

AUTHENTICATION  
IN ART

AiA news-service

artnet®

## Scions of a Famed British Family Struggled for 50 Years to Recover a Stolen Portrait— But Then It Popped Up in a Google Alert

After an international effort, the picture of Real Admiral Charles Fanshawe, the 4th Viscount of Fanshawe, has been recovered from a Philly auction house.

**Caroline Goldstein**, August 7, 2019



The stolen painting of Rear Admiral Charles Fanshawe has been returned to Valence House. Courtesy of Valence House Museum.

Thanks to the moxy of one family, and a little assist from Google Alerts, an 18th century oil painting that was stolen almost 50 years ago from the Valence House museum has been returned at long last.

In 1971, thieves broke into Valence House, a museum located in the East London borough of Barking and Dagenham, and made off with six portraits of members of the Fanshawe family in a stolen government van. Shortly afterwards, police were able to recover two of the paintings and all six picture frames—though after that early break in the case, the Metropolitan Police were stymied. The remaining art went missing.

Years later, with the artworks presumed lost forever, Fanshawe's enterprising ancestors decided to set up a Google Alert to keep abreast of any developments in their looted family treasures. Lo and behold, in January 2019, their efforts were rewarded. The family got an alert that one of the works, an oil painting of Charles Fanshawe, the 4th Viscount of Fanshawe (1643-1710), dating to around 1750, was being offered at auction in Philadelphia more than 3,000 miles away.

With the new tip, a multi-agency international effort was put into place to retrieve the painting, involving London's Met Police Art and Antiques Unit, the FBI's Art Team and dedicated legal attaché, the American Embassy, and the Upper Dublin Police Department. This crack team united to ensure the long-lost portrait's return.



The Valence House. Photo: Gordon Joly, via Wikimedia Commons.

“They say a picture tells a thousand words, and in the case of this painting, this is another long and dramatic tale added to its rich tapestry,” councilor Saima Shraf said in a statement. “We are absolutely delighted to welcome home this portrait of one of our borough’s most important figures almost 50 years after it was stolen.”

The Valence House museum holds more than 70 portraits of various members of the Fanshawe family, who were lords of the Barking manor throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, and lived throughout the borough.