

. AGNEWS .

EST. 1817

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Wenceslaus Hollar (Prague 1607 - 1677
London)

*View of Prague, with the Hradschin Castle and the
Hirschgraben*

Inscribed in brown ink (upper right): 'at Prage'

Pen and black ink over black chalk

Approx. 3 ⁷/₈ x 6 in. (97 x 153 mm.)



Provenance

Dr. Francis Springell (1898-1974), Prague and Portinscale, Cumbria;
his sale, London, Sotheby's, 30 June 1986, lot 14,
where purchased by Albin Schram, Lausanne,
by inheritance to the previous owner until 2020.

Literature

F. Sprinzels, *Hollar Handzeichnungen*, Vienna 1938, p. 98, no. 275, pl. 44, fig. 231;

F. Springell, *Connoisseur and Diplomat*, London 1963, p. 190, no. XCIX, pl. 49;

V. Denkstein, *Hollar Drawings*, London 1979, p. 44, fig. 17;

A. Volrábová, *Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-1677): Drawings. A Catalogue Raisonné*, Prague, Národní galerie v Praze, 2017, no. A.III / 3.

Exhibited

Manchester, City Art Gallery, *Wenceslaus Hollar*, 1963, no. D.72.

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Wenceslaus Hollar is thought of by many first and foremost as the artist who gave us the essential visual record of mid-17th century England. Hollar's drawings and prints of London before the great fire are historical documents of the greatest importance, and also accomplished and appealing images of a world long gone.

Hollar was, though, no Englishman. He was born in Prague, towards the end of the rule there of the legendary patron and collector, the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, and first trained as an illustrator and topographer in his native city. His twenties were spent working in Germany and Holland, from 1634 in Cologne. It was only on 2 May 1636, when Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, arrived in Cologne on an official ambassadorial mission from the English King Charles I to the Emperor Ferdinand II in Vienna, that Hollar first entered the orbit of the English court and aristocracy, who were to provide him with his livelihood for the rest of his career.

Arundel, whose legacy as a patron and collector is surely more revered today than his achievements as a courtier and diplomat, engaged Hollar as his official artist, to accompany the embassy up the Rhine and record their progress in a series of drawings (more than one hundred of which survive, almost all in museum collections²), presumably with the aim of having them engraved and published. His official duties in Vienna completed, though without any conspicuous success, Arundel decided to continue on to Prague in a private capacity, taking Hollar with him, after which the party returned, via Germany and the Netherlands, to London, where Hollar embarked on the glittering London-based career that was to sustain him for the rest of his life.³

During their week-long stay in Prague, from the 6th to the 13th of July 1636, Hollar made topographical drawings, some of which (but not this one) served, directly or indirectly, as the basis for his monumental print, the *Great Prospect of Prague*, published in 1650.⁴ This informal yet perfectly composed drawing is one of a small handful of these views of Prague that have survived. In the foreground is the *Hirschgraben*, or 'stag-moat', a walled deerpark on the slope below the Hradschin Castle. In the distance is the part of the city called 'Kleinseite', with the Laurentiusberg above.

The drawing is one of no fewer than 24 sheets by Hollar formerly owned by Dr. Francis Springell, himself a native of Prague, who, despite having a highly successful 'day job' in the food industry, became the leading authority on the artist, and author of the first catalogue of Hollar's drawings, published in 1938 (when Springell was still living in Prague, and using his original name of Franz Sprinzels). Having fled to England very shortly after the publication of his book, Springell established himself at Portinscale, near Keswick in Cumbria, and proceeded to build both a successful business, and a fine collection of Old Master Drawings,

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the majority of which was sold at Sotheby's in 1986, with a catalogue introduction by the eminent drawings curator and connoisseur, Keith Andrews, of the National Gallery of Scotland.

Though relatively small in scale, this study by Hollar has a moving simplicity and clarity which is only heightened by the knowledge that when the artist drew it, he had presumably not seen his native city for a number of years. Superficially unassuming yet perfectly balanced, and highly atmospheric, this extremely well-preserved drawing sums up Hollar's talents as a draughtsman, and even the story of his career. No other view of Prague by Hollar has come to the market since the last time this drawing was sold, in 1986, and only a small handful of his drawings of any kind have been sold in the current century.

Albin Schram (1926-2005) was a voracious but discerning collector of works on paper and autograph documents. His collection included 19th and early 20th century works on paper, including drawings by artists such as Camille Pissarro, Edgar Degas, August Macke, Emil Nolde and Alfred Kubin. The story goes that his fascination with these records of human interactions and artistic creation was sparked when his mother presented him with a romantic letter written by Napoleon Bonaparte to his future wife Josephine de Beauharnais in an attempt to patch up an argument.

