

Ilam Rock, Derbyshire

William Day



Description

William Day (1764-1807)
Ilam Rock, Derbyshire

Signed lower left: WDay 1789 and inscribed verso: The Pickerell, on the Staffordshire side of Dove Dale
Pen and grey ink and watercolour over pencil heightened with scratching out on laid paper
37.2 by 48.3 cm., 14 ½ by 19 in.

Provenance:

Reginald Ernest Alton (1919-2003), Oxford;
Anonymous sale, Christie's, 4th December 2024, lot 220;
Russell Worby (1954-2025)

William Day, a draper by trade, was a keen geologist and amateur artist, who exhibited as an Honorary Exhibitor, at the Royal Academy between 1783 and 1801. He subsequently fell into relative obscurity until the discovery in 1951 of a large group of his drawings. According to Judy Egerton, Day's interests were, 'in descending order, geology, mineralogy and painting' (J. Egerton, 'William Day 1764-1807', *The Connoisseur*, July 1970, p. 177). He formed one of the earliest private collections of minerals in the country, which ended up in Hampstead Central Library, but was destroyed during the Blitz. He was known as 'Rocky Day' by his descendants and apparently always took a specimen bag, as well as his watercolours, with him on his trips.

Day became friends with the artist John Webber (1751-1793) in 1787, and the two made various sketching tours together including to Derbyshire in 1789, during which the present watercolour was painted. The two men often depicted the same view, although from slightly different viewpoints and with a slightly different emphasis. The elder artist's influence is clear in both Day's use of a soft colour palette and his practice of making detailed on the spot, pencil drawings, annotated with colour notes, to be worked up later. Day's watercolours, especially those from his Derbyshire tours, are notable for their remarkable clarity and crispness, as well as their particular focus on the geology and plant-life.