

[PROSPECTUS]

A DYNASTY OF DEALERS

John Smith and Successors
1801-1924

A Study of the Art Market in Nineteenth-Century London

Charles Sebag-Montefiore with
Julia I. Armstrong-Totten

The Roxburghe Club

MMXIII

A DYNASTY OF DEALERS: JOHN SMITH AND SUCCESSORS 1801–1924

is a study of the art market for Dutch and Flemish pictures in nineteenth-century London, based on 564 unpublished letters between the art dealer John Smith, his sons and their customers, and also on the Smith firm's business books, which are now located in the Victoria and Albert Museum. His customers included the Prince Regent (later George IV), the Duke of Wellington, Lords Bute, Lansdowne and Northwick, Sir Robert Peel, Sir Charles Bagot, Ralph Bernal and William Beckford, as well as members of the Baring, Hope and Rothschild banking families, and the firm dealt in works by such artists as Rembrandt, Vermeer and Rubens. For around seventy years John Smith's firm acted as a leading London dealer, and had curatorial responsibility for Lord Ellesmere's celebrated collection of pictures at Bridgewater House, St James's, a role that lasted for three generations, and a lesser role for Lord Ashburton's collection at Bath House, Piccadilly, which lasted as many. Smith was also the author of the pioneering *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French Painters*, nine substantial volumes covering forty-one artists, published between 1829 and 1842.

As Nicholas Penny writes in the Foreword, the book 'publishes the remarkable correspondence of John Smith and the family firm of art dealers that he established. The authors provide a learned and sympathetic commentary on the letters, bringing us close to the business – often, indeed, following it on an almost daily basis ... This book will appeal not only to anyone interested in the commercial history of the art market; it also illuminates aspects of social history. The Smiths' houses, holidays and problems with servants feature in the letters and John Smith's marital arrangements were very curious, even by the standards of today.'

The book provides an account of John Smith (1781–1855) and his family, and discusses his early years as a carver, framer and gilder; his evolution into a leading picture dealer and his relationships with customers; other contemporary dealers then practising in London, Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels; the sources of supply of pictures and details on profits and mark-ups; the second generation (John Mountjoy and Samuel Mountjoy Smith); the third generation (Samuel Theobald Smith); and finally Reggie Smith and Nevill Cooper, the last owner of the firm, who died in 1936. The letters and accompanying commentaries chronicle in detail the activities of the Smiths and the dealers and collectors with whom they corresponded, providing valuable information

on the pictures and their provenance, and the nature of collecting and dealing during the period. The text is supported with explanatory footnotes, which include identification where possible of many of the paintings handled by the Smith firm, with details of the present owners, such as the National Galleries in London, Edinburgh and Washington, DC, and The Metropolitan Museum, New York. The endmatter includes Sources, a Bibliography, the Smith Family Tree, a Biographical Index with information on contemporary figures in the art world and a comprehensive Index. The book features sixty colour illustrations including portraits of John Smith and his principal customers; significant paintings handled by the firm; a selection of the original letters; and pages from the stock book and ledgers of the firm.

THE AUTHORS

Charles Sebag-Montefiore is a Trustee of the National Gallery and has spent forty years creating the definitive library on British patronage and collecting. Julia I. Armstrong-Totten, formerly of the Project for the Study of Collecting and Provenance, at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, is an expert on the London art market in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

THE BOOK

Measuring 11¾ × 9¾ inches (300 × 248 mm), the book comprises 464 pages, printed to the highest standard on archival-quality Mohawk Superfine 118gsm paper by the Beacon Press in Sussex. It is bound in full buckram by Ludlow Bookbinders in Shropshire. This edition is printed privately for the Roxburghe Club, which has agreed to make 250 copies available for sale at £250.00 plus postage and packing.

