

# The identity of 'the famous paynter Steven' Not Steven van der Meulen but Steven van Herwijck

*Bendor Grosvenor*

In the inventory of the Lumley collection taken in 1590, a number of pictures are noted as being by 'the famous paynter Steven'.<sup>1</sup> He is cited as painting the portraits 'Of the last Earle of Arundell Fitzallen, drawne wise'; of John, 1st Baron Lumley; of Lumley's first wife, Jane, Lady Lumley; and 'Of the County Egmond executed at Bruxels'.<sup>2</sup> These pictures can be dated to the early 1560s, but this Steven, given his appellation 'famous', was evidently still highly regarded over a quarter of a century later. How ironic then, that art history appears subsequently to have misidentified him, and has not only given him the wrong dates, but the wrong name.

'Steven' is known today as Steven van der Meulen. He is thought to have been practising in England from about 1560 onwards. An *oeuvre* has been proposed for him, by, among others, Sir Roy Strong in his pioneering work *'The English Icon'*, beginning in c1560 and continuing into 1567/8.<sup>3</sup> These pictures are painted in the well established Anglo-Flemish tradition, and follow on from the style practiced most recently in England by Anthonis Mor. The apparent arrival of van der Meulen in England coincides with the production of a number of high-quality Elizabethan portraits by a quite distinctive Flemish hand, which can be dated from the early 1560s onwards. However, the recent emergence of the Hampden portrait of Elizabeth I, a full-length painted in c1563, has led to the discovery of important new evidence on 'Steven's' identity. The Hampden portrait (PI 1) has been attributed with general acceptance to the hand of Steven van der Meulen, and is the finest of what Sir Roy Strong called the 'Barrington Park' portraits of Elizabeth, after a half-length version of the Hampden portrait then at Barrington Park in Oxfordshire.

Wider knowledge of an accomplished Flemish portraitist working in England in the 1560s called Steven has been in existence since George Vertue observed some of his works in the possession of Richard Lumley, 2nd Earl of Scarborough, the then owner of the bulk of the Lumley collection. Vertue noted that 'Stevens, a painter who lived in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth', painted a portrait of Lord Lumley, and some other unidentified sitters then in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire. Vertue also, in his voluminous work, mentioned the medallist known to him as Stephen of Holland or Stephanus Hollandus from a number of signed medals marked 'Ste. H'. There then followed a temptation among art historians to link these two Dutch Stevens, or Stephens, as the same individual. GF Hill, for example, in his 1908 article 'Stephen H., Medallist and Painter',<sup>4</sup> was happy to combine the skills of a medallist and a portrait painter in the same person.

In 1922, however, Victor Tourneur showed conclusively in the *Numismatic Chronicle* that the medallist 'Ste H.' could be identified as 'Steven van Herwijck, Cornelissone', born in Utrecht in c1530. Van Herwijck appears, by the sitters of his recorded and dated medals, to have been in Utrecht in 1558, at Antwerp 1559-61, in Poland 1561-2, England in 1562-3, back in the Low Countries briefly in 1564 and early 1565, and then in England till his apparent death between 1565-7. He was clearly well regarded and known throughout Europe. He is described in the Guild of St Luke at Antwerp in 1558 as 'Steven van Hertwijck, beeldsnijdere' (that is to say, portraitist/sculptor).

But Tourneur presumed that a medallist could not also be the 'paynter Steven'. Casting about for a painter named Steven, he suggested the name Steven van der Meulen. This artist was apprenticed to Willem van Cleve in Antwerp in 1543, and the same artist was later apparently recorded in London in 1560. Van der Meulen was referred to as a 'pictor' in the records of the Huguenot church in London, with whom he got into trouble on a question of baptism. On 4 February 1562 van der Meulen became naturalised. We know little else about him. Nevertheless, the name van der Meulen has since entered the literature, and, despite there being no other evidence save the coincidence of two Dutch artists called Steven, has become firmly attached to the identity of the 'famous paynter Steven'. His name has since been repeated unquestioningly by art historians.

Matters were confused, however, by Elizabeth Drey's recent discovery of the will of one 'Stephen Vandermuellen', written on 5 October 1563 and proved in January 1564. This, it is now claimed, has 'dramatically narrowed the artist's oeuvre'.<sup>5</sup> Pictures once attributed to Steven van der Meulen and dated up to 1567/8 have therefore been rejected. But few questioned instead whether the discovery of Vandermuellen's demise ruled out the attachment of that name to the oeuvre of the 'paynter Steven'.

