

The Travelers

166[2?]

Oil on canvas, 101 x 145 (39 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 57)

Widener Collection

InscriptionsAt lower right: *m .hobbema . f 166[2?]*

Technical Notes: The support is a heavy-weight, loosely and plain-woven fabric.¹ Moderately thick paint is freely brushed over a light tan colored ground in paste consistency.

Small losses are scattered overall. The sky is abraded, particularly in the dark cloud at top left, while the foreground is well-preserved. Prior to acquisition, two linings had been attached to the support. In 1981, a third lining was added and the painting cleaned. At that time discolored varnish and old overpaints were removed where possible. Aged insoluble overpaint in the horse, sky, and dark cloud were toned.

Provenance: Alberda van Dyksterhuys, Château d'Alberda van Dyksterhuys, Province of Groningen by 1829; R. Gockinga and P. van Arnhem, Groningen, after 1829; (sale, Amsterdam, 5 July 1833, no. 11);¹ R. Gockinga, Groningen. Colonel Biré, Brussels;² (sale, Bonnefons de Lavialle, Paris, 25–26 March 1841, no. 2); William Williams Hope, Rushton Hall, Northamptonshire, and Paris;³ (sale, Christie & Manson, London, 14–16 June 1849, no. 124); purchased by Fuller or perhaps bought in;⁴ (William Williams Hope sale, Pouchet, Paris, 11 May 1858, no. 2). William Ward, 1st Earl of Dudley [d. 1885], Witley Court, Worcestershire, by 1871; by inheritance to his son, William Humble Ward, 2nd Earl of Dudley [d. 1932], Witley Court, Worcestershire; (sale, Christie, London, 25 June 1892, no. 9); (P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London, until 1894); Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

Exhibited: *Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1871, no. 369, and London (Winter) 1894, no. 60.⁵

THIS WOODED LANDSCAPE VIEW was formerly titled *A Watermill* because of the picturesque mill in the middle distance on the left. Presumably because many similar watermills exist in Hobbema's oeuvre, a new title was chosen to emphasize the distinctive staffage figures in this work, the two men on horseback who ride along the winding path in the center of the composition. A third traveler in the lower right rests on a fallen log, while others in the distant right walk toward a church whose steeple rises behind a dense group of trees.

This work has an intriguing history, first published by C. J. Nieuwenhuys in 1834.⁶ The painting and its companion, *The Old Oak*, 1662 (now in Mel-

bourne, see fig. 1) were discovered in 1829 by the president of the fine arts society of Groningen, P. van Arnhem, in the château of Alberda van Dyksterhuys, a fifteenth-century manor house that was situated near Groningen. Van Arnhem, who was a collector of old paintings, was judging a local exhibition of landscape paintings when he recognized that one of the finest works on show bore a great resemblance to paintings by Hobbema. Upon questioning, he found that the artist had copied a painting that was hanging in the château of Alberda van Dyksterhuys. Van Arnhem visited the château and eventually persuaded the owner of the château, Alberda van Dyksterhuys, the last member of a family with a long and distinguished history, to sell his two large paintings by Hobbema. Shortly thereafter, however, Alberda van Dyksterhuys also received an offer from another "amateur" from Groningen, R. Gockinga. Before any transaction could be completed, the owner died. The two interested parties eventually agreed to purchase the two paintings jointly, which they then brought to auction in Amsterdam in 1833. At the sale Gockinga bought the present picture outright for himself, while *The Old Oak* was bought by the dealer Nieuwenhuys.⁷ Soon afterwards the two paintings were reunited in the collection of Colonel Biré in Brussels.

According to Alberda van Dyksterhuys, the two pictures represented views from the surroundings of the château, and were painted for the family by Hobbema. While the identical size of these extremely large paintings does suggest that they were commissioned pieces, no evidence exists to substantiate this family tradition. In any event, neither work was painted from nature, for both are clearly based on compositions by Jacob van Ruisdael. *The Old Oak*, signed and dated 1662, is derived from Ruisdael's etching *A Forest Marsh with Travelers on a Bank*.⁸ The National Gallery of Art painting, which is also signed and dated, is a close variant of Ruisdael's 166[1?] painting of a watermill, now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (fig. 2).⁹ In this painting one not only sees a comparable watermill, but also the same large oak tree rising to the left of the path with its roots clinging to the river bank. Although the last digit of the date is obscured and is difficult to read, it appears to read 1662.¹⁰ A date of 1662 is not only consistent with that of the Melbourne painting, it is also justifiable on compositional and stylistic grounds.

