

Colvin Smith RSA

RSA Obituary, transcribed from the 1875 RSA Annual Report

Colvin Smith, R.S.A. was born at Brechin in 1796 and died at Edinburgh, 21st July 1875.

He went early to London and studied at the school of the Royal Academy; after which he proceeded to Italy, where he pursued his studies most enthusiastically, making many fine copies from the works of Titian and others of the great colourists, and on his way home he visited Antwerp, where he executed some admirable studies from the pictures of Rubens.

Returning to his native country in 1827, he established himself in Edinburgh as a portrait painter, occupying the house and studio which had formerly belonged to Sir Henry Raeburn, and here he practised his art during the rest of his life. From influential family connection he at once started on a most eventful career, which continued till within a year or two of his death when failing health and eyesight interfered with work.

He painted the portraits of some of the most remarkable men of his time in Edinburgh, among whom may be mentioned Lord Jeffrey, Henry Mackenzie (The Man of Feeling) and Sir Walter Scott; the last, several of the great Novelist's friends considered, in some respects the most successful of the many portraits painted of him. Of this portrait he painted twenty replicas - for seven of these Sir Walter gave him sittings.

Colvin Smith's portraits are remarkable for much individuality of character, simplicity of treatment and admirable drawing.

It is with much regret that the Council have to record the death of a distinguished Member of the Academy. Colvin Smith, R.S.A., died on the 21st July, in his eightieth year. He was one of those who joined the Academy in 1829. From early youth, till within two or three years of the close of his long life, he pursued his art with unremitting industry and student-like application, the results of which were manifested in the numerous excellent works which year after year proceeded from his easel.

A thoroughly skilled workman and trained in the old traditions and established canons of Art, his pictures will always be notable for their masterly drawing and strong perception of character, for their solidity of style, and well-balanced depth of effect.

From his exclusive devotion to portrait painting, and the ability which he brought to bear on it, he secured an extensive practice at a comparatively early period of life. For a long series of years the walls of the Exhibition were enriched by admirable specimens of his talent, and his name must always occupy a distinguished place on the roll of Scottish Portrait-painters.