'Stephen Vandermuellen', living in the parish of St Andrew Undershaff in London made a nuncupative will, that is, he indicated his final wishes but died before signing a will setting these out. He provided for his wife Gertrude and his two sons Rumold and Eric as well as remembering other relatives. He left all his property abroad to his father Rumold. On 15 January 1564 the administration of his estate was granted to a group of his friends.<sup>6</sup> There is no evidence in the will to link this man with the 'famous paynter Steven'.

There is in fact much more evidence to suggest that the 'paynter Steven' is Steven van Herwijck after all. Steven van Herwijck, despite now only being known as a medallist, was described to William Cecil by the Flemish poet Charles Utenhove not only as an 'eximious sculptor', but as '*Steph. Pictor*' in c1564.<sup>7</sup> Van Herwijck described himself in 1565 as a '*conterfeytere ende medalyeur oft beeltsnydere*'; that is, a 'portraitist and a medallist or sculptor'.<sup>8</sup> Intriguingly, this last description is contained in his appeal to the Antwerp authorities to be exempt from paying tax there on the grounds that he was settled in England with his family in order to complete '*zekere wercken*', or 'certain works', for Queen Elizabeth, which would require at least three years. His appeal was rejected by the cash-hungry authorities, because van Herwijck could not sufficiently prove that he was working for the Queen.

Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the significance of a Flemish professed portraitist working in England, apparently for the Queen, at a time when we suddenly see the production of a series of quality portraits of Elizabeth, all apparently modelled on the Hampden picture or the 'Barrington Park' picture, which in turn have been attributed by some, such as Strong, to the hand of Steven van der Meulen. According to Strong, some of the Barrington Park type are dated as late as 1567.<sup>9</sup> Another example of this type



1 *The Hampden Portrait of Elizabeth I*. Oil on panel transferred on to canvas, 196 by 140 cm. Private Collection © Philip Mould Ltd



2 *Steven van Herwijck* by Anthonis Mor (was this man the 'Famous Paynter Steven?'). Oil on panel, 118 x 89 cm. © Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague

3 *Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel*. Oil on panel, 107 x 83 cm. This portrait was sold as 'attributed to Sir Antonio Mor' in 1996. © Sothebys

4 *Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel* (apparently a version of portrait in PI 3). Oil on panel. This picture, with its Lumley *cartellino*, must be one of those recorded in 1590 as being by 'Steven'. Copyright reserved; private collection. Photograph National Portrait Gallery, London

of head has come to light recently, from an English private collection (PI 5).

The discovery of Steven van Herwijck's will by the present author contains valuable information. It appears to prove that van Herwijck was indeed a painter, and that Tournear was wrong to assume that he could not be 'the famous paynter Steven'. In the records of the prerogative court of Canterbury there is a copy of the will of 'Stephen Vanherwicke of the parishe of alhalowyne barkinge within the Citie of London marchante'. This man died sometime between making his will on 22 August 1566 and its being proved on 24 March 1567. After asking to be buried in the churchyard of Allhallows Barking, he left 20 shillings to be distributed among the poor of the parish. He left half his goods 'as well as being in the parties beyond the sea as within this realme of Englande' to his wife Johane and half to his sons Abraham and Stephen who were to be brought up in 'learninge and vertue' until reaching their majority, and in the event of their deaths their portion was to be divided between his 'next kindred' and the 'nexte kindred of my saide wife Johane'. He named his wife sole executrix. The will was witnessed by two London merchants, Cornelius Raynes and 'John Dymocke'.<sup>10</sup> Although the testator described himself as a merchant, we should not overlook the fact that in 16th-century England 'merchant' was a rather loose term used to cover a diversity of business activity. There are compelling reasons for identifying this testator with the medallist Steven van Herwijck. First, the names of the merchant's wife and his children accord with those known for the medallist. Secondly, the medallist cast a medal of Mary Dymock, John's wife, which Tournear dated 1562 (British Museum). And finally, after 1567 John Dymock is mentioned as being the landlord of the widowed 'Johane van Herwijcke', Steven's wife, when she was living in the adjoining parish of St Dunstan-in-the-East.<sup>11</sup>

5 *Version of the Hampden Portrait* (head and shoulders, with a later apocryphal inscription). Oil on panel, 46 x 36 cm. Private collection

6 *King Erik XIV of Sweden*, 'attributed to Steven van der Meulen'. Oil on canvas, 186 x 104 cm. ©The National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm

The most important evidence here is the mention of the merchant John Dymock (c1493-1585). As we shall see below, Dymock's relationship with Steven van Herwijck indicates that van Herwijck, the acknowledged medallist, must also have been a painter – and therefore capable of producing some of the works given to the 'paynter Steven' in the guise of Stephen van der Meulen.