Among the works related to *The Travelers*, the most similar in composition is an undated painting formerly in the collection of the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio (fig. 3).¹¹ This painting is also Hobbema's



Fig. 1. Meindert Hobbema, *The Old Oak*, 1662, oil on canvas, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, Felton Bequest 1949/50

closest adaptation of Ruisdael's *Landscape with Watermill* in the Rijksmuseum. With the exception of the staffage figures, Hobbema has here copied all of the compositional elements, including the cut logs strewn on the path by the woodsman. Since *The Travelers* is a freer adaptation of the Ruisdael composition than is this work, it almost certainly follows it chronologically.

The evolution of this composition for Hobbema does not, however, begin with this work. At least three other paintings have similar compositions, but with a simpler mill and a differently shaped tree in the foreground.¹² Hobbema certainly painted the

ex-Toledo and Washington versions, which were influenced by Ruisdael, after he painted the three scenes with the simpler watermill; nevertheless, since one of these later works is signed and dated 1662,¹³ the time frame in which this evolution occurred was very narrow. Hobbema and Ruisdael may both have derived their compositions from an actual site, although Hobbema's earlier watermill compositions may more accurately reflect that site than Ruisdael's. Ruisdael often freely altered the character of buildings to give the scene added drama and grandeur. The changes in Hobbema's conception of the scene are thus fascinating evidence of the

Fig. 2. Jacob van Ruisdael, *Landscape with Watermill*, 166[1?], oil on canvas, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



Fig. 3. Meindert Hobbema, *Landscape with Watermill*, c. 1662, oil on canvas, private collection





Meindert Hobbema, *The Travelers*, 1942.9.31

nature of Ruisdael's influence on his young protégé at this stage of his career.

Despite their relatively old provenance, the attribution of the two works from the château Alberda van Dyksterhuys to Hobbema is not without question. Smith wrote in 1842 that when this painting and its companion appeared in the Amsterdam sale of 1833, they "were then considered by several connoisseurs to be by the hand of some imitator of Hobbema, in which opinion the writer then coincided." He added, however, "lining and judicious cleaning have since so greatly improved them, that he feels no hesitation in now recording them among the works of the master."¹⁴

Although the attribution of the painting to Hobbema has never subsequently been doubted, Smith's initial hesitation is understandable because the painting style lacks many of the nuances of touch found in Hobbema's other works from the early 1660s. Brushstrokes are quite regular, and forms are comparatively simplified, particularly in the reeds in the lower left and the foliage in the bushes on the right. As a result, the painting does not exhibit the warmth and seeming spontaneity of Hobbema's more characteristic landscape views.

Various explanations can be advanced for the relative dryness of the painting, and, to judge from photographs, its companion. Primary among them is that both works are exceptionally large in scale for Hobbema and are replicas of smaller variants he made of compositions by Jacob van Ruisdael.¹⁵ These factors may have affected Hobbema's manner of painting and rendered his style less spontaneous than usual. Though nothing is known of his workshop practices, it is also possible that these paintings were produced in Hobbema's studio under his direct supervision. The staffage figures are, in any event, by another hand, which is a common occurrence in Hobbema's paintings. One nineteenth-century reference plausibly suggests that they are by Barent Gael.¹⁶

Notes

1. Both Van Arnhem and Gockinga had individually offered to buy the two pictures by Hobbema, including 1942.9.31, that Alberda van Dyksterhuys owned. Before either had closed the deal, however, the owner died. It was later arranged that the two would purchase the paintings together; see Nieuwenhuys 1834, 147–149.

2. The catalogue of this sale bears the title *Catalogue d'une riche collection de tableaux des écoles Flamande et Hollandaise, Recueillie par M. Hérès de Bruxelles...*, but although the collection was "recueillie" ("collected/gathered") by Hérès and was offered for sale under his name, he may not himself have been the owner of the paintings. In the copy of the sale catalogue

at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the words "Recueillie par M. Hérès de Bruxelles" in the title are followed by the handwritten addition, "...pour M. le Colonel Biré," and alongside the title in the Victoria and Albert Museum's copy is written "mais c'est la collection de M. le Colonel Biré," which suggests that Hérès may have been acting as Biré's agent in acquiring and selling the pictures.

