



Meindert Hobbema  
Dutch, 1638 - 1709

## *A Wooded Landscape*

1663

oil on canvas

overall: 94.7 x 130.5 cm (37 5/16 x 51 3/8 in.)

Inscription: lower right: meijndert hobbema / F 1663

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.61

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### ENTRY

In this idyllic 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. [1] 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 the sky, on tree, bush, and meadow, been exhibited with such astonishing power, transparency and freshness as in this picture." [2]

Signed and dated 1663, this painting is among the first of Hobbema's fully mature works. Here he has freed himself from the overt dependence on Jacob van Ruisdael (Dutch, c. 1628/1629 - 1682) evident in his compositions from the previous years, for example, *The Travelers*. The landscape is now open and spacious, the painterly touch more delicate and varied, and the palette considerably lighter than in earlier paintings. Hobbema draws the viewer back into the forest with pools of light that accent distant foliage and silhouette tree trunks rising before them, a

device he more fully exploits in his later paintings, for example, *Hut among Trees*. He uses this technique effectively to enhance the recession into space of the small trees growing along the side of the dike in the right middle ground. Stechow has noted that the configuration of these trees, which he terms “tin-soldier trees,” relates back to Hobbema’s earliest compositions (for example, *A River Scene*, 1658, Detroit Institute of Arts). [3] One might thus argue that Hobbema was here sufficiently free of Ruisdael’s influence to reach back and draw upon motifs that were part of his repertoire before becoming Ruisdael’s student. The location of Hobbema’s scene is not known, although the close similarities to a drawing of this wooded glade attributed to Hobbema, formerly in the Emile Wolf Collection, New York (see the 1995 archived version of this entry), suggest that it is based upon an actual site. Hobbema also painted a second, slightly simplified version of the scene, now in the Wallace Collection [fig. 1].

When Smith published the painting in 1835, he indicated that it was a companion piece to the masterful landscape of the same dimensions and date now in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, and formerly in the collection of Sir Alfred Beit [fig. 2]. Both paintings have a distinctive signature in which Hobbema wrote out in full his complete name. At that time the Washington painting was in the collection of Charles Cobbe in Ireland, and the Beit painting was owned by an English politician, the Rt. Hon. Edward John Littleton (1791–1863), who was made 1st Baron Hatherton in 1835. No earlier provenance, however, exists to confirm that the paintings were ever together. [4] Both paintings can stand by themselves as independent creations and compositional parallels are not particularly strong. In the Dublin painting, moreover, the cows appear to be painted by Adriaen van de Velde (Dutch, 1636 - 1672), whereas no such collaboration with a staffage painter is evident in the Washington work. Smith’s statement must therefore be treated with some skepticism. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that we know so little of the types and character of seventeenth-century landscape pendants that his assertion cannot be totally discounted. [5]

The painting was clearly greatly appreciated by its owners, to judge by a fascinating account of the circumstances of its sale by Charles Cobbe in 1839, published by his daughter Frances Power Cobbe in 1894. She wrote as follows: “Though often hard pressed to carry out with a very moderate income all his projects of improvements, [my father] was never in debt. One by one he rebuilt or re-roofed almost every cottage on his estate, making what had been little better than pig-styes, fit for human habitation; and when he found that his annual rents

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could never suffice to do all that was required in this way for his tenants in his mountain property, he induced my eldest brother, then just of age, to join with him in selling two of the pictures which were the heirlooms of the family and the pride of the house, a Gaspar Poussin and a Hobbema, which last now adorns the walls of Dorchester House. I remember as a child seeing the tears in his eyes as this beautiful painting was taken out of the room in which it had been like a perpetual ray of sunshine. But the sacrifice was completed, and eighty good stone and slate 'Hobbema Cottages,' as we called them, soon rose all over Glenasmoil. Be it noted by those who deny every merit in an Anglo-Irish landlord, that not a farthing was added to the rent of the tenants who profited by this real act of self-denial." [6] Hobbema would have been pleased to know that the sale of his painting created new housing for so many families.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Meindert Hobbema, *A Wooded Landscape*, c. 1663, oil on canvas, Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London



**fig. 2** Meindert Hobbema, *Landscape with Cows and Travellers*, 1663, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

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## NOTES

*A Wooded Landscape*

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

- [1] Smith's 1835 entry for the painting consisted of only a brief description, but in his 1842 supplement he described the work in great detail and praised it lavishly, saying: "This brilliant epitome of Nature is justly entitled to the highest commendations, and is in truth an example of . . . rare occurrence." (John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. [London, 1829–1842], 9:725).
- [2] Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain: Being an Account of the Chief Collection of Paintings, Drawings, Sculptures, and Illuminated Mss.*, 3 vols. (London 1854–1857), 2:203.
- [3] Wolfgang Stechow, "The Early Years of Hobbema," *Arts Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1959): 9, 15.
- [4] Gregory Rubinstein has pointed out verbally that it is nonetheless possible that both paintings could have been together in Ireland in the early 1830s. Littleton was appointed chief secretary to the lord lieutenant of Ireland in 1833, and must therefore have spent a considerable amount of time there during this period. When it was in the Cobbe Collection, the Hobbema was paired with a landscape by Gaspard Dughet (French, 1615 - 1675). See Alastair Laing, ed., *Clerics and Connoisseurs: An Irish Art Collection through Three Centuries* (London, 2001), no. 40.
- [5] A case in point is *The Travelers* and *The Old Oak* (discussed in the entry on *The Travelers*), which are apparently companion pieces, but whose commonality, other than dimensions and date, is essentially that the compositions were both derived from works by Jacob van Ruisdael.
- [6] Frances Power Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe*, 2 vols. (Boston and New York, 1894), 1:23–24. For further information on the "Hobbema Cottages" see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Alec Cobbe, "A Better Picture to the Christian Eye': The Sale of Meindert Hobbema's Wooded Landscape from Newbridge," and Charles Sebag-Montefiore, "Collecting in Ireland in the 18th Century: The Historic Cobbe Collection in Context," in Alastair Laing, ed., *Clerics and Connoisseurs: An Irish Art Collection through Three Centuries* (London, 2001), no. 24.

