

A Country Cottage by a River

John Thomas Smith

Sold



REF: 504

Height: 19.9 cm (7.8")

Width: 30.1 cm (11.9")

Description

John Thomas Smith (1766-1833)
A Country Cottage by a River

Pen and grey ink and watercolour
19.9 by 30.1cm., 7 ¾ by 11 ¾ inches

This is a rare drawing by John Thomas 'Antiquity' Smith, the son of Nathaniel Smith, a sculptor, printseller and artist. He turned to drawing in 1784 and in 1788 was a drawing master in Edmonton. He was appointed Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum in 1816. Mallalieu describes his penwork as 'fine, with sharp twists and angles' (see Huon Mallalieu, Dictionary of British Watercolour Artists, 2002, Vol. II, p.182).

He is best known today for his influence on the young John Constable. They met in 1796, when Constable was staying with relations, the Allens, at Edmonton. Constable was still working in the family business and Smith was a local drawing master who was about to publish his Remarks on Rural Scenery illustrated with etchings of picturesque country cottages and Smith became his guide and mentor. In his first recorded letter to Smith, of 27th October 1796, Constable wrote: 'I have in my walks pick'd up several cottages and peradventure I may have been fortunate enough to hit upon one, or two, that might please. If you think it is likely that I have, let me know and I'll send you my sketchbook' (R.B. Beckett, John Constable's Correspondence, 1962-8, vol.II, p.5). In the autumn of 1798, Smith stayed with Constable and his family at East Bergholt. It is likely that Constable's copy of Smith's 'A Well on the Road to Ipswich' (Courtauld Institute Galleries) dates from this trip.

Constable's work from 1797 and 1798 clearly show Smith's influence in its depiction of dilapidated country cottages and in its penwork. The closest examples are 'A Farmhouse at Hadleigh', 'Cottage near a Stream' and 'Country Folk in front of a thatched Cottage' (see Graham Reynolds, The Early Paintings and Drawings of John Constable, 1996, nos.98.1 (pl.54), 97.13 (pl.49) and 97.14 (pl.50))

Provenance:

A.P. Oppe;
Purchased from Michael Spratt, January 1985;
Private Collection, London until 2008

Engraved:

As an Etching for 'Rural Landscapes from Nature', 1795

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