NICHOLAS HILLIARD'S PARISIAN ATELIER

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While reading Elizabeth Goldring's new monograph on Nicholas Hilliard (1647-1619), I was most anxious to discover what she had written about my all-time favourite artist in Paris and what she may have discovered while I was researching the same topic at the same time. One note struck me, about Hilliard's whereabouts in Saint-Germain des Prés, back in 1578 where he is supposed to hold a studio.

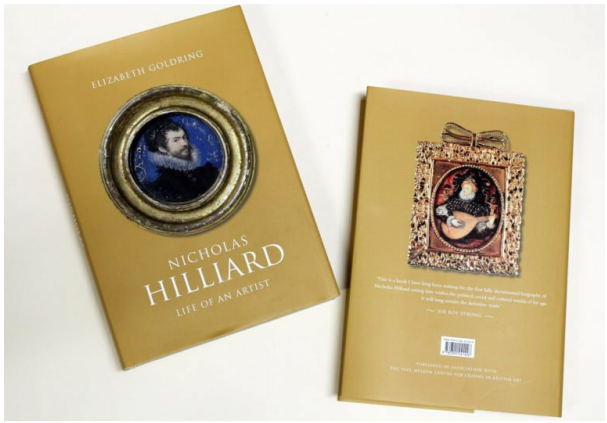


Fig. 1 Elizabeth Goldring's new publication: Nicholas Hilliard: Life of an artist, Yale University press, 2019 © Yale University Press

Saint-Germain des Prés in the Late Sixteenth Century:

Sixteenth-century Paris was surrounded by city walls, built by Philippe-Auguste in the end of the twelfth century (Fig. 2 illustrated in blue). Within the walls, work and daily life were heavily regulated, whereas fewer rules applied outside the walls. This allowed foreigners, including Huguenots, to settle in the boroughs surrounding Paris, the most important one being Saint-Germain des Prés.



Fig. 2 Sebastian Münster, Map of Paris and its surroundings, 1572. Source: Wikimedia Commons. In the lower right corner, Saint-Germain des Prés.

As a foreigner, and a protestant, there was no way that Hilliard could have set up a studio on his own. In order to settle down in Paris, a foreigner had to become a journeyman for a master for several years, and upon producing an œuvre and paying the corporation's fees, he would have become a freeman of the corporation and set up his own workshop.

By working for the court, Hilliard did enjoy some privileges, as did almost all artists patronised by the royal family. He was able to work within Paris for some time, almost unobserved, which is why most of the extant works from this period are court or English embassy related - these miniatures being painted in a private circle and with the protection of the King's brother or the ambassador. However, this protection seemed to end in March 1578 when the Duke of Alençon was preparing for war in Flanders, and having no need for a painter, released Hilliard (along with a great other number of valets) in order to surround himself with warlords and soldiers. It has been suggested that Hilliard would have worked for Louise de Lorraine (then likely to be in 1578) but no archival records have been found so far that can confirm this hypothesis. We must then suppose that, from March 1578, Hilliard was on his own in Paris and, as he explained to the English ambassador Sir Amyas Paulet, willing "to increase his knowledge by this voyage and upon hope to get a piece of money of the Lords and Ladies here…".[1] It is at this point that Hilliard decided to set up a studio in Saint-Germain des Prés, where the presence of foreign and/or protestant artists, but also wealthy commissioners, was already established.