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a medium-weight, tightly and plain-woven fabric that has two lining fabrics attached to it. The original tacking margins were opened up and added to the picture plane, expanding the painting by approximately 0.5 cm on all sides. At some point in the painting's history, this area was inpainted to incorporate it into the picture. The remainder of the original tacking margins as well as those of the

first lining fabric have been removed. The stretcher is slightly larger than the painting and as a result the dimensions have been extended up to an additional 1.0 cm on all sides. The warm dark gray ground is a moderately thick layer. The paint was applied in a thin paste with vigorous brushwork. Low impasto is found in foliage and figure highlights. The ground continues onto the expanded areas around the edges, but the paint does not. The X-radiographs show a change in the lower left corner, where the artist painted out a small tree trunk.

A small L-shaped tear occurs in the clouds to the right of center. Small losses are confined to the tear and edges, and abrasion is minimal. There is a pronounced craquelure pattern in the sky, which is slightly disfiguring. Old newspaper on the back of the stretcher is dated December 1916. The painting was probably lined at that time. A second lining fabric was added when the painting was treated in 1941. In 1987, the painting was treated again to remove discolored varnish and inpainting, including the non-original paint that had been added to the opened-up tacking margins.

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## PROVENANCE

Thomas Cobbe [1733-1814], Newbridge House, Donabate, near Dublin, by 1770;<sup>[1]</sup> gift 1810, with the Cobbe estates and painting collection, to his grandson, Charles Cobbe [1782-1857]; sold 1839 through Michael Gernon to (Thomas Brown, London); sold 4 April 1840 to Robert Stayner Holford, M.P. [1808-1892], Dorchester House, London, and Westonbirt, Gloucestershire;<sup>[2]</sup> by inheritance to his son, Lieut.-Col. Sir George Lindsay Holford, K.C.V.O. [1860-1926];<sup>[3]</sup> purchased 1901 through (Charles J. Wertheimer, London) by J. Pierpont Morgan [1837-1913], New York;<sup>[4]</sup> by inheritance to his son, J.P. Morgan, Jr. [1867-1943], New York; consigned February 1935 to (M. Knoedler & Co., New York); sold 13 December 1935 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; deeded 24 June 1937 to The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh;<sup>[5]</sup> gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] Thomas Cobbe may have acquired the painting by Hobbema upon the recommendation of the Rev. Matthew Pilkington (1701–1774), who was private secretary to Thomas' father, Charles Cobbe (1686–1765), the Archbishop of Dublin. Pilkington wrote enthusiastically about the Hobbema, then in Cobbe's collection, in his book *The Gentleman's and Connoisseur's Dictionary of Painters* (London,

1770), 288. The Knoedler prospectus for the painting (in NGA curatorial files) says the painting was owned by the elder Charles Cobbe (Thomas' father) and then inherited by the younger Charles Cobbe, who is incorrectly identified as the elder Charles' grandson, when he was in fact the great-grandson. The prospectus does not name Thomas.

[2] For the painting's early provenance see Alastair Laing, ed., *Clerics & Connoisseurs: The Rev. Matthew Pilkington, the Cobbe Family and the Fortunes of an Irish Art Collection through Three Centuries*, Exh. cat., The Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood House, London, 2001: 9, 50-51, 71, 87-89, 116, no. 24, 373 n. 11 for Wheelock and Cobbe essay.

[3] *The Holford Collection, Dorchester House*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1927, 2: ix, produced by the executors of Sir G.L. Holford's estate, says that the Hobbema that had belonged to "Mr." (i.e. R.S.) Holford was sold to help pay his death duties. Holford also owned another painting that came to the National Gallery of Art by way of the Andrew W. Mellon Collection, Anthony van Dyck's portrait of Marchesa Balbi (1937.1.49).

[4] "In the Sale Room," *Connoisseur* 1 (September-December 1901): 190. The Knoedler prospectus (in NGA curatorial files) says this sale took place in 1905.

[5] The painting was Knoedler no. CA 787. See the letter from Nancy C. Little, librarian, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, to Gregory M.G. Rubinstein, 12 September 1987; the Knoedler bill of sale to Mellon; and Mellon collection records, all in NGA curatorial files.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1840 British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1840, no. 22.

1851 British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1851, no. 49.

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1857 Art Treasures of the United Kingdom: Paintings by Ancient Masters, Art Treasures Palace, Manchester, 1857, no. 767.

1862 British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1862, no. 3.

1887 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1887, no. 59.

1900 Exhibition of Pictures by Dutch Masters of the Seventeenth Century, Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1900, no. 24.

1909 The Hudson-Fulton Celebration, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1909, no. 48, repro.

1914 Loan Exhibition of the J. Pierpont Morgan Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1913-1916.

2001 Clerics and Connoisseurs: An Irish Art Collection through Three Centuries, The Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood, London, 2001-2002, no. 24, repro.

2015 Ireland: Crossroads of Art and Design, 1690-1840, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2015, no. 59, fig. 6.

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