HOW TO ORDER

The book, ISBN 978 1 901902 10 5, will be published in April 2013. If you would like to order a copy, please contact Robert Harding of Maggs Bros. Ltd, 50 Berkeley Square, London W1J 5BA (telephone +44(0) 20 7493 7160; email robert@maggs.com), or Thomas Heneage of Thomas Heneage Art Books, 42 Duke Street St James's, London SW1Y 6DJ (telephone +44 (0) 20 7930 9223; email artbooks@heneage.com). Both booksellers accept credit cards. An illustrated prospectus, produced to the same quality as the book, is available on request.



[Fig. 31] *Portrait of Susanna London (Le Chapeau de Paille)*, 1716-17, by Peter Paul Rubens. This picture was the cause of the lifelong enmity between Smith and L.J. Nieuwenhuys and his son C.J. Nieuwenhuys. Smith sold the picture to Robert Peet in June 1824 for £2,725. Courtesy of the National Gallery, London.

CHAPTER I 1801-1820s: From Carving, Framing and Gilding to the Sale of Rubens's *Le Chapeau de Paille*

John Smith's apprenticeship to William Hurwood, carver and gilder, ended in 1801, when he was about twenty years old. He quickly established himself in business on his own account and his personal collection of annotated auction catalogues¹ dates from 1801. The first published confirmation of Smith's entry into business as a carver and gilder appears in the 1802 *Post Office Annual Directory* (a guide to businesses in London), in which his premises was listed as being at no. 98 Swallow Street, Piccadilly.² The successful expansion of the business led him to move twice to larger premises, first in 1812 to no. 49 Great Marlborough Street, and then in 1828 to no. 17 New Bond Street, the street that attracted to many dealers in pictures, carvings and curios as well as upholsterers and cabinet-makers.³ The Smiths were to remain at this address until 1874, when the business was removed to smaller premises at no. 37 Duke Street, St James's.

Smith's diligence and the quality of his work soon brought him success. He began his working life as a carver, gilder, looking-glass manufacturer and picture-framemaker, and by 1810 had secured as a customer no less a person than the Prince of Wales, later George IV,⁴ who in 1812 appointed Smith as his picture-framemaker;⁵ by 1817 Johnstone's *London Commercial Guide and Street Directory* recorded him as 'Carver and Gilder to the Prince Regent'.⁶

Smith's move into picture dealing was gradual. A transaction from the records of Christie's⁷ suggests that he began dealing in pictures as early as 1809, when he purchased from the auction house a pair of landscape paintings by the German artist Johann Heinrich Roos for £99, at the sale of the recently deceased

antiquary and prominent military figure, General Charles Rainsford (1728-1809).⁸ In the following decade Smith made similar purchases at Christie's, but they typically involved fewer than a dozen transactions a year, in which he paid out very small amounts of money for his acquisitions.

However, Smith's surviving ledger entries in the day books, which began in January 1812, provide a more complete picture of his activities. The majority of the entries found in the first decade of the day books relate to charges for framing, hanging and restoring works of art. But sales of prints, drawings and sculpture as well as paintings are also recorded, and in 1812 this activity represented roughly 12 per cent of his annual turnover. The largest entry by value amounted to £82 2s.⁹ This related to the sale of seventeen drawings and paintings to one of his regular clients, Dr Robert John Thornton (1768-1817) of botanical fame.¹⁰ The low sales level demonstrates that at the start of this decade Smith was still a minor player in the London art world.

Early in his career, Smith appreciated the value of contacts in the art world in Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam and elsewhere on the Continent. The earliest surviving evidence of Smith's travels abroad is contained in the visitors' book of the van Winter collection in Amsterdam, half of which was inherited after his marriage in 1812 by the Jonsheer Hendrick Six van Hillegom [Fig. 29].¹¹ The book records that Smith visited the house on 6 August 1816 in the company of the Brussels dealer L.J. Nieuwenhuys, who features unhappily later in this chapter. It is intriguing to speculate whether at that time Nieuwenhuys acted as an instructor to Smith as he worked his way up to becoming a picture dealer. It is doubtful whether a competing London dealer would have helped a potential future rival in this way. The surviving early Smith ledgers contain many instances of Nieuwenhuys's name, and they clearly had a good professional relationship in those early years.

