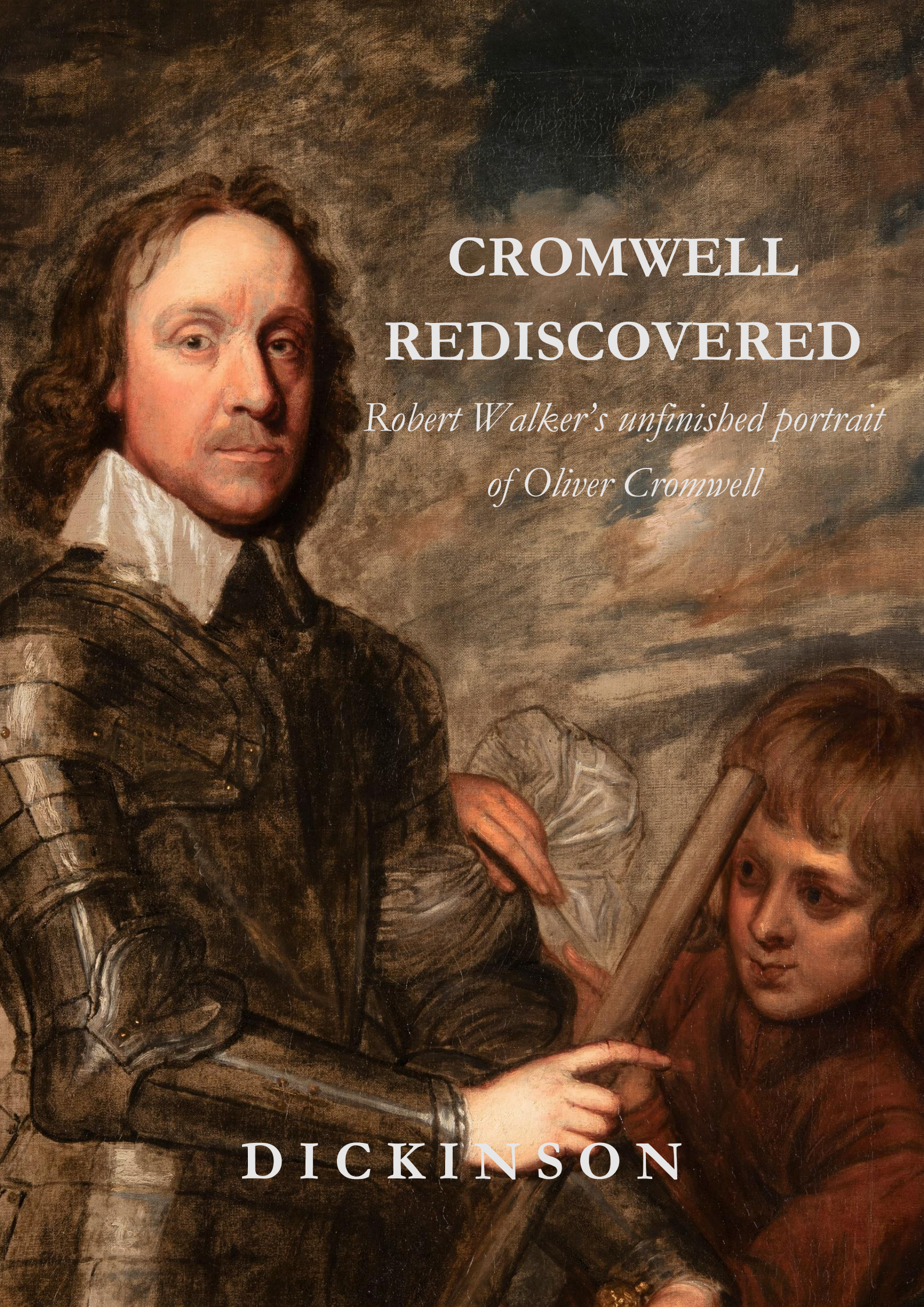

# CROMWELL REDISCOVERED

*Robert Walker's unfinished portrait of Oliver Cromwell*

DICKINSON

# DICKINSON

In *Cromwell Rediscovered*, Dickinson presents a rare, unfinished portrait of Oliver Cromwell by his favourite artist Robert Walker, which has emerged after remaining hidden for generations in a collection in Northern England. The exhibition aims to shed new light on Cromwell – a complex figure who led Britain through one of its most turbulent periods – and on the unexplained abandonment of this portrait by Walker at a critical juncture in British history.

The restoration process brought a surprise to light: the painting was left unfinished by Walker, raising significant questions. Why would Cromwell's preferred artist abandon such an important commission? It was painted during a period when Cromwell was facing military challenges in Scotland and Ireland and unrest at home, so the sudden abandonment of the project by Walker indicates that it fell victim to the changing fates of the period.

