

George Smith RSA

RSA Obituary, transcribed from the 1934 RSA Annual Report

In appearance robust and muscular, the comparatively early death of George Smith on 26th November, must have come as a surprise to many of his numerous friends. To those around him, however, it was apparent that the gastric trouble from which he suffered some little while before had seriously affected his constitution.

He was born in 1870 at Midcalder, where his father had a meal mill. Probably from this early association with the products of the field, and its workers, was derived his marked air of belonging himself to the land, developed by his later intimacy with the farms and cattle he delighted to paint, and the whole life of the countryside.

He received his general education at George Watson's College, and while there was notable as an athlete, representing his College in interscholastic sports as a runner, and winning several events. In swimming he also excelled - this recreation he enjoyed all his life - and at seventeen he swam the three miles across Lock Long, from Ardentinn Point to Coulport.

His training as a painter began in the school of the Board of Manufactures in Edinburgh and was continued in Antwerp, when the Academy there was under that very forceful animal painter Verlat. On his return to Edinburgh he studied in the Royal Scottish Academy Life School. Both in Antwerp and in the Royal Scottish Academy class he was premiated.

From the age of eighteen, when he had two pictures exhibited, his works were shown in the Royal Scottish Academy in quite unbroken sequence to the final group of last year. Uniform in manner and in matter his exhibits were personal and unmistakeable. But while practically all his subjects were connected with the country in its bucolic and pastoral aspects, he was very varied within these limits, and completely escaped any feeling of repetition or monotony, and his loose brushing always enlivened his work with a sense of vibration and movement.

Very fond of the district around Stirling as a painting country, he also found numerous motives in the Hebrides. Indeed, from one period of work in the Islands, between 1910-1916, came some of his happiest efforts, several dealing with animals crossing these western fords in twilight being especially memorable. He also painted in Holland and Belgium and, as a result of a recent visit, exhibited a few subjects from North Africa.

George Smith was elected Associate of the Academy in 1908 and an Academician in 1921, and is represented in the Diploma Collection by one of his typical subjects "The Shelter." He was awarded a gold medal at the Antwerp International Exhibition and elected a member of the International Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1924.

Two important works were acquired for the Venice International Gallery of Modern Art: - "Feeding Time," 1901, and "Frosty Morning," 1902. In 1908 "Cattle Shelter" was bought for the Chadwick Museum, Bolton, and in 1909 "A Cool Retreat" was secured for the Art Gallery of Dunedin, New Zealand. The King of Italy and the Prince of Bavaria both purchased large works.

Living first at Glengyle Terrace, Edinburgh, he removed many years ago to 47 Lauder Road, where he resided with a sister. He was unmarried.

A familiar figure in the Arts Club, his generous nature placed him in easy relations with every one, while his healthy exuberance and zest made an atmosphere which remains a very pleasant memory.