

A Missing Canaletto Found

THERE can be very little major work by Canaletto to have escaped the net of W. G. Constable but he has himself recently remarked how difficult it is completely to account for all the work of a prolific artist, especially when it is widely distributed. The two paintings illustrated (Figs.25 and 26) have not hitherto been recorded and one of them, at least, is of quite exceptional interest.

The paintings were originally bought by the Child family (of Child's Bank) and hung at Osterley Park. They thus descended through the Earls of Jersey and were first sold in 1934 by the present Earl. They then seem to have disappeared until 1941 when the present owner bought them from a London dealer better known for handling furniture than pictures; they have not since been moved. They measure $22\frac{3}{4}$ by $33\frac{1}{2}$ in., a little more than most of Canaletto's Grand Canal paintings, such as those at Windsor or Woburn which are about $18\frac{1}{2}$ by 30 in.

One of the paintings (Fig.25) shows the Riva degli Schiavoni looking east and the other the Rialto Bridge from the north. It is the latter which commands our particular interest for it is undoubtedly the original painting from which Joseph Baudin made his copy for L. P. Boitard to engrave and Baudin to publish, together with five others, on 22nd April 1736 (Fig.27, reproduced from the copy belonging to Mr F. J. B. Watson to whom I am much indebted for permission to publish it).

Only one other painting has ever been traced which can with any confidence be said to be among these six and, until Mr Watson's discovery referred to in his notes following this article, none of Baudin's copies had been found. Even more extraordinary is the rarity of the engravings themselves, for neither the British Museum nor the Correr Museum has any of them. Two known sets are bound up with another six engravings, in this case engraved by H. Fletcher, which were also published by Baudin, but not until 26th June 1739. One of these sets belonged to Mrs H. F. Finberg who provided the little that was then known about Baudin in an article in *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* in April 1932. In November 1955, in the same Magazine, F. J. B. Watson was able to add a little when commenting on an article by Antonio Morassi in the same issue, and was subsequently able to become the owner of another set. A third used to be in the Print Room at Dresden, but enquiries have failed to show whether it survives.

As will be seen from the illustrations, the painting and engraving are virtually identical, the only difference of any note being that there is about four per cent more picture on each side and at the bottom of the engraving than there is in the painting and a little more sky in the painting than in the engraving. This adds up to quite a lot of addition to the engraving (or reduction in the painting), and the addition on the left hand side is significant.

The picture purports to be done from a quay on the north side of the Palazzo Civran which is depicted as a stone-faced building in the engraving. The side is not in fact stone-faced and, from other engravings and drawings, it appears never to have been so (see Fig.33 for example). It is probable that Baudin, when making the drawing from which the engraving was to be copied, either wanted slightly different proportions or thought he could improve on Canaletto. He therefore extended the scene as he imagined it to be, adding to the boats on the right and completing the gondola in the foreground on the left. Having enlarged the quay considerably, he wished to show more of the side of the palace and concluded from the stone corner in the painting that the stone extended along the side of the building. (The alternative theory that the painting has at some time been reduced in size to make it 'pair' with the companion with which it was sold is not supported by examination of it out of its frame. Relining has made it difficult to say with certainty that the picture was never bigger than it is now but there is no evidence that it ever was.)

This is by no means the first known case of an engraver, or an artist when copying a picture for an engraver, making his own alterations or additions and, by a strange coincidence there is an interesting example in the case of another Canaletto painting of the same scene. Figure 28 shows the Queen's picture of the scene and there are two adaptations from it. First, Visentini followed the painting faithfully when drawing for the series of engravings he published in 1735. By 1779 Visentini's drawings and plates had become the property of the publisher Lodovico Furlanetto who applied for and was given a twenty-year copyright in them.¹ He employed the artist Giovanni Battista Brustoloni to make new engravings of a number of them, rather larger in size, and Fig.29 shows Brustoloni's version of the Rialto Bridge from the north.

It should be mentioned that Furlanetto's series of twenty-four views of Venice, which included six not previously drawn by Visentini, are remarkably hard to come by and Fig.29 is from a modern print.² Constable³ saw only sixteen out of the twenty-four and this particular view was not one of them. There must have been at least two different series as he gives the size of each of those he saw as 29.8 by 45 cm. whereas Alpago-Novello⁴ gives 31.8 by 45.9 cm. (not even the same proportions). The modern print reproduced is smaller than either, being 26.5 by 43.1 cm., and its wording follows that quoted by Alpago-Novello (except for the addition of 'P.V.' after the word 'Pinxit') which varies

¹ F. J. B. WATSON: 'Notes on Canaletto and his engravers', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* [October 1950].