Oliver Cromwell, the formidable soldier and statesman, was known for his strategic skill and stern Puritanical rule. Leading Parliamentarian forces to victories over the Royalists, he played a pivotal role in the trial and execution of King Charles I, forever altering British history. Although he declined the crown, Cromwell used his image as Lord Protector as a tool of propaganda, to convey strength and resolve. Walker's portrait shows Cromwell in armour, a calm figure towering against turbulent skies, echoing his controversial leadership style and his aspirations for control.

Robert Walker, Cromwell's go-to portraitist, was a master at depicting authority. His earlier portraits of Cromwell solidified a powerful, enduring image that still influences perceptions of the Lord Protector. This rediscovered portrait, with its expressive, unfinished details, highlights the artist's talent and raises questions about the political risks of such patronage at a time of shifting allegiances.

*Cromwell Rediscovered* will showcase the restored portrait alongside other works from this pivotal era by artists including Mary Beale, Sir Anthony van Dyck and Cornelius Johnson, offering visitors a fresh perspective on portraiture and political power during one of Britain's most transformative periods.

**Exhibition Open:**
**Monday – Friday**
**10am – 6pm**
**25th November – 11th December**

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# DICKINSON

**Attr. John DE CRITZ, the Elder (1551 – 1642)**

*Portrait of James I and VI (1566 – 1625)*, c. 1604

inscribed upper left *IACOB⁹ D.C. ANGLIÆ / SCOTIÆ. HIBER: REX*
oil on oak panel
66.2 x 50.5 cm. (26 ½ x 19 $^{7}/_{8}$ in.)

# DICKINSON

James I and VI ruled as King of Scotland from 1567 and then as King of England and Ireland from 1603-25, unifying the English and Scottish crowns in the process. He was the first member a century-long Stuart dynasty to rule these three distinct nations. Although his reign was undoubtedly more peaceful than that of his son Charles I, religious troubles from the Protestant Reformation abounded; the first few years of his rule saw the foiling of the Gunpowder Plot, followed by a crackdown on Catholicism. He also keenly advocated for his own royal prerogative, as supposedly enshrined in the divine right of kings to rule, leading the way for his son's absolutist tendencies, which resulted in Civil War later in the century.

This painting is a good example of court portraiture from the start of James's reign. John de Critz was made Serjeant Painter to the monarchy in 1603 and would hold the post until his death in 1642. His son, John de Critz the Younger, replaced him in his role only to be killed shortly afterwards by Parliamentary troops whilst fighting for the Royalist cause near Oxford.

DICKINSON

**Cornelius JOHNSON (1593 – 1661)**

*Portrait of the 1st Viscount Falkland (in or before 1575 – 1633), Governor General of Ireland*, c. 1632

oil on oak panel
78.7 x 62.2 cm. (31 x 24 ½ in.)

# DICKINSON

Like many of the great artists in England in this period, Cornelius Johnson was a painter of European descent, having been born in London to Dutch or Flemish parents. Johnson did paint some royal portraits, but he often lost the most prestigious commissions to Van Dyck. This portrait shows Johnson's skill with the brush: he has painted the individual hairs in the sitter's beard and the minute details of his costume with great care. The figure is surrounded by a feigned oval, painted in a *trompe l'oeil* marble effect.

Henry Cary, 1st Viscount Falkland, was an important political figure in the reigns of James I and Charles I. Cary was elected member of Parliament for Hertfordshire and was ennobled in 1620, although his peerage, being a Scottish one, meant that he could continue to sit in the House of Commons. He was an important agent of Charles I and held the office of Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1622-29. In this post, he served as the monarch's representative in Ireland, and was responsible for its administration as a dependant territory of England. The English Protestant intervention in Ireland would be continued with extreme violence by Oliver Cromwell during the 1640s and 50s. This portrait was painted about a year before Falkland's death in 1633.

DICKINSON

**Sir Anthony VAN DYCK (1599 – 1641)**

*Portrait of James Stewart (1612 – 1655), Duke of Richmond, as Paris of Troy*, c. 1633-36

oil on canvas
101.6 x 74.9 cm. (40 x 29 ½ in.)

# DICKINSON

James Stewart, 1st Duke of Richmond, was a prolific patron of the arts and prominent Royalist courtier and Privy Councillor. Stewart was King Charles I's third cousin and remained a loyal supporter of his course throughout the Civil Wars. He held many eminent posts and served as Lord High Admiral of Scotland and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. He spent much of the Civil War at the Royalist court in Oxford and helped with its defence in 1643. His two younger brothers, who were also immortalised by Van Dyck, were both killed in action during the First English Civil War.

This portrait is a great example of arts patronage in Charles I's court in the 1630s. The King led the way himself, commissioning Van Dyck for all his most important portraits. Van Dyck brought to England an elevated genre of portraiture that sought to mix classical themes with a likeness, with the aim of showing the sitter's erudition and high breeding. This is especially true of this portrait, which depicts Stewart in the guise of Paris of Troy, holding the Golden Apple. He is shown in a state of undress, clothed only in a white shirt. Such aristocratic nonchalance would later be seen as a defining characteristic of the Royalist 'Cavalier' and stands in stark contrast to the much more austere portraiture conventions of the Parliamentary cause.

