

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Cornelis Liefrinck

(Leiden c. 1581 – after 1652)

*The departure of Puritans  
from Delft harbour to join  
the 'Speedwell' to the  
New World*

1620

Oil on oak panel

44.7 x 58.1 cm.;

17 4/8 x 22 7/8 in.

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## Provenance

The Duke of Marlborough Collection, Blenheim Palace (according to a label on the reverse);  
Collection of the Anglo-American painter George Henry Boughton (1833-1905), London/New  
York, by 1895;

(presumably) By descent to his wife Katherine Louise Boughton née Cullen (1845-1919);  
Collection of the ambassador James John Van Alen (1848-1923), Newport, Rhode Island;  
By descent to his wife Margaret Louise Van Alen Bruguière née Post (1876-1969);  
Her deceased sale, Christie's London, 5 December 1969, lot 61 (as Flemish School 17th  
century);

Bought by the consortium of dealers Herbert Terry-Engell, London (advertised in Apollo,  
May 1970), Hermann Abels, Cologne, and Evert Douwes, Amsterdam (as by Adam van  
Breen and as depicting the Pilgrim Fathers with the Mayflower);

Purchased from the latter, 26 October 1972, by a Swiss private collector

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## Litterature

- Not in the Blenheim Palace collection catalogue of 1862 (by George Scharf) - Harper's  
Weekly, Vol. XXXIX, no. 1994 (March 9, 1895), p. 228 (ill.)

- Joseph Dillaway Sawyer and William Elliot Griffis, History of the Pilgrims and Puritans.  
Their ancestry and descendants, basis of Americanization, New York 1922, ill. p. 248 (as the  
Departure of the Speedwell from Delfshaven)

- F. Ziner, The Pilgrims and Plymouth Colony, New York 1961, p. 53 - L.W. Cowie, The  
Pilgrim Fathers, London 1970, pp. 50-51 (as the Departure of the Speedwell from  
Delfshaven), pp. 50-51 & cover (ill.)

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- Nick Bunker, Making haste from Babylon. The Mayflower Pilgrims and Their World. A new History, New York, 2010, cover (ill.)
  - Laura Hamilton Waxman, Why did the Pilgrims come to the New World? And other Questions about the Plymouth Colony, Minneapolis, 2010, p. 15 (ill.) Otto Nelemans, Lost in interpretation. De zoektocht naar een verloren titel van een schilderij van Adam Willaerts (1577-1664), Utrecht, 2020, p. 17, fig. 19 (as by Adam van Breen)
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## Exhibited

- Terry-Engell Gallery, London, Twenty-Five important Dutch and Flemish Master Paintings, no. 2 (as by Adam van Breen and with 'illegible signature')
- Abels Gemälde-Galerie, Cologne, Niederländische Gemälde von 1540-1700, 15 April – 31 May 1972, ill. cat. p. 7 (as by Adam van Breen and reported as being signed)

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LONDON

NEW YORK

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The present picture (Fig 1.) is part of the collective memory of all those interested in the early history of the United States, as it is reproduced in many publications dealing with the Pilgrim Fathers and their exodus to the New World. In 1608, a group of about a hundred deeply religious Calvinists, refusing to subordinate themselves to the ordinance of the Anglican church, set sail from Nottinghamshire to escape persecution under James I. Their leader, the elderman William Brewster, chose to set course to the Dutch Republic, known for its religious tolerance. After a short stay in Amsterdam they settled in the city of Leiden, where they moved into some small houses, also known as the *Wevershuisjes*, close to the *Pieterskerk* church. Even though they were allowed to have their own sermons and to live life according to their principals, the group were weighed down by poor poverty. Besides, their leaders feared assimilation with lesser orthodox puritans within the Leiden community.

From 1617 the idea emerged to emigrate to the 'New World'. Here they would eventually start a society in compliance with their strict interpretation of the Bible. The ship 'Speedwell' was equipped to transport a selection of members from the group, and the departure took place from Delfshaven as soon as July 1620. The painting shows the ship and its passengers in advance of their long journey, probably at the very moment they took off for a Day of Solemn Humiliation, of fasting and Bible lecture. In all their actions, the colonists coordinated with God to be assured of His approval.

The intention for the 'Speedwell' had been to join the ship 'Mayflower' off the coast of Southampton, from where the two ships with pilgrims would continue in convoy. Unfortunately, the 'Speedwell' proved unfit for the transatlantic journey as it leaked. Therefore, the crew of the Dutch ship went on board of the 'Mayflower'. After some detours the puritans arrived in Massachusetts where they established Plymouth Colony. At the very beginning the inexperienced settlers met with the friendliness of the local native Americans, who supported them in their basic needs.

