it was shipowners, dock officials and shipbuilders who purchased such works. As such, rare shipyard scenes such as Cleveley's are significant in representing the tastes and values of an emerging industrial society, as well as setting out an iconography for the industrial landscape itself. As Sarah Monks asserts: 'with their simple, somewhat utilitarian delineation of naval architecture, industrial topography and social spectacle', Cleveley's paintings, 'would have complemented the commercial and patriotic interests (not to mention contemporary aesthetic tastes) of the urban bourgeoisie' (Monks, p.11).

While Cleveley has always been recognised as an important marine artist, his working life as a painter and carpenter has only become properly documented in the last years. The son of a joiner from Southwark, he was apprenticed to a shipwright, and practiced as a ships carpenter until he retired on a Navy Board pension in his late fifties. His paintings reflect his unusual situation, placed between the working world of the artisan in Deptford and the emerging metropolitan arenas for fine art. If his marine paintings are often routine, his images of shipyards are widely recognised as his most distinctive and brilliant contribution to the genre. While these are marked by the clear light and sense of orderliness which bear comparison with the paintings of Samuel Scott and, especially, the London scenes of Canaletto (which he would certainly have known), and make overt reference to the iconic works of the Van de Veldes, Cleveley's observational approach and level of insight into the work of the

shipyard are distinctive. While he appears not to have gone out to sea, as would usually be the case with ships' carpenters, his practical perspective is apparent in his precise draughtsmanship and attention to detail. Michael Leek notes that 'These dockyard scenes are very strictly explanatory in nature and therefore constitute an important record for historians.' (p. 50). E.E.H. Archibald notes of Cleveley's paintings of ship launches that they are 'of high quality and closely observed, so closely that the experienced eye can roughly date them from the size of the tree growing beside the Master Shipwright's house'. In biographical terms, Cleveley's lowly social origins provide a noteworthy context for his artistic ambitions, which have borne comparison with Canaletto, Joseph Vernet and Scott.

APPENDIX



(1) John Cleveley the Elder (c.1712-1777), *The Adams Shipyard from the Isle of Dogs*, 1774. Oil on canvas, 89.5 x 150.2 cm



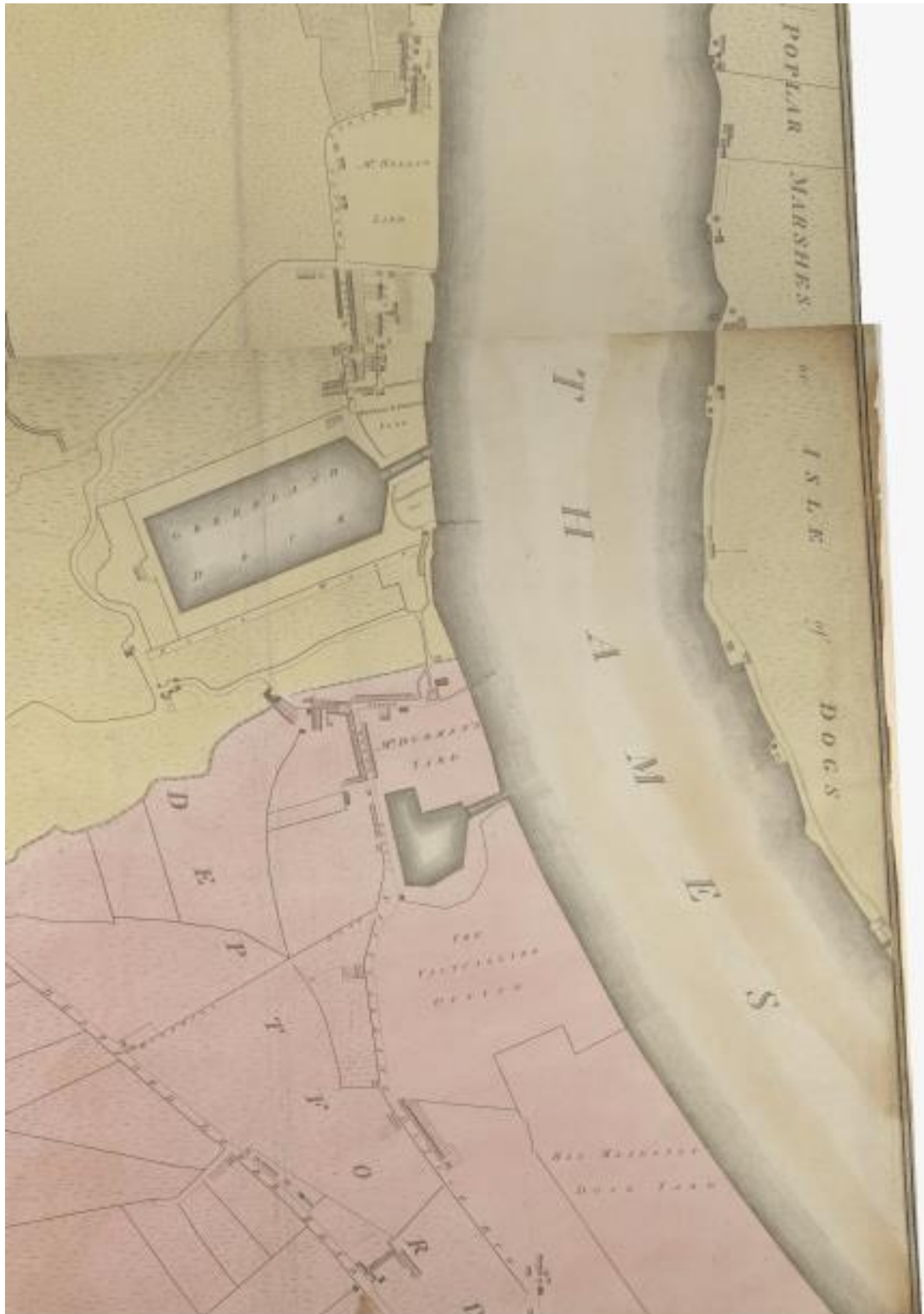
(2) John Cleveley the elder (c.1712-1777) *A Shipyard on the Thames*, 1762. Oil on canvas, 55.6 x 95.3 cm. Glasgow Museums Resource Centre. Brian Lavery identifies the site as Wells' Yard, Rotherhithe and dates it to c.1774.



(3) John Cleveley the Elder (c.1712-1777). *A Sixth rate on the Stocks*, 1758. Oil on canvas, 65.4 x 128.9 cm. National Maritime Museum. Formerly identified as the Grove Street yard; Brian Lavery identifies the location as Randall and Brent's Yard, Rotherhithe.



(4) John Cleveley the Elder (c.1712-1777), *The 'Royal George' at Deptford Showing the Launch of 'The Cambridge'*, 1757. Oil on canvas 121.9 x 187.9 cm. National Maritime Museum



(5) Detail of Horwood's map of London (1792-99), showing shipyards at Deptford and Rotherhithe. From north to south: 'Mr Wells's Yard' (see fig. 2), 'Randall & Brent's Yard' (see fig. 3), with the Greenland Dock behind, 'Mr Dudman's Yard' (the Grove Street yard) (fig. 1), the Victualling Office and the Royal Dockyard (fig. 4).