

Kenneth MacLeay RSA

RSA Obituary, transcribed from the 1878 RSA Annual Report

It is with the utmost pain that the Council have to add to the list of those who have been taken away during their year of office, the name of their much loved brother Academician Mr, Kenneth MacLeay, who died on the 3d November in the seventy-sixth year of his age. He was the last of the gallant little band who, in spite of great difficulties and powerful opposition, inaugurated the Academy in 1826, and he continued to the end one of its most enthusiastic and effective members.

Mr. MacLeay was born at Oban in 1802, and after receiving a great part of his early education in the West, came to Edinburgh when about eighteen years of age, and began his Academical Art-studies in Picardy Place, where he soon showed great talent in miniature-painting, a branch of Art in which he was destined to attain to the highest place. His works on ivory are gems of Art, such as are seldom if ever attempted in these days, and his larger miniatures are all executed with such broad, sharp, masterly touches, that he earned for himself the name of the Raeburn of miniature painters.

After the beautiful Art in which he had attained such perfection had declined in public estimation, Mr. MacLeay devoted a great part of his time to landscape and figure pictures, in Oil and Water-Colour, all of which are pervaded by the same careful drawing, fine appreciation of colour, and well-chosen daylight effect. For many years Mr. MacLeay was annually elected one of the Auditors of the Academy, and discharged faithfully the duties of that office, for which his aptitude for calculation and great knowledge of accounts specially qualified him.

The Life Class was his especial care, and no Member of the Academy gave more of his time to that object than Kenneth MacLeay. For fifteen years consecutively he acted as a Life Visitor, and even within a few days of his death he presided at a meeting called for the purpose of making suggestions as to improvements in the management of the School.

Indeed, in every way the interest of the Academy was held by him to be of paramount importance, and he acted most efficiently in more than one department, where his great experience and business habits rendered his services invaluable.

The Council desire particularly to record their high esteem and sincere regard for one with whom they have for so many years had the most agreeable intercourse, and they feel it due to his memory to state that there is not a Member of the Academy nor a Student in the Life Class who does not lament the loss of a dear friend in the courteous, gentle, noble-hearted Kenneth MacLeay.

It has seldom, if ever, been the privilege of the Council to present a Report of their proceedings without having occasion to express many regrets for the losses sustained by death during their year of office, and the Council of 1878 is unfortunately no exception in this respect. But with regrets they have also much reason for congratulation on the progress and prosperity of the Academy.

Although from causes which have affected all classes of the community, the finances of 1878 have not quite reached the height of those of 1877—which were exceptionally high—they yet contrast favourably with those of previous years; and the valuable bequests by friends, both at home and abroad, announced in this Report, are gratifying proofs of the interest taken in the Academy, and of the recognition of its importance as a great National Institution.