However, it was not an easy time to become a dealer, as Smith

1. The auction catalogues owned and annotated by John Smith and his sons are now on deposit at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in the Hague.

2. The directory was published in London under the direction of the King's Postmaster General. His name appears as 'J. Smith'.

3. The move prompted John Smith to sell a group of Dutch and Flemish pictures from his stock through the auctioneer George Stanley, on 2-3 May 1818 (Lugt 1720). According to a copy of the sale catalogue on deposit at the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the results of the sale totalled £8,547 14s. 6d. (see fig. 5, p. 107).

4. Invoice in the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle (RA, 1810/MAN/5232; see also fig. 6, p. 15).

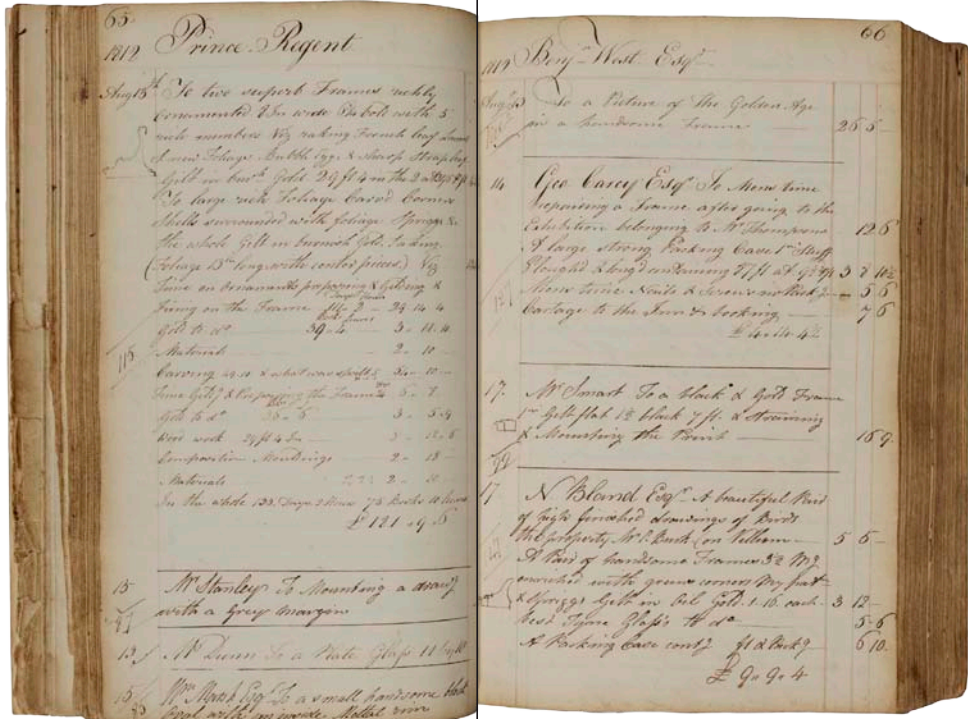
5. National Archives, Kew, Surrey (i.e. [Lord Chamberlain], 1768, p. 121).

6. See the entry for 'Christie & Mansel' in the Biographical Index.

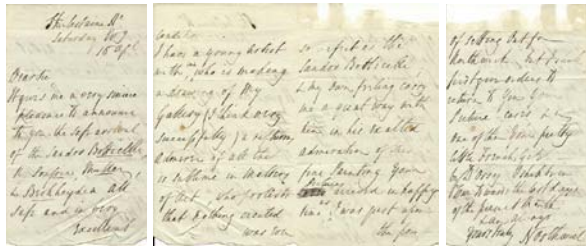
7. Smith's purchase appeared as lot 19 in the Rainsford sale that Christie's held on 18 July 1809 (Lugt 7622).

8. Smith, 'Day Book', 1812, p. 60.

9. An incomplete search of the Six van Winter visitors' books shows that Smith also visited the combined Six van Hillegom collection in Amsterdam on 23 August 1814 with Jan Frans van Diehl (1764-1840), a flower painter, and on 3 June 1815 with other dealers from London [Fig. 30]. I am most grateful to Jan Six for this information.



