

JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

A View of the Thames looking upstream from the Terrace of Somerset House

Sold

THOMAS PRIEST (Att. To)



Description

Att. to THOMAS PRIEST Op. circa 1750 English School A View of the Thames looking upstream from the Terrace of Somerset House Oil on canvas 43.2 x 97.6 cms 17 x 38 3/8 inches Overall framed size 56 x 111 cms 22 x 43 5/8 ins Provenance: U.S. private collection With Knoedler and Co., New York Ex Collection: Walter S M Burns, North Mimms Park, Hatfield

The English painters Samuel Scott, William James and William Marlow picked up on this style and there were several others of varying ability such as Samuel Wale, Francis Harding, Joseph Nicholls and Herbert Pugh who were commissioned to paint views of a city rapidly expanding in size, influence and wealth. There is evidence though that Scott was already painting topographical views of London before the arrival of Canaletto with a drawing of Westminster Abbey and Hall from the River in the British Museum confidently dated to 1738 providing the evidence for this. There is also speculation that some of these painters utilised a camera lucida or other such optical devices which would explain some of the occasional distorted buildings, even apparent in an artist of Scott's ability.

Britain is fortunate in that it has an unrivalled record of topographical record compared to Europe. On the continent, major towns or cities were occasionally depicted as were important castles or palaces such as Versailles for example but in Britain there is an abundance of engravings and paintings depicting country houses, churches, villages, towns, cities and parts of them.

The astonishing wealth of records, "There is simply nothing like this in the rest of Europe, not even after 1800, and no other country in the world has today such an efficient system of rate-supported County Record or Archive Offices which take into their care the paper history of the county" (John Harris in 'Prospects of Town and Park' - National Art-Collections Fund Exhibition, Colnaghi 1988) There were large numbers of antiquarians and there was enormous interest in recording the history and topographical views in written and painted records. One can only surmise why this is the case, perhaps it is a deep-rooted consequence of the Domesday Book, but whatever the reason, there is an abundance of painted views and aspects of houses and urban areas.

Therefore it is rather ironic that the genre of topographical painting had really been introduced to England from Northern Europe where artists in the Netherlands had an established tradition. There are few surviving illustrations from the Tudor period although some artists from the Low Countries such as Hoefnagel in 1568 and van der Wyngaerde in 1559 did work in England. It was following the Restoration and the coronation of Charles II in 1660, marking the end of the governance of Parliament, and then, particularly after the accession of William of Orange in 1689, that the influence of art and architecture from H...