3. The buyer's name is noted in the Philadelphia copy of the sale catalogue as "hoppe," which is probably a misspelling of Hope. (The 1858 Hope sale catalogue states that Hope bought the picture at the Hérès sale.)

4. HdG 1907–1927, 4: 406, lists the 1849 sale in the provenance of his no. 100, a painting that may or may not be identical with HdG 1907–1927, 403–404, no. 94 (which is definitely *The Travelers*). The compositional descriptions given in both these HdG entries are similar, but the dimensions listed for no. 100, 51 x 54 in., are impossible for the National Gallery picture. The identity and whereabouts of HdG 100 remain unclear; it is possible that HdG was mistaken in the dimensions that he gave for this picture, and that it was indeed the same painting as his no. 94. HdG further confuses the issue by listing part of the provenance of *The Travelers* under no. 94, and part (the 1841 Hérès sale) under no. 100. The 1849 Hope sale catalogue does not give dimensions, so it is impossible to establish whether the painting offered there was *The Travelers* or the unknown, and perhaps apocryphal, "HdG 100." The picture in question fetched £367.10, and HdG, citing as his source a handwritten note in Smith's own copy of his *Catalogue Raisonné*, says that it was bought in. (In this copy, which is at the RKD, Smith gives the buyer as "Fuller," but this is not necessarily contradictory, as Fuller may have been a Christie's employee.) Smith's statement is probably correct, for the National Gallery of Art's painting remained in the possession of W. W. Hope until 1858, when it was sold in Paris.

5. The Royal Academy label, removed from the stretcher during conservation in 1981, is now in NGA conservation files. The label identifies Colnaghi as the lender. A label from the Art Institute of Chicago shipping room, dated 27 January 1943, was also removed from the stretcher at this time, but neither the Art Institute nor the NGA registrar's office records this movement.

6. Nieuwenhuys 1834, 147–149.

7. Annotated copies of the sale catalogue and HdG give the prices fetched by each picture as fl 3,000, although Hérès 1839, 7 says that *A Watermill* fetched fl 4,000 and *The Old Oak* fl 3,225. A price of fl 3,000 was quite high for a painting by Hobbema at that time.

8. The Hague 1981, 108.

9. Van Thiel, et al. 1976, inv. no. C213. While the catalogue indicates that the painting is signed and dated 1661, Seymour Slive has informed me that the last digit of the date is no longer legible.

10. Koppius 1839, 117, described the painting as being dated 1662 in his enthusiastic account of the work's pictorial and aesthetic qualities. Over the years, however, the date has become difficult to read. Widener 1913, 78, acknowledged the ambiguity of the date, stating that the picture is inscribed: "M. Hobbema 1660 (the last figure is uncertain)."

11. Stechow 1966, fig. 150.

12. Broulhiet 1938, 33; HdG 1907–1927, 4: 401, no. 88; oil on canvas, 57 x 72, J. Hage Collection, Nivaa, Denmark, 1908. Broulhiet 1938, 34; HdG 1907–1927, 4: 408, no. 108; oil on panel, 61 x 83, sale *Important Old Master Paintings*,

Sotheby's, New York, 11 January 1986, lot 109 (as "from the Collection of an East Coast Museum"). Brouhiet 1938, 35; HdG 1907–1927, 4: 403, no. 93; oil on panel, 52 x 66, National Trust, Petworth House, England. All of these paintings are illustrated by Brouhiet.

13. See Brouhiet 1938, 34.

14. Smith 1829–1942, 9: 727, no. 25. Although it seems probable that Smith's comments relate to the two Hobbema paintings, it should be noted that provenance information he provides about these paintings is inaccurate.