In 1561 John Dymock went on a semi-official visit to the court of Erik XIV of Sweden.<sup>12</sup> Details of the voyage appear in answers given by Dymock to the Privy Council on 6 August 1562. Four other men were interrogated about the same matter on the same day.<sup>13</sup> Dymock's account records that he had travelled to Sweden described as 'the queen's servant' in order to sell jewels and furs to Erik. On the eve of his departure he had met 'a certain honest Dutchman, a cunning painter, who should make the haven at Dover, to know if it were possible to get him his denizenship, so that he might work here quietly'. Dymock had persuaded this Dutchman to join the expedition so that 'he could get the King's picture' and had obtained the approval of John Astley, the master of the jewel house, for his proposition. Dymock did not name the 'honest Dutchman', but we know from Swedish accounts of the expedition that the artist who ultimately painted Erik's portrait was called, by the Swedes, 'Master Steffan'. He was also described as a 'Hollandsk Konterfegare' (portraitist), and was paid 100 daler for the King's portrait.<sup>14</sup> Dymock's cunning Dutch painter must therefore have been called 'Steffan', or, Steven. It has generally been assumed that the portrait in question is the full-length now in Gripsholm Castle (PI 6). This fine picture, which is now classed as 'attributed to Steven van der Meulen', was formerly in an English collection (Marwell Hall, Winchester), and was traditionally associated with Erik's ill-starred attempt to woo Elizabeth I in the early 1560s. It is painted on canvas and could thus have been despatched to England in order to impress the Queen. It is equally possible that 'Master Steffan' also painted another portrait of Erik, now in Meiningen, Germany.

It therefore seems evident, given the close relationship that both 'Master Steffan' the 'cunning' painter and Steven van Herwijck the medallist enjoyed with John Dymock, that we are dealing with the same person. The only alternative explanation is that John Dymock was unusually well acquainted with Flemish artists called 'Steven' between 1561-7. There is, at the very least, more evidence to link Steven van Herwijck to the name of the 'paynter Steven' than the otherwise obscure Steven van der Meulen.

There is further circumstantial evidence to link Steven van Herwijck with the man thought to be the 'famous paynter Steven'. The subjects of a number of van Herwijck's medals are worth noting. A sitter to van Herwijck the medallist was George Egmont, Bishop of Utrecht (1558), whose brother, Lamoral, Count of Egmont, 'Steven' is recorded as painting in the Lumley inventory. Were the two commissions related? Another medal thought to be by van Herwijck is of Anthonis Mor,<sup>15</sup> whose style the 'paynter Steven' has been noted as following. This has obvious links to a portrait thought to be of van Herwijck by Mor himself (PI 2). We may reasonably ask, therefore, whether Van Herwijck the painter acquired some of his painting skills from Mor?



Here, it may be worth considering an important portrait of Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel. In the first attempt to create an oeuvre for the artist Stephen Van der Meulen in *The English Icon*, Strong included three portraits of the Earl of Arundel as likely candidates for the two mentioned in the Lumley inventory as being painted by 'Steven'. One of these examples (PI 3), a fine portrait that descended in the Howard family, has since been attributed by some to Mor, and was sold as 'attributed to Sir Antonio Mor' by Sothebys in 1996 (London, 10 July 1996, lot 14). It certainly seems, in areas such as the decoration of the sword and the sitter's left hand, to be painted with a level of quality above that seen in the few works that are today certainly accepted as being by 'Steven', that is, in his 'Stephen van der Meulen' guise. The point is further reinforced by comparison with what must be one of the pictures of Arundel mentioned in the Lumley inventory as being by 'Steven'. This picture has a Lumley cartellino, and is published here for the first time (PI 4). It is inferior to the version attributed to Mor, and the different quality can immediately be seen in the hands, the face, and details such as the sword. It was sold at Christies in 1979 (23 November, ex-Commander Philips collection), and was apparently not known by Strong, who did not include it among his selection of pictures that were once thought to be in the Lumley collection in *The English Icon*. If Plate 3 here is indeed by Mor, and if it was therefore Mor's original that was copied by Steven for the Lumley collection, then we have, alongside the medal of Mor and the portrait of van Herwijck by Mor, a further link between the two artists.