² A set containing twenty-one of the twenty-four, lacking title page, was sold at Sotheby's on 29th November 1966 for £560; it was the first copy to appear in a London saleroom for ten years.

³ W. G. CONSTABLE: *Canaletto* [1962], p.614.

⁴ *Gli Incisori Bellunesi* [1940].

considerably from the wording Constable gives. I do not know its origin (it was found quite recently in a Venice shop) and it may well indicate the existence of yet a third series.

Its immediate interest, however, is in the fact that Brustoloni has done to the original painting much the same as Baudin did to our painting of the same scene. He has added to the bottom of the picture and in the additional space he has placed a laden barge in front of the poles on the left, an almost complete new gondola on the right of centre and the prow of another gondola at the extreme right. Whereas none of Baudin's additions protrudes into the area of the original painting, being merely imaginary extensions of Canaletto's objects, Brustoloni is more daring and his boats enter water which Canaletto left blank. It must be remembered, though, that Brustoloni probably never saw the original painting and that he worked from Visentini's drawing or engraving. These had been prepared for Joseph Smith, the owner of the paintings, who sold his collection to George III in the early 1760's, and Visentini's drawings and plates were probably sold to Furlanetto by Smith's widow after his death in 1770. By 1779 when, as we have already noted, Furlanetto petitioned for copyright in the plates and drawings he had bought, and commissioned Brustoloni to re-engrave them, the original painting had been in England for nearly twenty years. Baudin's drawing, on the other hand, had been published in 1736, only a year after the publication of Visentini's first series of fourteen engravings and six years before his second series of twenty-four. There is, therefore, no reason to suppose that it was done from anything other than the original painting.

Canaletto and others painted many pictures from this site and it is interesting to examine what tempted them there. It holds no promise for the painter of today for, as will be seen from Fig. 32, there is no quay on the north side of the Palazzo Civran; instead there is a little red brick house. Moreover, to obtain the same angles as appear in the picture, the artist (or photographer) must place himself several feet from land on the Grand Canal, and the Palazzo Civran will then be at a quite different angle, showing its façade and not only its side. Anyone, however, who has examined a number of Canaletto's subjects *in situ* knows how right Antonio Morassi was, in the article already referred to, when he said that Canaletto used to 'correct' the scene before him when his artistic sensibility was 'disturbed by questions of fact'.

When was the little red house built? It certainly appears (although not as red) in F. Guardi's two pictures done from almost the same spot, one in the Metropolitan Museum which was exhibited in Venice in 1965 (Fig. 30) and the other, almost identical, in Lord Iveagh's collection. Something similar appears in Marieschi's engraving of the same scene (Fig. 31), but this has more than one viewpoint and is altogether more capricious than was Canaletto or Guardi when drawing topographical pictures. These three pictures are all, of course, considerably later than 1735 which is the last date attributable to the one under discussion.

Probably the earliest pictures showing the little house are Canaletto's of the Grand Canal from the north, looking towards the Rialto Bridge, formerly in the Harvey Collection.⁵ Figure 33 reproduces one of them and the Palazzo Civran and the little house can be seen on the far side of the

Grand Canal almost at the end of the row of palaces. This was among twenty-one paintings bought in Venice by the first Duke of Buckingham. A number of them were copied and engraved by Visentini for his second and third series of views of Venice published in 1742, but Constable firmly gives the paintings a date approximating to 1731-2.⁶ Nothing is known of their history, however, and judgement of their date can be based only on their style.