[Fig. 61] John Smith, 'Day Book', vols. 1, 1811-12, pages 60-66. Page 66 records the sale of two 'superb frames' to the Prince Regent, the future George IV, on 12 August 1812. Page 66 shows that Benjamin West was charged £65 for a frame for his painting *The Golden Age* 1776 (Tate collection). Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



[Fig. 43] *Lord Northwick's Picture Gallery at Abbotstone House, View of the Dining Room, 1846*, by Robert Haskins. The newly acquired Botticelli is visible on a wheeled picture stand (see fig. 44, letter 64). Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

[Fig. 44] Letter 64, 18 April 1846, from John Ruschout, and Baron Northwick, to John Smith & Sons. Author's collection.

[Fig. 45] *The Virgin Adoring the Sleeping Christ Child, c. 1490*, by Sandro Botticelli. The Smith brothers acquired the picture in Paris in 1846 and sold it to Lord Northwick the same year (see fig. 21, p. 43). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Sir Robert Peel, and Baronet

Sir Robert Peel, and Baronet (1788–1850; fig. 46), was a favoured customer of John Smith for several years. His name first appears in Smith's surviving ledgers in the autumn of 1812, when the dealer and an assistant moved some of his pictures.¹²⁰ Throughout the next decade minor services would follow, with Smith often framing prints and cleaning and framing other acquisitions. When Smith began to focus more exclusively on picture dealing in the early 1820s, Peel would prove to be a steady customer, particularly after his London house in Whitehall Gardens was completed. Smith also acted as Peel's agent and adviser for several years, and the collector sometimes commissioned the dealer to bid for him at important sales. In 1829 Smith dedicated the first volume of his *Catalogue Raisonné* to Peel [78], an indication of the dealer's high regard for this significant client. A few years later Peel provided him with information used in the volume on Rubens, by obtaining transcriptions of certain papers in the Public Record Office [102–4]. However, in 1836 Peel took exception to the price charged by Smith for conservation work, and ceased to use the firm. Some years later, however, cordial relations were re-established, and eventually he purchased an expensive painting by Ruissald from Smith's sons in 1842.¹²¹ Peel's complex relationship with the Smiths is documented here by thirteen surviving letters, which range in date from 1823 to 1848.

The son of a textile millowner, Peel was educated at Harrow and Oxford, and entered Parliament in 1809. Early in his career Peel was appointed Under-Secretary for War and the Colonies, and Chief Secretary for Ireland. In 1822 he became Home Secretary, and introduced criminal law and prison reform as well as creating the Metropolitan Police; the terms 'Tobbiest' and 'peelers' derive from his name. Peel, who inherited his father's baronetcy

all that is sublime in matters of art, who protests that nothing created was ever so perfect as the Sandro Botticelli & my own feeling carry me a great way with him in his exalted admiration of this fine Painting. Your pictures arrived in happy time as I was just upon the point of setting out for Northwick but I shall first give orders to return to you your picture cases & one of the [sic – yours?] pretty little French Girls by D'Orsay;¹²² I shall be in Town towards the last days of the present month.

I am always
Yours truly
Northwick

120. Smith, 'Day Book', 1823, p. 60.
121. For more details about this purchase, see letter 47; Smith, 'Stock Book', no. 2026; 'Day Book', 1842, p. 47; *Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 9, 1842, no. 64. Present location: National Gallery, London (no. 594).

