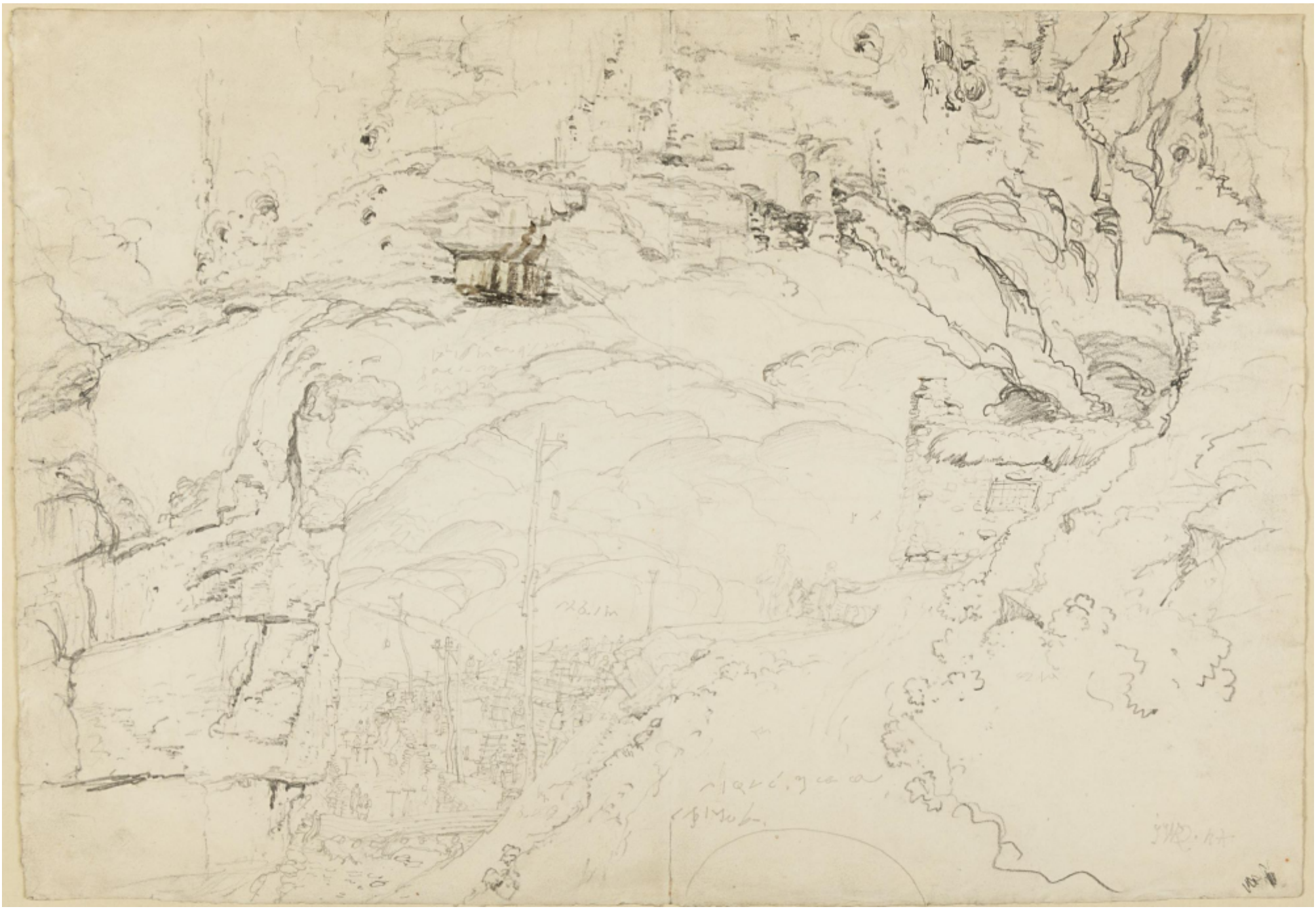
Peak Cavern, Castleton, Derbyshire

James Ward, R.A.



REF: 2318

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Description

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James Ward, R.A. (1769-1859)
Peak Cavern, Castleton, Derbyshire

Signed with initials lower right, extensively inscribed with artist's shorthand and inscribed on part of old backing: 'The Peake Cave/looking in, with Rope Walk
33.7 by 48.7 cm., 13 ¼ by 19 in.

Provenance:
Knowles of Hanwell by 1951;
Prudence Summerhayes by 1959;
By descent until 2008;
With WS Fine Art, 2009;
Private Collection

Literature:
Susan Sloman, Drawings by James Ward 1769-1859, 2009, exhibition catalogue, p.46, no. 45, ill. p.75

Exhibited:
WS Fine Art, Drawings by James Ward 1769-1859, 18th November to 11th December 2009, no. 45
This drawing dates from 1810 to 1815 and is the basis for an oil sketch formerly in the Cochrane collection. This may be the picture exhibited in Ward's Newman Street gallery in 1841 (Description of Ward's Gallery, 1841, no.112, p.37) as `Looking into the Peak Cavern, Derbyshire.' Ward noted in the catalogue that `The entrance into this cavern, under the shelter of the rocks, is turned into a rope-walk. The immensity of the rocks gives the men the appearance of pygmies; and the high poles erected bear the appearance of so many gibbets' (op. cit.). Stylistically it relates to a series of studies made for one of Ward's masterpieces, `Gordale Scar' (Tate Britain) dating from 1814-15.

Peak Cavern is the largest of Derbyshire's natural caves and was used by ropemakers for well over 500 years and into the mid 20th century. The Duke of Devonshire allowed them to occupy the site rent free with each terrace occupied by one family. In the early nineteenth century, there were forty families mostly living in thatched cottages within the cave (one is seen to the right of this drawing). There were also stables, inns and shops, all of which were demolished in the 1860s.

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