Curiously enough, two of Canaletto's rare documented paintings are of the same scene as our picture and these are among his earliest work in Venice. One is among the four painted in 1726 for Stefano Conti of Lucca for which contracts and receipts signed by Canaletto exist. It is now in Montreal in the Pillow Collection, but a sketch for it is in the Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 35). It shows an indeterminate structure on the side of the quay which could well be the beginning of the building of the little house. Work is in progress on the Pescheria opposite whereas in our picture the work appears to have been completed.⁷

The other dated picture of the same scene is of no assistance to us as there is neither quay nor Palazzo Civran. It belongs to the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, is painted on copper, and can be dated before 28th November 1727. A painting on copper of a different scene, though, may provide a useful clue. It is the Earl of Leicester's view of the Rialto Bridge from the *south*⁸ and the little house can be clearly seen through the bridge. This was copied by Baudin⁹ and engraved for him by H. Fletcher, appearing in 1739, and, whereas only one of the Canaletto originals engraved by Boitard has hitherto been traced with certainty,¹⁰ all those engraved by Fletcher are known. Figure 34 shows a detail from the engraving. The use of copper indicates a very early date in Canaletto's career.

Returning to the paintings of the Rialto Bridge from the *north*, we have already studied the Queen's version (Fig. 28) of the scene. There are the tops of some poles shown which may well be connected with the work seen in the Stefano Conti (or Pillow) painting and the Ashmolean sketch (Fig. 35). Michael Levey¹¹ considers this painting a very early one although not, perhaps, pre-1730 as Constable dates it.¹² Brustoloni's drawing from Visentini's (Fig. 29) may be dismissed as he probably never saw the original painting and there is no reason to suppose he visited the scene before making his drawing.

All the other known versions of the scene follow the lines of those mentioned or are too late to be of interest to us. There remains only Canaletto's sketch-book in the Accademia, Venice, of which such a beautiful facsimile was produced by

⁶ Pp. 109-10, 262 etc. Throughout his catalogue, Constable refers to the series as consisting of twenty-one paintings. However, there were only twenty lent to the Birmingham Art Gallery in 1936 and again to the Ashmolean Museum in 1938.

⁷ This restoration work is even more in evidence in another painting of the same series, also in the Pillow Collection, the Grand Canal looking north from the Rialto Bridge, CONSTABLE, No. 230.

⁸ CONSTABLE, No. 226.

⁹ His copy was reproduced in THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE of November 1955, having been identified by F. J. B. Watson as a gouache which had been sold in the Charles Sedelmeyer sale in Paris in 1907, then ascribed to F. Guardi. The original Canaletto painting had not then been traced to the Earl of Leicester.

¹⁰ CONSTABLE, p. 616, No. 214. Mr Watson, it will be seen later, has now established the existence of another.

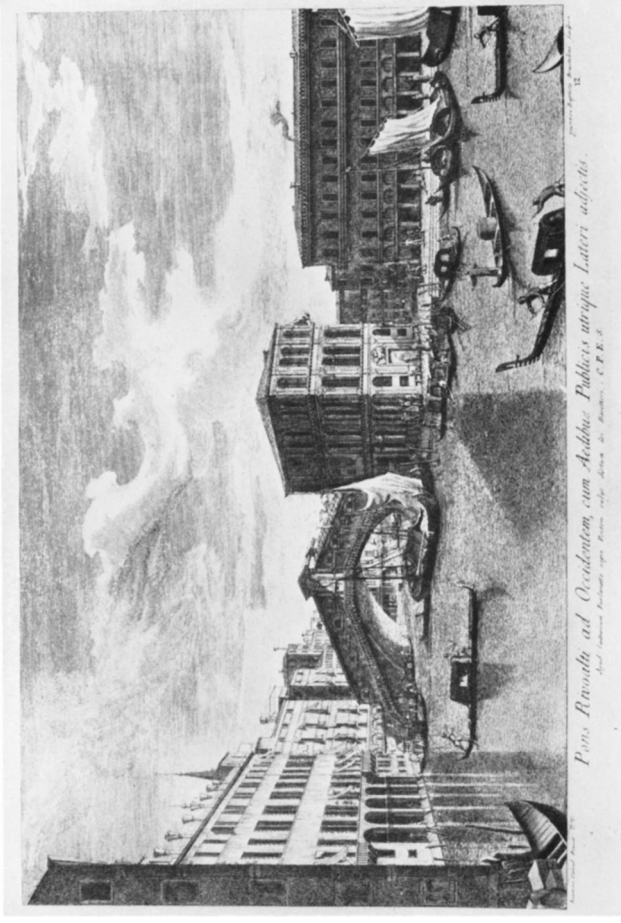
¹¹ MICHAEL LEVEY: *Italian Pictures in the Royal Collection* [1964], p. 61.