DICKINSON

**Sir Anthony VAN DYCK (1559 – 1641)**

*Portrait of a Gentleman, said to be Francis Russell, 4th Earl of Bedford (1587 – 1641), three-quarter length, wearing a black cloak over a black suit, with a wide lace collar and cuffs, a column to the left*, c. 1639-40

oil on canvas
123.5 x 98 cm. (48 5/8 x 38 ½ in.)

# DICKINSON

Francis Russell, 4th Earl of Bedford, was an important political figure in the years preceding the Civil Wars and was, quite remarkably, both a confidant of the King and a political ally of Cromwell.

Russell would have been well-known to Cromwell from at least 1630, when he was one of the primary instigators and backers of a scheme to drain the Cambridgeshire Fens – an area very near to Cromwell's parliamentary constituencies of Huntingdon and Cambridge. Although he was loyal to Charles I (for whom he served as a Privy Councillor), as a member of the House of Lords, he became a leader of a group of parliamentarians who grew wary of Charles's autocratic tendencies. This group, which counted the Earls of Essex and Warwick as well as Oliver Cromwell amongst its number, agitated for the King to recall Parliament, abolish episcopacy and end hostilities with the Scots during the 1640 Bishop's War. As such, Russell was an early ally of Cromwell, although we will never know which side he would have taken in the War, as he died two years before hostilities broke out.

Seeking to reflect his sitters' temperaments, Van Dyck presents Bedford in a rather more austere manner than he does the Duke of Richmond; his clothes, though rich, are sober, and his classical erudition is conveyed through the inclusion of a solid, Tuscan Doric column rather than by means of a more whimsical theme such as the Judgement of Paris.

DICKINSON

**Robert WALKER (1599 – 1658)**

*Portrait of Oliver Cromwell (1599 – 1658), three-quarter-length in armour, with his page*, c. 1649-55

oil on canvas
127.5 x 102.7 cm. (50 ½ x 40 ½ in.)

# DICKINSON

Oliver Cromwell is still one of the most titanic, yet divisive, figures in British history, and, along with Charles I, is the most famous commander of the Civil Wars. Cromwell rose from relative obscurity first as a Member of Parliament, then as a leading Parliamentary general during the Civil Wars. After Charles I was defeated, Cromwell instigated the King's trial for treason and subsequent execution. Despite being himself a regicide, Cromwell was offered the crown, which he refused. He ruled as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland from 1653 until his death in 1658.

This portrait is a recently rediscovered work by the preferred portraitist of Cromwell and his Parliament: Robert Walker. Although much of Walker's work is derived from the Royalist painter, Van Dyck, this composition is his own invention. Uniquely for a portrait of Cromwell by Walker, this painting has been left unfinished, and was perhaps abandoned in the tumult of the Civil Wars. Although the state of this work gives it a truly painterly finish, it also offers a great insight into Walker's painting technique and studio practice. In this portrait, Walker has precisely demarcated the outlines of the armour and has confidently painted in his sitter's flesh tones and the sky beyond him. It is also possible to detect where the artist has changed his mind compositionally, with *pentimenti* visible in Cromwell's finger, baton and armour.

DICKINSON

**Mary BEALE (1633 – 1699)**

*Portrait of a Gentleman, traditionally called the Duke of Monmouth*, c. 1670s

inscribed on the old lining, verso *Duke of Monmouth*
oil on canvas
74 x 61 cm. (29 x 24 in.)

# DICKINSON

This portrait has long been presumed to depict James Scott, Duke of Monmouth (1649 – 1685). Scott was the illegitimate son of Charles II (who was restored to the throne in 1660 after Cromwell's death and the end of the Commonwealth) by his mistress Lucy Walter. Charles II, having no legitimate heirs, was succeeded by his brother James, who had, very unpopularly, converted to Roman Catholicism. Scott, by this time living in exile, sailed to England in 1685 to claim the throne for himself, and for Protestantism. He and his supporters clashed with James II's government forces at Sedgemoor in Somerset – the last pitched battle fought in England. Monmouth was captured shortly after the battle and was tried for treason and beheaded at the Tower of London. The Monmouth Rebellion was one of the closing shots of a century of armed religious and political conflict in Britain.

Mary Beale was one of the leading painters of her day and one of very few female artists to achieve professional success. Her father was an amateur painter who knew both Sir Peter Lely and Robert Walker, either of whom might have taught Mary as a young painter. Her success with the brush ensured that she was the principal breadwinner of her family, quite remarkable for the second half of the 17th Century. She was well-connected, and after the Restoration painted portraits of prominent figures who had been sympathetic to both sides in the Civil Wars. One of her most frequent patrons was the clergyman Dr John Tillotson whose wife, Elizabeth, was Oliver Cromwell's niece, and one of Mary's close friends.

DICKINSON