

JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

A Gentleman driving a Gig to his Country Home

HENRY THOMAS ALKEN

Sold



REF: 162431

Description

HENRY THOMAS ALKEN 1785-1851 English School A Gentleman driving a Gig to his Country Home Oil on canvas 25.5 x 33 cms 10 x 13 inches Henry Thomas Alken, sometimes referred to as Henry Alken Snr., was the best known of this renowned dynasty of sporting painters. They were originally of Danish ancestry and Henry was the son of Samuel Alken Snr and the brother of George Samuel Junior and Sefferein John. He himself had 5 children of which Samuel Henry (Henry Alken Jnr) and Sefferein Jnr became sporting artists.

He was born in Soho 12th October 1785 and did his early art training under his father. At a young age he studied under the miniaturist J.T. Barber and some of this training is apparent in Alken's depiction of figures.

Little is known of his young adult life, however by 1809 he was married and living in the Ipswich area. He moved back to London and lived in the Haymarket where he became successful as a graphic journalist under the pseudonym of Ben Tally Ho.

Various suggestions have been put forward as to his understanding of horses: some say he was a groom to the Duke of Beaufort, others that he hunted regularly with the Meltonians or that he hunted with his patron the MP Hollingsworth Magniac, and even that he supplemented his income by horse dealing. Most of these are implausible, however he must have ridden fairly frequently at some stage of his life.

In 1816 he wrote and published "The Beauties and Defects in the Figure of the Horse" and in 1821 illustrated the "National Sports of Great Britain". Between 1820 and 1831 he produced a number of sketch books and text books on drawing. He was also a competent engraver and his prints were very popular at the time.

He only exhibited two paintings; miniature portraits at the Royal Academy, the majority of his work being for private commissions or publishers. Some of his most famous paintings were "The Derby 1850", "The Oakley Hunt" and a set of eight paintings titled "Grand Leicestershire Steeplechase 1829".

He became something of a recluse from the 1830's onwards and was quite a noticeable character walking the streets of London wearing old-fashioned clothes. He died penniless on 7th April 1851 and his funeral was paid for by his son-in-law, the artist Christian Zeitta.

Henry Alken Snr principally painted hunting, racing and coaching scenes, but also depicted other sports. His knowledge of hunting and horses was good and the horses he painted were generally attractive, slightly Arab types of hunters and hacks. His works are always illustrative and he rarely painted horse portraits as such, although some of the people in his crowds were recognisable. He was a major influence on many sporting artists who followed him, and he left a large body of work, particularly in prints.

Bibliography:

Dictionary of British Equestrian Artists- Sally Mitchell

Dictionary of English Landscape Painters- M.H. Grant

Dictionary of Victorian Painters- C. Wood