Nothing that we know of van Herwijck's evidently peripatetic career, which is reasonably well documented from facts such as the sitters in his dated medals, rules out the possibility that he was also the 'paynter Steven'. In fact, if he is the 'paynter Steven' it is possible to reconstruct a quite plausible biography from the late 1550s until his death. We find Dutch medal sitters from the late 1550s until 1561, with a short journey to Italy in 1557. In early 1561 he met John Dymock, and in March 1561 painted Erik XIV's portrait. In late 1561 early 1562 he made medals of the King and Queen of Poland, no doubt travelling directly from Sweden to Poland.<sup>16</sup> Then, from 1562 we find a flurry of English sitters, such as Thomas Stanley, Maria Dymock, William, Marquess of Northampton, and William, Earl of Pembroke. This last sitter also appears in a portrait now called 'attributed to Steven van der Meulen' (PI 8) and offered as such at Sothebys, London on 15 June 2000 (lot 10). This picture, with its similar handling, background and presentation of the coat-of-arms has a good claim to be by the same hand as the portrait of Robert Dudley in a private collection (reproduced in, for example, K Hearn ed, *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, 1995, p97), which in turn strikes the present author as being close to the presentation of the Queen in the Hampden picture – it is not impossible that all these pictures are by the same artist. The few later, European, sitters of van Herwijck the medallist accord with the dates of his brief returns to the Continent, such as his visit to Antwerp in 1564, but he seems to have settled in England from about 1562.<sup>17</sup>

Stephen van Herwijck was, it seems, an example of those highly trained Flemish artist/craftsmen able to practise their trade across Europe in the 16th century. In one parish registry he was even described, after his death, as a 'cutter of stones for rings', and probably worked in this capacity for Dymock.<sup>18</sup> In short, he was just the sort of multi-talented man one might describe in the 16th century as the 'famous paynter Steven'.

If 'Steven' is van Herwijck, then the chance to extend the group of paintings attributed to him beyond the 1563/4 cut-off date so recently imposed by the discovery of poor Steven van der Meulen's will is something of a luxury. We can perhaps look again at some of the works once attributed to van der Meulen by scholars such as Strong. At the time of writing, poor reproductions and the presence of many works in unknown private collections makes a thorough examination of Steven's putative oeuvre hazardously difficult. But we can with confidence include the following extant portraits, either on documentary basis, or by close stylistic similarities:

*Erik XIV of Sweden*, 1561, Gripsholm Castle, Sweden;  
*John, 1st Baron Lumley and his first wife Jane, Lady Lumley*, apparently inscribed 1563, Lord Scarborough collection (reproduced in Roy Strong, *The English Icon* p121);  
*Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel*, location unknown, ex-Commander Philips collection, reproduced above; called *Sir Thomas Gresham*, inscribed 1563, private collection (reproduced in Roy Strong, *The English Icon*, p125);  
*Catherine, Lady Knollys*, Yale Center for British Art.

Among the many pictures attributable, or possibly attributable, on stylistic grounds are:

*The 'Hampden Portrait' of Elizabeth I*, private collection, formerly in the collection of the Earls of Buckinghamshire;  
*'The Barrington Park' Elizabeth I*, private collection (reproduced in Roy Strong, *The English Icon*, p31);  
*Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester*, c1563, private collection (reproduced in Roy Strong, *The English Icon*, p132, and in K Hearn, ed, *Dynasties...*, p97);  
*Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk*, 1565, National Portrait Gallery, London;  
*Thomas Percy, 7th Earl of Northumberland*, private Collection.<sup>19</sup>

Further research will, it is hoped, enable an *oeuvre* of the 'paynter Steven' to be more fully collated. But perhaps the most important advance in scholarship will be the extent to which we can prove his involvement in the formulation of the Queen's portraits. As we have seen, Steven van Herwijck claimed to be working for the Queen on a number of works or projects over a number of years. This claim is given credence by his engagement to produce a medal to commemorate the Treaty of Troyes, which, in 1564, brought an end to the war between England and France. Van Herwijck's medal was unknown until a single example surfaced from a ploughed field at Great Moulton in 1962 (PI 7), and was snapped up by Sir Roy Strong for the National Portrait Gallery in the same year. And yet, if van Herwijck was truthfully telling the Antwerp authorities that his work for Elizabeth would require three years, then should we look for more than one ploughed-up medal as proof of his labour in England for the Queen? Can we instead conclude with an even greater certainty that Steven, in his painting guise, was the artist behind the Hampden portrait and the subsequent Barrington Park type portraits?