15. A smaller version of the Melbourne painting (Brouhiet 1938, 224) is in Schloss Rohoncz, Lugano.

16. Barent Gael (Haarlem before 1635–after 1681 Amsterdam) was a pupil of Philips Wouwerman and sometimes painted staffage figures for Jan Wynants as well. (Bernt 1948/1960, 1: 295.) Although no documentary evidence exists that Gael worked with Hobbema, a collaboration between the two painters would have been possible. The figures in Gael's *Travelers at a Village Well* (sold Christie's, London, 20 February 1986, lot 237) are quite similar to those in *The Travelers*. Gael also painted horses in motion in comparable ways: see *Peasants Merry-making Outside an Inn* (sold Christie's, London, 25 October 1974, lot 136) and *Horsemen Halting Outside an Inn* (National Trust, Dyrham Park, near Chippenham).

References

- 1829–1842 Smith, 9 (1842): 727, no. 25.
 1834 Nieuwenhuys: 147–149.
 1839 Koppius: 114–128, repro. (as dated 1662).
 1839 Hérís: 54: 5–7, repro.
 1854 Jervis: 2: 225.
 1859 Thoré (Bürger): 28–44.
 1861–1876 Blanc: 12 pages.
 1864 Scheltema: 214–226.
 1891 Cundall: 157.
 1885–1900 Widener, 2: no. 212, repro.
 1907–1927 HdG, 4 (1912): 385–386, no. 94, 387–388, no. 100.
 1913–1916 Widener: introduction, 78 repro.
 1923 Widener: unpaginated, repro.
 1927 Rosenberg: 139–151.
 1931 Widener: 78–79, repro.
 1937 Roos: 183, repro.
 1938 Brouhiet: 71, 381, no. 32, repro. (as after Ruisdael, dated 1664).
 1948 Widener: 59, repro.
 1959 Stechow: 3–18.
 1965 NGA: 68, no. 627.
 1968 NGA: 60, repro.
 1975 NGA: 176–177, repro.
 1981 Schmidt: 156, 198, note 192.
 1985 NGA: 203, repro.
 1987 Sutton: 350.

1937.1.61 (61)

A Wooded Landscape

1663

Oil on canvas, 94.7 x 130.5 (37 3/8 x 51 3/8)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

At lower right: *meijndert hobbema*

F 1663

Technical Notes: The support is a medium-weight, tightly and plain-woven fabric which has been double lined. The original dimensions are slightly enlarged on all sides. A small L-shaped tear occurs in the clouds to the right of center.

Paint is applied over a thick, warm dark gray ground layer in thin pastes with vigorous brushwork. Low impasto is found in foliage and figure highlights. The x-radiograph shows a change in the lower left corner, where the artist painted out a small tree trunk. Small losses are confined to the tear and edges, and abrasion is minimal. Discolored varnish was removed when the painting was cleaned in 1987.

Provenance: Possibly Charles Cobbe, archbishop of Dublin [1687–1765]; by inheritance to his grandson, Charles Cobbe [1782–1857], Newbridge House, Donabate, near Dublin.¹ (T. B. Brown, London, in 1839); Robert Stayner Holford, M. P. [1808–1892], Dorchester House, London, and Westonsbirt, Gloucestershire; by inheritance to his son, Lieut.-Col. Sir George Lindsay Holford, K.C.V.O. [1860–1926].² J. Pierpont Morgan [1837–1913], New York, in 1901; by inheritance to J. P. Morgan, Jr. [1867–1943] in 1935; (consigned to M. Knoedler & Co., New York); sold 20 December 1935 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.³

Exhibited: British Institution, London, 1840, no. 22, and 1851, no. 49. *Art Treasures of the United Kingdom*, Museum of Ornamental Art, Manchester, 1857, no. 767. British Institution, London, 1862, no. 3. *Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, Winter Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1887, no. 59. *Exhibition of Pictures by Dutch Masters of the Seventeenth Century*, Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1900, no. 24. New York 1909, no. 48, repro. *Loan Exhibition of the J. Pierpont Morgan Collection*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1914.

IN THIS IDYLIC VIEW of the world, the season is summer, the foliage of the trees is dense and lush, sunlight breaks through the billowing clouds in soft pools of light to give warmth to the day, and men and women wander along paths, stopping to converse, or sit idly by a pool of water to fish. Hobbema's view of *A Wooded Landscape*, one of his most harmonious compositions, has been highly praised since Smith first published it in 1835, when it was in the collection of Charles Cobbe.⁴ Waagen, for example, wrote in 1854: "Seldom has the power of art in expressing the effect of the low afternoon sun in the light clouds in