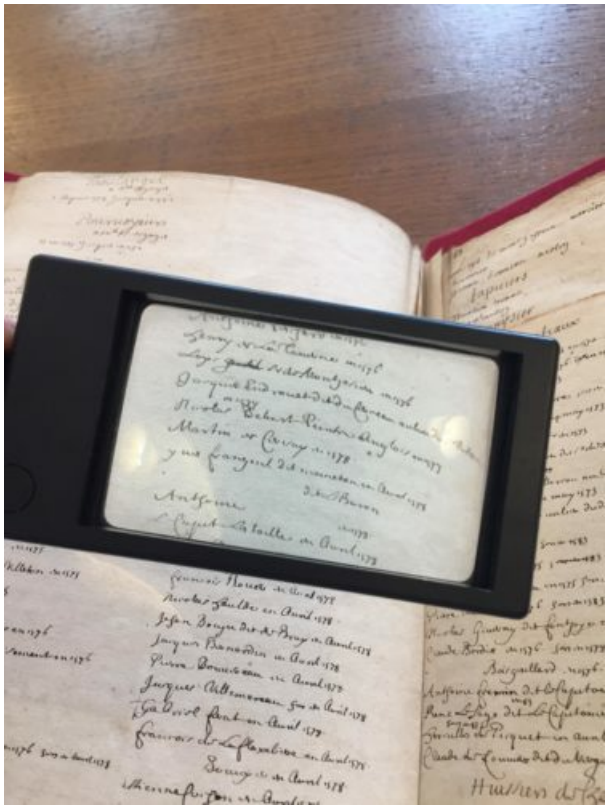


Fig. 3

‘Nicolas Beliart, painctre anglois en 1577’ Accounts of François d’Alençon (later copy and sum up), Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, MS 848 © Céline Cachaud Mars 2019

Nicholas Hilliard’s Studio - Methodology:

In November 1578, Nicholas Hilliard is busted working as a goldsmith in Saint-Germain des Prés.[2] Hilliard was considered a painter, and as such he was not permitted to do goldsmith work in Paris or Saint-Germain des Prés, because they were both sworn professions. The guard’s report states that Hilliard refused that the guards enter his house and that in exchange he gave three fellins of gold.[3] This is the only time when Hilliard is considered as a goldsmith, but as a journeyman rather than a freeman.

The given address is quite precise: ‘aux faulx bourgs sainct Germain des prez prés le jeu de paulme des Canettes’. The rest of the affair is not known; Hilliard was supposed to appear and be judged but there has no more information on the matter. It is likely then that Hilliard fled the city or asked for Royal protection and then quickly came back to London. A boat, bringing the Wardrobe Master of Alençon, arrived in London on January 3rd 1579 to set up his master’s visit next year. Hilliard possibly returned to England with him or around the same period.

So where was Hilliard’s house? My research started with a street that exists today in Saint-Fermain de Prés called ‘rue des Canettes’. Then I looked for every ‘jeu de paulme’ - rackets court, but more generally a place where people would play (and gamble). I drew up a chart with all known rackets courts in the borough during the period Hilliard was in Paris (Fig. 4), but none could be found associated with an address of ‘Canettes’ in sixteenth-century Saint-Germain des Prés.

N°	Nom	Rue	Précisions géographiques	Dates	Référence de page
1	Jeu de paume du Château de Milan	Rue des Boucheries	Entre la porte Saint-Germain et la rue de Condé	1522-1589	p. 28
2	Jeu de paume du Dauphin	Rue des Boucheries	Donnant vers la rue des Quatre-vents	dès 1523	p. 29
3	Jeu de paume de Notre-Dame de Boulogne	Rue des Boucheries	Côté méridional	1525-1687	p. 32
4	Jeu de paume de la Maison de l'Échiquier	Rue des Boucheries	Entre la rue des Mauvais-Garçons et de l'Ancienne Comédie	1423-1628	p. 35
5	Jeu de paume de l'Écu de France	Rue des Boucheries		1405-1695	p. 35-36
6	Jeu de paume	Rue de Bucy		dès 1531	p. 39
7	Jeu de paume	Rue Cassette	côté oriental	1565-1610	p. 51
8	Jeu de paume de l'Écu de Savoie	Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie	Attenante à la rue des Boucheries et de la rue des Fossés	1523-1687	p. 78
9	Jeu de paume	Rue de Condé	coté occidental, donnant sur la rue de Tournon	?	p. 84
10	Jeu de paume des religieux de Saint-Germain des Prés	Rue Mézières	Entre la rue Bonaparte (alors Pot-au-fer) et la rue Cassette	XVIe siècle	p. 215
11	Jeu de paume des Trois-Cygnes puis des Trois-Canettes	Rue de Seine	côté oriental	1595-1623 1687-1728	p. 249
12	Jeu de paume de l'Image Saint-Christophe	Rue de Seine	Donnant sur la rue des Marais	vers 1566	p. 250
13	Jeu de paume Rouge	Rue Vaugirard	Attenant à la rue des Francs-Bourgeois, côté méridional	1559-1614	p. 283
14	Jeu de paume (privé)	Rue Vaugirard	Entre la rue du Regard et la Rue Cassette	dès 1570	p. 325
15	Jeu de paume	Rue des Quatre-Vents	côté méridional	?	p. 331
16	Jeu de paume dit d'Orléans (nom en 1628)	Rue des Quatre-Vents	côté septentrional, entre les rues du Brave et du Coeur-Volant	1523-1690	p. 333