¶ Not enough is currently known about George Henry Morland's professional activities to state with certainty that he was a dealer (see p. 297), but the high volume of paintings he continuously bought from the Smiths suggests he was in fact trading. Furthermore, the contents of two of the notes sent by Morland to the Smiths in 1846 concerning some potential purchases also appear to support this theory, particularly when he describes one of the paintings under consideration as 'a very uncertain speculation'. He also emphasises that they should place the paintings that interest him out of sight [475]; as a dealer he would not want either the competition or possible clients to have seen them already. Despite the subtle threats that he would not make this purchase without the possibility of a long credit, the Smith ledgers show that he did acquire all of the paintings mentioned below, and several others. In fact, he purchased fourteen paintings from the Smiths between the months of January and June for a total of £827.⁴⁵

472 28 JANUARY [] 1846
From: George Henry Morland, New Lodge, Watlington, near Maidenhead, Kent
To: Messrs Smith

Dear Sirs,
I will give for the six pictures £300 if you will give me a tremendously long credit. Van Falen⁴⁶ and Brughel⁴⁷ are very dear, the Greuze⁴⁸ suspicious and the Ruysdael⁴⁹ a very uncertain speculation.
I think that my offer is a noble one for so early in the year and for pictures that have been so very lately. If we agree, I shall visit you to try a further frame for the Ruysdael.⁵⁰
An early answer if you please
I remain, Dear Sirs
George H Morland

45. Smith, 'Day Book', 1846, pp. 608–17, 616, 618, 620.
46. Morland purchased the painting by Carl van Falen called *Man holding his Horn for Lupo* (Smith, 'Stock Book', no. 3375; 'Day Book', 1846, p. 616).
47. He also bought the painting by Jan Brughel the Elder called *View on the Rhine many figures for Lupo* (Smith, 'Stock Book', no. 3371; 'Day Book', 1846, p. 616).
48. Although he questioned the painting's authenticity, Morland paid £70 for the painting by Jean-Baptiste Greuze called *A portrait of a young girl* (Smith, 'Stock Book', no. 3386; 'Day Book', 1846, p. 616).
49. Morland also had doubts about this painting. *His eye views over a flat country* and described in the ledgers as a late painting by Ruissald. It contained bleaching grounds and a view of the church of Haarlem in the background. Nevertheless, he paid £70 for it (Smith, 'Stock Book', no. 3378; 'Day Book', 1846, p. 616).
50. Morland did buy two second-hand frames that he had cut down and sized to fit their paintings, although the entry does not specify if either was for a painting by Ruissald (Smith, 'Day Book', 1846, p. 623).

¶ Morland writes on 19 February 1846 to the Smith brothers to say that he is ill, which will delay a visit to London, when he no doubt plans to discuss his account. However, as his subsequent letter illustrates [473], several months pass and they are still in negotiation about the £300 payment, so apparently he does receive an extended period of credit.

473 19 FEBRUARY 1846
From: George Henry Morland, New Lodge, Watlington, Kent
To: Messrs Smith

I am laid up with influenza and as soon as I recover will not fail paying you a visit. You may expect me in the course of next week.
Yrs truly
George H Morland

¶ Elhanan Bicknell (1788–1864) of Herne Hill, south London, was a wealthy shipowner and merchant of sperm-whale oil. He was an active patron of British artists, from whom he often commissioned works of art. Although the following note does not give the year, it probably refers to a purchase he made from the Smiths in March 1846, of a painting by Jean Alphonse Roehn called *Girl in a garden*, for which he paid £75.⁵¹

474 20 MARCH [1846?]
From: Elhanan Bicknell, Herne Hill, London
To: Messrs Smith

Dear Sirs,
As my friend Roberts⁵² is coming to see me tomorrow with some other artists I shall like to show them the painting for which I enclose a draft. I shall be obliged therefore by your sending it to me.
Yrs truly
E Bicknell

¶ As noted above, Morland made several other purchases from the Smiths during the spring of 1846. However, his original bill from January of £300 must have remained unpaid, as it is the

51. Smith, 'Stock Book', no. 2666; 'Day Book', 1846, p. 648. Present location: last known in Bicknell's posthumous sale held at Christie's on 25 April 1863 (Lot 2729) as the first lot, when it was called *The Lover-Letter*. It appears that someone from the Smith firm bought it back for £275.
52. David Roberts (1796–1864) was a Scottish artist and illustrator of books on Egypt and the Holy Land. His daughter Christine Roberts married Henry Sanford Bicknell, the son of Elhanan, who was also a patron of Roberts.

only amount mentioned below, even though the ledgers show he had spent another £537 on additional paintings in the mean time.