Until this day the story of the Pilgrim Fathers is a central theme in the history and culture of the United States. It has been calculated that there may be as many as 35 million living descendants of the Pilgrims worldwide. The settlers in Plymouth Colony are credited with

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organizing the first Thanksgiving Day, which would have derived from the October 3rd-celebrations in Leiden, honouring the Relief of the city from the Spanish siege.

A citizen of Leiden and later bailiff of the neighbouring village of Rijnsburg, the painter Cornelis Lieftrinck lived in the Mandemakerssteeg, not far from the Pieterskerk. He was the son of a painter-cartographer from Antwerp, Hans Lieftrinck II, a specialist in the maritime genre, who must have been Adam Willaerts master during the latter's sojourn in Leiden. As Otto Nelemans has observed, the figure of the markententser walking a dog in the left foreground of our picture, also appears in Willaerts' painting of *'The Departure of the Pilgrim Fathers from Delfshaven'* in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (access.no. 2020.408) (Fig 2).

Cornelis Lieftrinck, in turn, may be credited for being Willem van de Velde the Elder's master. The Van de Velde family inhabited a house in the very same alley as the Lieftrinck's did. Apart from that, in 1621, the young Willem and his father joined their neighbour as a representative of the city's militia on a mission to Grave in Brabant. The operation is the subject of a series of three etchings by Lieftrinck junior, dating from 1622. The idiosyncratic rendering of the masts in one of these prints is remarkably equal to our picture. The staffage - most particularly the dog - compares well to Lieftrinck's signed picture in the Lakenhal, Leiden (inv.no. S 3533).

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Additional information on the attribution of the subject:

We have gone back to the accounts of two directly involved, namely that of Edward Winslow (Edward Winslow, *Hyprocrisy unmasked: by a true relation of the proceedings of the Governour and company &c.*, London 1646, pp. 90-91) and that of William Bradford. The original of the latter account was lost during the Civil War, but Young (Alexander Young, *Chronicles of the Pilgrim fathers of the colony of Plymouth, from 1602-1625*, Boston 1841) and Arber (Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1606-1623 A.D.; as told by Themselves, their Friends, and their Enemies*, London 1897) quote from a copy thereof.

Both sources describe the actions prior to departure from Delfshaven. From the community, the strongest and most healthy representatives had been chosen to venture the perilous crossing, a substantial proportion – albeit less than half – of the Leiden-based Puritans. To illustrate the situation: Bradford took his wife on board, but they left their young child behind in Leiden.

After farewell ceremonies in Leiden, which lasted two days and consisted of celebration and prayer, the almost entire community left Leiden for Delfshaven, where the 'Speedwell' was already waiting. A fleet consisting of small ships, the caravel ships depicted in the center of the painting, reached Delfshaven via the Schie. The small ships were able to pass through the narrow passage between the Schie and the Oude Haven, where the transshipment took place. Here a delegation of like-minded people who had come from Amsterdam joined the group to participate in the farewell festivities.

The name of the 'Speedwell' first appears in a source from 1669, the ship is not mentioned by name by Winslow and Bradford. As can be seen in the painting on the left, with a load of sixty tons, it was a ship of modest proportions. According to recent sources, the ship would have participated in the battle with the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Although the sources are silent about the exact place of the Speedwell, the painter has located the ship on the Waaldijk. The dike dated from 1601 and lay between the Maas and the Buizenwaal or Kolk, where the VOC wharf was located. From the Meuse there was a

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direct connection to the North Sea, the ship could quickly leave for England when the wind was favourable, and the tide was high. The painting seems to represent the situation at low tide.

The crucial sentence regarding the course of events in Delfshaven is found in Winslow: “*After this they accompanied us to Delphs Haven, where wee were to imbarque, and there feasted us againe*”. The festivities lasted into the night and the final departure did not take place until the next day, as Bradford also testifies. The celebratory flag was not only there on arrival, but also on departure and the accompanying festivities.

The situation depicted in the painting is therefore after embarkation and installation on the ship, but before departure for Southampton, which after all did not take place until the following day. By 17th-century standards, this is a fast course of action, assuming that sometimes several days (and in some cases even weeks) had to be waited for favourable winds. This was a common part of a departure, such as the security check or handing in luggage at the airport for us.

