

John Guthrie Spence Smith RSA

RSA Obituary, transcribed from the 1951 RSA Annual Report

John Guthrie Spence Smith was born in Perth on 4th February 1880, the son of Mr Joseph Smith of Messrs. J & D Smith, Linen Drapers, Perth. When he was between two and three years of age he had a serious attack of scarlet fever, after which he remained deaf and dumb for the rest of his life. About the age of 7 he went to a school in Dundee for deaf and dumb children and under an instructor whose wise guidance had a great influence on his character and, as his mother said, "made a man of him." He afterwards attended a similar school in Edinburgh.

He was always fond of drawing and, having a strong sense of humour, began to produce caricatures, in which he was very successful. He later, however, gave this up and turned to painting. He studied at the College of Art, Dundee, and attended classes at the Royal Institution and the Royal Scottish Academy School, Edinburgh, where he gained prizes in 1906. He also attended evening classes at the Edinburgh College of Art (1908-10).

Owing to his infirmity his outward life was not eventful. In 1911 and again in 1912 he went to France with his mother and made a considerable number of pictures in watercolours decocting donkeys ain carts, but did not again return to the Continent. War broke out in 1914 and he found subjects for painting in such places as Ceres, St. Monance, Haddington, Edinburgh and Perth. He was elected an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1930 and an Academician in 1939.

He painted chiefly landscapes, notable for their strong sense of colour and their decorative quality. His subjects were mostly inspired by the landscape of his own country and comprise Fife coast villages and historic and picturesque old buildings. Some, as before mentioned, are from the north of France.

He is represented in Public Galleries at Greenock, Bradford, Auckland, New Zealand, and in his native town of Perth.

He died on 22nd October 1951, in the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, in his 71st year of age. He was unmarried.