Here we should perhaps look closely at the 1563 Privy Council proclamation concerning Elizabeth's portraits, one of the most important documents on Tudor portraiture. The earliest portraits of Elizabeth as Queen (such as the accession portraits of c1558 best typified by the 'Clopton' portrait now on display at the National Portrait Gallery, Washington) are testament to the Queen's initial aesthetic indifference to her image at her accession. There were other more pressing matters, such as the war with France inherited from Mary I and a new religious settlement. But in 1563 the Council turned its attention to the relatively poor quality of Elizabeth's early portraiture, 'which did nothing resemble' her, and took



7 *Elizabeth I* by Steven van Herwijck. Medal. Lead, 4.8 cm diam. Found in a ploughed field in 1963, the only surviving example. © National Portrait Gallery, London

8 *William, Earl of Pembroke*, attributed to Steven van der Meulen. Oil on panel, 111 x 84 cm. Pembroke was also portrayed by the medallist Steven van Herwijck. © Sothebys 111 x 84



steps to stop production of such images. A proclamation was drawn up forbidding reproductions of the Queen's portrait until 'some special person' had been selected to paint an approved likeness, which 'after finished, her majesty will content that all other painters or gravers' could then copy.<sup>20</sup>

It is surely no coincidence that the Hampden portrait not only presents the Queen at her most 'official' (in front of the royal coat-of-arms, a cloth of state and the throne), but was replicated in a number of highly finished smaller examples in just the way envisaged by the Privy Council. It is tempting to assume, therefore, that the artist who painted them or oversaw their production was the 'special person' the council had in mind. What we already know about Steven's likely sitters or connections suggests a circle of patronage out of which the Queen and the Privy Council would have had ample opportunities to be acquainted with the artist's work before his possible commission to paint the Hampden por-

trait. For example, as we have seen, 'Steven' was known to William Cecil. He also painted portraits of two of the most noted patrons in England, Arundel and his son-in-law Lumley. Arundel, who as we have seen may be a plausible link between Mor and 'Steven', was Lord Steward when the Hampden portrait was commissioned and thus well placed to recommend Steven to paint the Queen. Of further interest may be the link between another of Steven's sitters, Catherine, Lady Knollys, who was not only the Queen's cousin, but the wife of Sir Francis Knollys, vice-chamberlain of the household and a member of the Privy Council. Was Steven van Herwijck therefore the 'special person' mentioned by the Privy Council, and was he the artist behind Elizabeth's first important portraits?

1 I am grateful to Alasdair Hawkyard for his assistance in drawing up this article.

2 L Cust, 'The Lumley Inventories', *Walpole Society*, VI (1918), pp22-32.

3 See Roy Strong, *The English Icon, Elizabethan & Jacobean Portraiture*, 1969, p119-134.

4 GF Hill 'Stephen H., Medallist and Painter', *The Burlington Magazine*, XIII (1907-8), pp355-63.

5 PG Matthews and Elizabeth Drey-Brown, 'Meulen, Steven van der (d. 1563/4)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

6 The National Archives (TNA), PROB 11/ 47, fol14.

7 See Jav van Dorsten, 'Steven van Herwyck's Elizabeth (1565) – A Franco-Flemish Political Medal', in *The Burlington Magazine*, CXI, (March 1969), p143. The letter is calendared 1st January 1563, but Dorsten claims this is erroneous and dates it 1 January 1565.

8 Victor Tournour, 'Steven Van Herwijck', *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 5th series, vol II (1922), p102.

9 Roy Strong, *Gloriana, The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (1987), p61.

10 TNA, PROB 11/49, fols56-56v.

11 Tournour, p109.

12 *CPR*, 1558-60, p334; *CSPFor*, 1562, p220.

13 *CSP For*, 1562, pp217-25, particularly pp223, 220.

14 Sixten Strömbom, 'A Flemish Painter at the Swedish Court, 1561', in *Actes du XVII<sup>me</sup> Congres International D'Histoire de L'Art, Amsterdam 23-31 Juillet 1952*, The Hague, 1955, p362.

15 See for example, GF Hill 'Recent Acquisitions for Public Collections-IV', *The Burlington Magazine*, XXXIII (August 1918), p59.

16 There are no known German sitters in van Herwijck's oeuvre, which could suggest that he did not travel by land to Poland from Holland.

17 He may even be the probable

Dutchman 'Cornelius Stephens' naturalised in March 1562.

18 Tournour, p109.

19 I have left out the portrait of John, 1st Baron Lumley, currently catalogued as 'attributed to Steven van der Meulen' in the National Portrait Gallery, London ( NPG 5262), as it is so different from the portrait of Lumley in the Scarborough collection.

20 Paul L Hughes and James F Larkin, ed., *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 3 vols, New Haven, 1964, II, pp240-1.