¹² CONSTABLE, p. 250.

⁵ W. G. CONSTABLE [1962], Nos. 241 and 242.



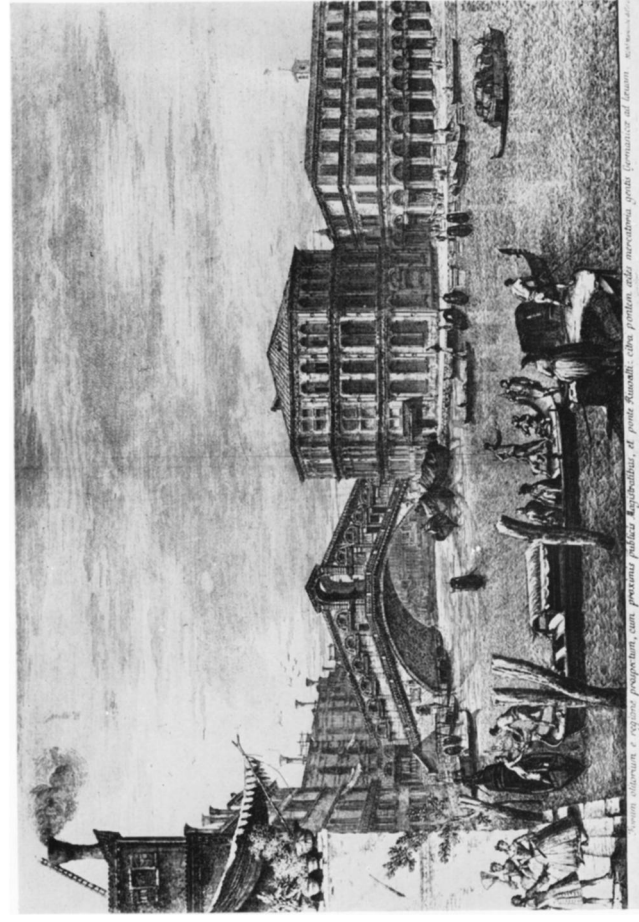
28. *The Rialto Bridge from the North*, by Canaletto. Canvas, 47 by 80 cm. (Windsor Castle). Reproduced by Gracious Permission of H.M. The Queen.



29. *The Rialto Bridge from the North*. Engraving by J. B. Brustoloni, published by L. Furlanetto.



30. *The Rialto, Venice*, by Francesco Guardi. Canvas, 53.4 by 86 cm. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.)



31. *The Rialto, Venice*. Drawn and engraved by Michele Marieschi.



32. Photograph of Palazzo Civran (with stone lower storey) and, on left, small house adjoining.



33. (left) Detail from *Grand Canal from the Ca' da Mosto to the Rialto Bridge*, by Canaletto. (Formerly Collection Harvey Trustees). Photograph Courtesy Courtauld Institute.



34. (right) Detail from engraving of a *View of the Rialto* by H. Fletcher, published by Joseph Baudin, 26th June 1739.



35. *The Rialto, Venice*, by Canaletto. Pen and ink, 14.1 by 20.2 cm. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.)

Terisio Pignatti in 1958. A willing eye can see the roof of the little house on p.70v; an unwilling eye can see nothing except scrawls. We need not therefore concern ourselves with the highly arguable date of this sketch-book.

To sum up. Either the little house did not exist or Canaletto ignored its existence when he painted our picture some time before 1736. He included it when he painted the Harvey pictures from the other side of the Grand Canal which must have been before 1742 and might have been much earlier. He also included it in the Leicester picture showing the south side of the Rialto Bridge which was probably painted very early and certainly before 1739 when Baudin published the Fletcher engraving of it. As for the quay, it does not appear in any other of his pictures except in a vague way in the Pillow painting of 1726, and even in the painting under discussion less of it was shown by Canaletto than by Baudin in his copy. Did it ever exist, one asks? Or was it perhaps not a quay at all but the foundations of the little house?