1. Sold, London, Sotheby's, 6 July 2010, lot 109; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. No. 2010.529;

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/395057?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&what=Drawings&ft=Hollar&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1>

2. See *Wenzel Hollar 1607-1677. Reisebilder vom Rhein*, exh. cat., Mainz, Landesmuseum, 1986-7.

3. For the best overall account of Hollar's career, especially the English period, see: Richard Godfrey, *Wenceslaus Hollar. A Bohemian Artist in England*, exh. cat., New Haven, CT, Yale Center for British Art, 1994-5.

4. G. Parthey, *Wenzel Hollar: Beschreibendes Verzeichnis seiner Kupferstiche*, Berlin 1852, no. 880a-c. See also R. Pennington, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Etched Works of Wenceslaus Hollar*, Cambridge, 1982, no. 880a-c.

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1. **Saint Vitus Cathedral:** Visible here are the spires of Saint Vitus Cathedral, one of the Prague's most iconic and recognizable monuments. Its origins date back to the early 10th century, and it took almost 600 years to complete. Many Czech kings and emperors were laid to rest here, including Rudolf II, who died in 1612.
2. **Black Tower:** Built in 1135 as a fortification at the eastern gate of the Prague Castle, the Black Tower is one of the oldest buildings in the city. It received its name from a fire that spread through the castle in 1541, turning its walls black. For many centuries, the tower operated as a debtor's prison, and its original entrance, though walled, is still visible today.
3. **The Lobkowitz Palace:** The Lobkowitz Palace was completed in the second half of the 16th century by Vratislav Pernštejn. The palace passed into the Lobkowitz family in 1603, after the marriage of Vratislav's daughter, Polyxena Pernštejn, to Zdeněk Vojtěch, 1st Prince Lobkowitz. The palace long serving as an important seat for the noble family at the east end of the Prague Castle complex. Barring a period from 1939-2002, the palace has belonged to the Lobkowitz Family and remains open to the public today.

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4. **Bastion:** This bastion remains today outside the eastern gate of the Prague Castle, and it offers panoramic views of the city.
5. **Deer Moat:** This dried moat stretched along the northern ramparts outside of the castle walls. During Rudolf II's reign, these grounds were filled with countless game, including deer, who freely roamed along the verdant slopes. The lush moat surrounding the castle remains today.
6. **Dabilorka Tower:** This tower famously served as a prison until the end of the 18th century. Its name arose from its first prisoner, a young knight by the name of Dalibor of Kozojedy. Legend has it that while imprisoned in the dungeon, he learned violin. His beautiful music flooded the city and inspired sympathy among the people, who brought to him provisions until his day of execution. His story was later turned into a famous opera by Smetana, the Czech composer.
7. **Powder Bridge:** This bridge, built in 1533, connected the Northern end of the Prague Castle to the Royal Gardens. It used to be a covered wooden structure, though that has since been replaced, and it sprawled over the Deer Moat.
8. **Church of Saint Thomas:** The spire of this church, which also housed an Augustinian Monastery, is among the most recognizable in the Mala Strana section of Prague. The church was originally founded by Wenceslas II in the late 13th century, and masses are still held there today.
9. **The Church of our Lady of Victorious:** This Carmelite church was built around the turn of the 17th century. It was to this church that the famed statuette of the Infant Jesus of Prague was donated in 1628 by Polyxena Lobkowitz. The statuette is an important devotional object, and it remains on view for visitors today.
10. **Petřín Hill:** This large hill stretches across the center of Prague. In the 14th century, a defense wall was built on this mountain, and during the era of Rudolf II, it became a popular destination for the emperor's walks. Today, it is filled with parks and woodlands, and since 1891 it has been home to a famous lookout tower, which bears strong resemblances to the Eiffel Tower.
11. **Letna:** Letna is another hill in Prague that parallels the Vltava River. Atop the hill is a large, flat plain that offers beautiful views of all of Prague. In this view, we see the western slope of the hill.
12. **Royal Gardens/Chotek Gardens:** The slope here leads up to the former Royal Gardens that housed Queen Anna's Summer House. In the 17th century, the eastern end of these gardens served as a location to store timber, wood, hay and other provisions for the castle. Today, this eastern garden is known as the Chotek Gardens, named after Count Karel Chotek who turned this area into a public park in 1832.