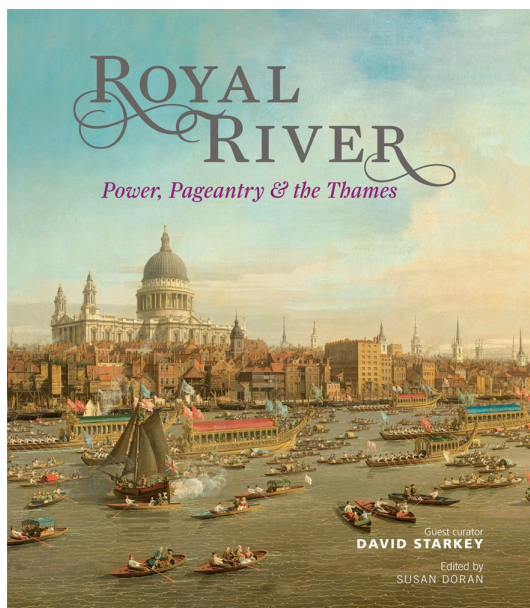




New Netherland Institute
Exploring America's Dutch Heritage

OORLOGSBUIT: DUTCH WAR BOOTY BACK IN ENGLAND

By Peter Douglas



After 345 years, in March 2012 a magnificent relic of the Anglo-Dutch wars returned to England, at least temporarily. As part of the celebrations for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, the Rijksmuseum has loaned to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich the ornate carving that once decorated the stern of the warship *Royal Charles*, captured by the Dutch in 1667.

HRH Willem Alexander, Prince of Orange, was present when the carving was taken aboard the Royal Netherlands Navy ship *Holland*, and both the Prince of Orange and HRH Prince Michael of Kent witnessed the official loan ceremony in London.

Built in 1655 for the Commonwealth Navy, the *Royal Charles* was originally named *Naseby* after Cromwell's victory over Charles I at the battle of that name, fought near Northampton in 1645. The ship was renamed in 1660—Naseby being too painful a reminder of Cromwell's rule—in honor of the new King, Charles II. Charles not only gave his name to the ship but also the royal coat of arms, supported by the lion and the unicorn, which formed the ship's impressive stern piece.

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The career of the 80-gun three-decker was brief, only twelve years. She took part in the Second Anglo-Dutch War, fighting in the Battle of Lowestoft in 1665, and in 1666 in the Four Days Battle and the St. James Day Battle. The pride of the English fleet came to a less than heroic end, for at the raid on the Medway in June 1667, along with the *Unity*, she was captured and taken in triumph to the Netherlands by Admiral Michiel de Ruyter.

For six years the *Royal Charles* was kept on public view at the dock in Hellevoetsluis. The Dutch never took her into service for she drew too much water for general use on the Dutch coast. She was scrapped in 1673, with only her stern preserved. At the end of the 19th century the Navy presented the carving to the Rijksmuseum, where it has been on public display ever since.

The stern carving is just over twelve feet wide and nine feet tall, and weighs about 1,650 pounds. The piece will be one of the highlights of an exhibition entitled “Royal River: Power, Pageantry, and the Thames,” from April 27 to September 9, 2012. A sense of history and the passage of almost three and a half centuries have, one hopes, finally recast what was once an embarrassing reminder of an English naval disaster into a unique, splendid, and fascinating artifact of the Second Anglo-Dutch War.