475 30 JUNE 1846
From: George Henry Morland, New Cottage, Watlington, Kent
To: Messrs Smith

Dear Sirs,
I shall give you one bill at six months for three hundred pounds [dated] from this day. I am going out this morn^g for eight days and afterwards shall be in London when I will call and accept the bill. If you cannot agree to the six months, it would be no use writing as I shall be from home. I hope you will put the pictures *out of sight* and also inform me, when I see you, where they come from.
I am Yrs sincerely
George H Morland

¶ The politician Colonel Rt Hon. John Sydney North (1804–94), MP for Oxfordshire from 1832 to 1853 and Privy Counsellor from 1836, was born John Sydney Doyle. In 1838, a few years after his marriage to Susan North, 10th Baroness North (1797–1884), he changed his name by Royal Licence. Although the Colonel appears in the ledgers sporadically in the 1840s, none of the entries appear to match up with this request for the Smiths to appraise a painting in his London house. The firm normally charged a fee for this service. They also carried out some work for the Norths at their Oxfordshire estate, Wroxton Abbey.

476 [1840s?]
From: Colonel John Sydney North, 16 Arlington Street, London
To: Messrs Smith

Colonel North's compliments to Mr Smith, will feel much obliged if he will do him the favor to call at 16 Arlington Street at any convenient early time to look at a picture which is in his hall, upon which Colonel North is anxious to get Mr Smith's opinion as to the artist who executed it and the quality or merit it possesses as a work of art.

¶ Earl FitzHardinge continued to employ the Smiths to clean and conserve his paintings. There was a large order in the ledgers dating from the summer of 1846 that totalled £48 6s. 6d.⁵³ This note, however, probably refers to a smaller group of paintings that was entered in the 'Day Book' on 21 September 1846. The total cost of this conservation work amounted to £26 7s.⁵⁴

53. Smith, 'Day Book', 1846, p. 640.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 642.

Contents



- Author Note 8
- Foreword *Dr Nicholas Penny* 9
- Acknowledgements 10
- Introduction 12
- 1 1801–1820s: From Carving, Framing and Gilding to the Sale of Rubens’s *Le Chapeau de Paille* 52
- 2 John Smith and Five Significant Collectors 62
Alexander Baring, 1st Lord Ashburton 63
Sir Charles Bagot 71
Lord Francis Egerton, 1st Earl of Ellesmere, and his Successors 81
John Rushout, 2nd Baron Northwick 88
Sir Robert Peel, 2nd Baronet 95
- 3 *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters (1829–1842)* 106
- 4 1830–1832: Customers and the Family at Home and Abroad 125
- 5 1833: A Year of Activity for John Smith and his Oldest Son 141
- 6 1834–1835: Correspondence of Father and Son between London and Abroad 169
- 7 1836: George Gunn and William Smith in Paris 193
- 8 1837–1838: Success in London and Tribulations in Paris 229
- 9 1839–1840: Letters Between John Mountjoy and Samuel Mountjoy Smith and their Customers 271
- 10 1841–1843: Picture Dealing by John Smith’s Sons in London, Glasgow and Paris 297
- 11 1841–1842: John Smith Separates from his Wife and Moves to Holland 323
- 12 1842: John Smith Buys and Furnishes Býdorp, Near the Hague 329
- 13 1843: A Year in Býdorp 353
- 14 1844: Death of Mrs Heyman and Return of John Smith to England 379
- 15 1844–1855: John Mountjoy and Samuel Mountjoy Smith Continue the Business 393
- 16 1845–1855: Letters Within the Family in John Smith’s Last Decade 405
- 17 1855–1904: The Business After John Smith’s Death 427
- 18 Selected Other Letters in the Smith Album 435
- Sources 441
- Bibliography 443
- Family Tree of John Smith (1781–1855) 444
- Biographical Index 447
- Index 452