The information about the ship from the accounts of contemporaries does not extend beyond the mention of the tonnage (sixty). In recent historiography, attempts have been made to gain more knowledge about the ship's origin and appearance by combining data. The most common reading, based on research by amateur historians (without mention of archival sites and therefore not testable) is as follows: the Speedwell is said to have been put into service in 1577 under the name *Swiftsure*. It would be a 60-ton pinas (pinnace) equipped with three masts. The ship is said to have fought against the Spanish Armada in 1588 and in 1596 to have

taken part in an expedition to the Azores in a fleet led by the Earl of Essex. Captain Blossom purchased the Speedwell in July 1620. This is the information propagated by the Pilgrim Hall Museum and reproduced without alteration on the English Wikipedia page about the Speedwell.

Only the purchase by Blossom in July 1620 can be supported by contemporary sources. Otherwise, there is much to suggest that this representation of the facts is incorrect:

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- The Swiftsure that took part in the Spanish Armada was a ship of 232 tons (stated according to the fleet list in exh.cat. 'Armada 1588-1988. An international exhibition to commemorate the Spanish Armada', Greenwich, 20.-4-04.09. 1988, p. 156), so four times as large.
- The Swiftsure wasn't a pinas. The first ship of this type to be launched in England at Chatham Dockyard was the Sunne in 1586.
- English pinaxes had a size of about 100 tons.
- There is no historical evidence that the Swiftsure/Speedwell passed over to the Leiden Puritans.
- Recently an entry has been found in the Southampton records, dated October 26, 1606, of the construction of the ship the Speedwell of Hampton. Local archivists have suggested that this may be the ship in which they made the crossing in 1620.

A ship of sixty tons equipped with three masts would be quite exceptional. Moreover, such a ship would be unmanageable for an inexperienced crew of less than 70 men. The age of 43 years is exceptionally old for a ship that was involved in crossing the Atlantic Ocean. It seems that amateur historiography has shaped our representation of the Speedwell. This historiography is the basis of all modern models that are built after the ship. Online there are numerous examples where a model of the early 18th century Speedwell, a three-master sailing the South Seas, is depicted to illustrate the ship that departed from Delfshaven in 1620. (Fig 3.) Literature on the 18th-century ship: George Shelvocke, *A voyage round the world By the Way of the Great South Sea, Perform'd in the Years 1719, 20, 21, 22 in the Speedwell of London*, London 1726; K.E. Poolman, *The Speedwell voyage. A tale of piracy and mutiny in the eighteenth century*, New York 2000.

The Pilgrim Hall Museum itself has a painting attributed to Abraham de Verwer in its collection, which depicts a ship that, according to a caption, is the speedwell. In reality, it is a



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painted copy of a print from the series 'Navium Variæ Figuræ et Formæ' by Wenceclaus Hollar from 1647 and a Brussels 'heu' (cargo/passenger ship) is depicted. This heu is also a one-master.

The painting by Adam Willaerts in Boston, also identified by some as the departure of the Speedwell, also shows a one-master, almost identical. The vendor in the foreground of Willaert's painting also appears in Liefrinck's composition. The paintings were most likely made at the same time by the two painters.

The Speedwell is named after the flower of the same name (Veronica). The flowers (the red water speedwell, ubiquitous in western Holland) in the characteristic flags of the ship in Liefrinck's painting could relate to this naming. The speedwell flower, or veronica flower, an important symbol in Christianity, is named after St. Veronica, who accompanied Jesus on the way to the mountain. She is therefore associated with (permanent) departure.

Although it was not known that Speedwell/Ereprijs was given at the departure of travelers/ships in the Netherlands, this is the case in England. Given the origin of the Pilgrim Fathers, the representation of these flowers, around an image (an allegory, personification, or coat of arms) as usual on celebration flags, is therefore plausible. Although these flags, made of silk, were very expensive, it makes sense that the Pilgrim Fathers used them anyway. After all, it was an almost obligatory tradition and with their connections in the silk trade, it was not impossible to obtain.

Incidentally, it remains important to bear in mind that ship flags are made up by most painters and appear in the same form consistently throughout their paintings. Only with Van der Velde, for example, are the flags correct, except for a few depictions of battles, where he was not personally present).

The Rijksmuseum's flag research project will probably reveal the exact meaning, but no research has yet been carried out into flag representations. Incidentally, Jeroen ter Brugge asked for photos of the flags and stated that these are very possibly not just made up.

The latter is underlined by the fact that the flag can already be seen on the under drawing below the painting (Fig 4.).

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Fig 1. Cornelis Liefrinck (Leiden c. 1581 – after 1652) *The departure of Puritans from Delft harbour to join the 'Speedwell' to the New World, 1620*. Colnaghi Gallery



Fig 2. Adam Willaerts, *The Departure of the Pilgrim Fathers from Delfshaven on their Way to America, 1620*. Oil on panel. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.