Fig. 4

Chart of the racket courts in Saint-Germain des Prés in the sixteenth century according to Berty's Topographie historique du Vieux Paris © Céline Cachaud Septembre 2017

I decided to go back to the sources and maps. I checked that the main street mentioned in the report was indeed 'Faulx bourgs Saint-Germain', and considered that he may have lived on this street where several rackets courts are nearby (Fig. 5 illustrated in orange). The position would have been quite strategic, positioned in front of the city gate, allowing the Parisian guards (and not those from Saint-Germain des Prés) to extend their jurisdiction and visit Hilliard's house. Also, it was one street away from where his friend and first 'landlord' (so to speak) lived.[4]



Fig. 5 Map of Saint Germain des Prés in 1609 said 'Vassalieu map' © Bibliothèque nationale de France et Céline Cachaud Septembre 2017

My research had ended here but then I read Goldring's book. She suggests that the house would have been near the racket

courts called ‘Les Trois Cygnes’ - which translates as ‘The Three Swans’, and the sign could have been misread by the guards as ‘ducklings’. I realized that, even though it’s included in my chart above (number 11), I had overlooked this one. Called The Three Swans between 1595 and 1623 and then The Three Ducklings from 1687 to 1728, the residence opened on the oriental side of the rue de Seine. How did I miss it? The archival records indicate the dates for this rackets court as from 20 years after Hilliard’s visit, so I had concluded the court may not have yet opened in the 1570s. Consequently, Hilliard may have lived further north on the faulx bourg or in the rue de Seine. It is an information that, unfortunately, will be almost impossible to confirm.



Fig. 6

Nicolas de Hoey, Saint Luke painting the Virgin and the Child, detail of the painter’s workshop, 1603, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon © François Jay – MBA Dijon

So where did Hilliard live in 1578?:

The exact spot doesn’t really matter, especially as the entire borough has been rebuilt over and over again and the workshop is long gone. A great part of this area regularly visited and ravaged by the royal army in search of Protestants to kill, especially from 1572 until the end of the religious wars in 1594. According to Adolphe Berty, the borough was rebuilt in 1595, which is why very few records are kept from before this date. It is likely that the rackets court was rebuilt at the same time.

Saint-Germain des Prés was also a fashionable place to be in the sixteenth century. Lords would settle down in the North of the borough, allowing them to be close to the city while living in the ‘countryside’. Saint-Germain was also well positioned for it’s proximity to the Louvre – just a few minutes’ walk - where the artists would take their position at the royal court. They would then enjoy a freer environment, which is why a great number of painters lived there by the end of the sixteenth / early seventeenth century and beyond, including Jooris van der Straeten, Hieronymus Francke (a Flemish artist, later also Louise de Lorraine’s painter), Jacob Bunel (painter to Henri IV, and his wife) and limners such as Marguerite Bahuche, etc. It would then be very interesting to carry on the research on how limners used to work within the Saint-Germain’s legal framework, compared to the Parisian agreements. But that’s for another tale.

[1] Public Record Office (London), S.P. (France) 78/2/16.

[2] As a miniaturist using limners’ techniques, it is likely that Hilliard’s statue was quite complicated – limning and illuminating was a free profession, not subject to swear an oath as other painters did. Yet, the recent discovery of two panel portraits, likely to have been painted by Hilliard in France, support the idea that he was working under the statutes of the painters, hence

a métier-juré.

[3] Fellins is a small measuring unit for gold, equivalent to around 1/24th of an ounce, that is to say 0,38g.

[4] Jooris van der Straeten, painter to Queen Louise de Lorraine, mentioned in his will of April 1577 that he lived in the ‘rue des Fossés’, in front of the city walls and a bridge away from the Louvre. If Hilliard would have become painter to the Queen, it is likely to be also through his friendship with Straeten, and his employment to Alençon, that it would have happened.

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