Panoramic View of Ramsgate, Kent

John Raphael Smith

Sold



REF: 832

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Description

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John Rubens Smith (1775-1849)
Panoramic View of Ramsgate, Kent

Signed lower left: J.R. Smith Junr 1802, signed and dated again on a bench and inscribed on the original washline mount: Painted by J.R. Smith 1802/View of Ramsgate Pier.
Watercolour over pencil
66.3 by 28.8 cm., 26 by 11 ¼ in.

This view of Ramsgate Harbour from 1802 gives a unique and fascinating glimpse of Ramsgate at the turn of the 19th century. Painted from what was an open, unenclosed east cliff top prior to its enclosure as Albion Place Gardens, the view takes in the Royal Harbour, completed in 1774. The view looks down on the elegant Pier House on the harbour front, designed by Samuel Wyatt in 1794. This building was demolished in the early 1900s as part of a scheme to widen the Harbour Parade. The area of cottages behind was known as Clift Court, while the large red roof maybe part of the either the Oak or the Castle Hotel, two of Ramsgate's oldest hostelries.

Also just visible at end of the furthest West Pier is the original timber staircase called 'Jacob's Ladder', built by the carpenter Jacob Steed in 1754 to give access to the harbour works from the cliff top. After falling into disrepair it was replaced by today's stone staircase in 1826. Above the west cliff, both the Paragon and Nelson's Crescent, newly completed in 1801, can clearly be seen. Peeping over the hill behind are two of Ramsgate's three windmills. The two smaller mills were demolished in the mid 1800s with the third surviving until the late 1920s. Only a small area of shops called Windmill Parade is evidence of their location. Finally, the rough path and steps on the far right of the watercolour show the only access to the East Cliff until the Royal Albion Hotel was demolished and Madeira Walk was cut out of the chalk.

Smith was born in London, the son of the portraitist and engraver John Raphael Smith (1752-1812). He studied under his father and exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1796 and 1811, mainly portraits but also some watercolours, including views of Reculver, Margate Pier and Brighton in 1802 and 1803. In 1802 he visited the United States and was impressed enough to move there permanently in 1806. He had letters of introduction from Benjamin West, the President of the Royal Academy to the three principal artists in Boston at the time, Gilbert Stuart, Thomas Sully and Washington Alston. He opened a drawing academy there in May 1807 and he became known for his stipple engraving and mezzotints. After ten years in Boston, he moved his drawing academy to New York where he was based from 1816 until 1827 and produced a number of watercolours and paintings of views in and around New York and the Hudson river. After a brief spell back in Boston, he moved to Philadelphia where his drawing school again proved a great success and he produced a number of topographical watercolours of the city. Works by him are in the Library of Congress, Washington D.C., the Boston Athenaeum, the Metropolitan Museum New York and the National Gallery of Art Washington. For more information on the artist see, Edward S. Smith, "John Rubens Smith: An Anglo-American Artist," The Connoisseur, May 1930, pp.300-307.

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