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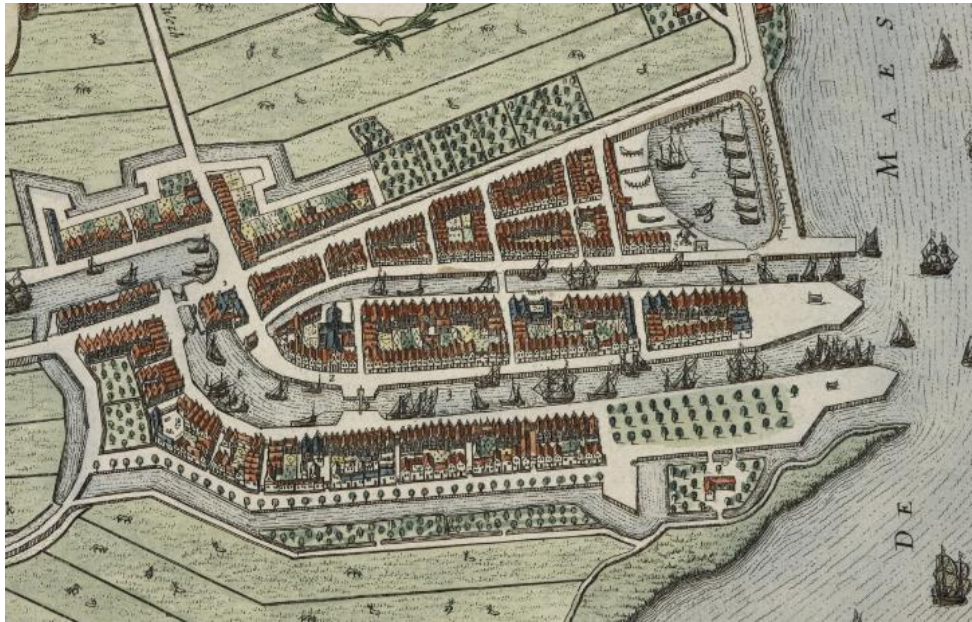


Fig 3. Detail of the map of Delftdshaven from 1632, with at the top right the docks where the Speedwell is depicted on the painting.

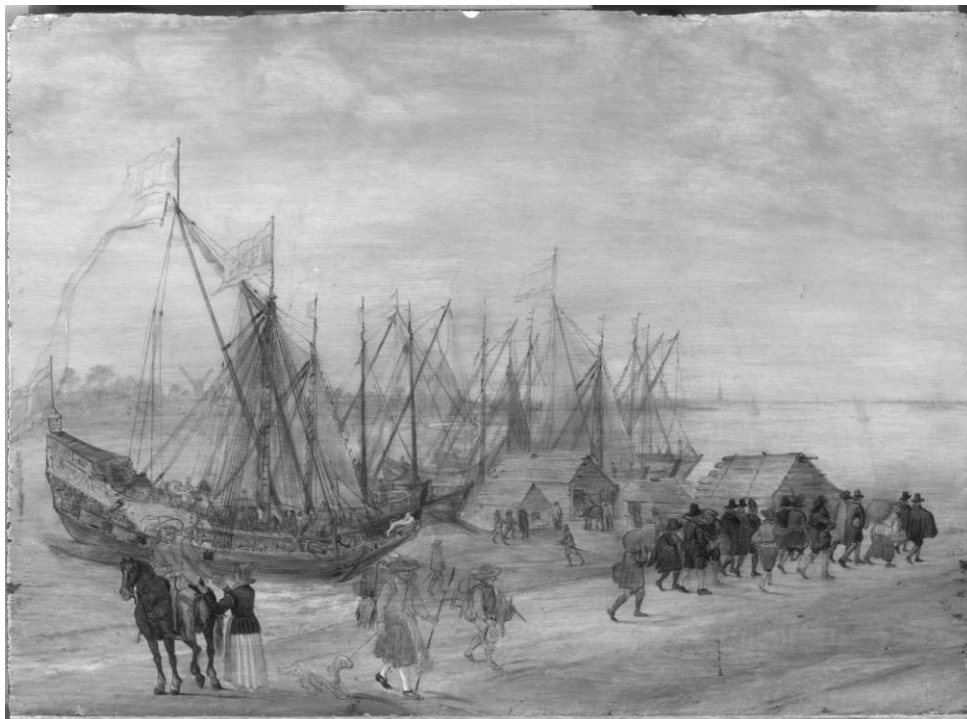


Fig 4. Infrared image of our painting.