One would hope that the pendant (Fig.25) to the painting we have considered at some length would prove to be the original painting for another of the missing Baudin drawings, but unhappily this is not the case. It is of another scene made familiar by Canaletto in paintings, drawings, and even one of his few etchings of the city, the Riva degli Schiavoni looking east. For these pictures Canaletto generally imagined himself some fifteen or twenty feet in the air and some distance out into the lagoon opposite the Piazzetta. This brought the column of St Mark in front of the lagoon façade of the Doge's Palace and well below the Palace roof. Twice, and twice only, he put St Mark's column against the Piazzetta façade of the Palace and in both cases, finding it projecting above the Palace roof, and his artistic sensibility being disturbed by the fact, 'corrected' it accordingly (to quote Morassi's words in another context). One of these occasions was when painting the picture illustrated and the other when painting one for Samuel Hill in 1730 which later descended to Lord Egerton of Tatton.¹³ In two *drawings* of the same scene, though, one of which was probably a sketch for Lord Egerton's, he allows the top of the column to remain in its proper place from the viewpoint of his picture, *i.e.* above the palace roof.¹⁴

As will be seen from the illustration (Fig.25), the painting is of high quality but it would be profitless to attempt to date it. One is tempted to examine the question of when there were

two huts by the Ponte della Paglia, as in a Carlevaris of 1710¹⁵ and in all Canaletto paintings known to me, and when only one, as in a National Gallery studio painting from the same viewpoint¹⁶ and a F. Guardi painting also in the National Gallery.¹⁷ There hardly seems enough evidence available, however, to justify the research. All that can be said is that Santa Maria della Pietà is as it was before the 1745 reconstruction began.

The dome of S. Zaccaria¹⁸ and the campanili of S. Giorgio dei Greci and S. Francesco della Vigna are shown with topographical accuracy. The campanile of S. Antonin, which should be visible, is rather surprisingly omitted.¹⁹ Some scaffolding appears in the far distance which could be in use for building operations in the Arsenale. The quay is in need of repair and later pictures show it in excellent condition. Readers may be able to discern other special points of interest in this painting.

As a postscript, it may be mentioned that on the backs of photographs of the two paintings are certificates by Dr Tancred Borenius to the effect that he considered them (in 1945) to be 'absolute masterpieces'. He would have had a particular interest in the Rialto painting had he noticed its identity to the Baudin-Boitard engraving, for he was one of the comparatively few people who knew of the existence of these engravings. Mrs Finberg, in her article in *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* of 1932 on Baudin, reproduced a painting from Borenius's own collection showing the English Resident's house at the end of the Grand Canal, a subject engraved by Fletcher after Baudin's copy of a Canaletto painting now in the Mario Crespi Collection, and published by Baudin in 1739. Mrs Finberg suggested that Baudin copied Canaletto *in oil* and that Dr Borenius's painting was one of his copies, the only one then known, whereas the picture referred to in note 9, considered by F. J. B. Watson to be a Baudin copy for the engraver, together with another from the same Sale, are both in gouache. Mr Watson has, however, kindly agreed to add a note on this subject following his later researches.

¹⁵ Reproduced in FABIO MAURONER: *Luca Carlevaris* [1945], p.14.

¹⁶ No.940. Discussing it in *The Eighteenth Century Italian Schools* catalogue (1956) MICHAEL LEVEY refers to pictures by Canaletto omitting both huts, but I do not know of them.

¹⁷ No.2099.

¹⁸ Now hidden by the Hotel Danieli annexe. Discussing the National Gallery version, MICHAEL LEVEY assumes this dome to be that of S. Giorgio dei Greci, but the topography in that picture is, as he remarks, inaccurate.

¹⁹ But as it is also omitted from the similar view in the Wallace Collection, the campanile may not have been built although the church was completed by the end of the seventeenth century.

¹³ CONSTABLE, No.111.

¹⁴ Darmstadt and Windsor, CONSTABLE, Nos.573-4.



23. *Earl Stanhope*, by John Partridge. Canvas, 127 by 101.6 cm. (Society of Antiquaries, London.)



24. *Lord Aberdeen*, by John Partridge. Canvas, 115.6 by 144.8 cm. (National Portrait Gallery, London.)



25. *Riva degli Schiavoni, looking East*, by Canaletto. Canvas, 58 by 85 cm. (Private Collection, England.)



26. *The Rialto Bridge from the North*, by Canaletto. Canvas, 58 by 85 cm. (Private Collection, England.)



27. 'A View of Ponte Realto at Venice'. Engraving by L. P. Boitard, published by Joseph Baudin, 22nd April 1736.