

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



Clarkson Stanfield RA (Sunderland 1793- London 1867)

Roveredo

signed and dated 'C. Stanfield RA 1851' (lower right)

oil on panel

39 x 60 cm (15³/₈ x 23⁵/₈ in)

This painting depicts the ancient fortress town of Rovereto, formerly known as Roveredo, nestled in the rugged and idyllic mountain landscape, and caught in the early evening light. The bright ice-capped mountains beyond lead us down into the darker valley below, the Alps fortifying the valley and framing the composition. Perched on the cliff, overhanging the little party of travellers on the track, is the picturesque castle. The original foundations seem to be from a Roman tower, architecturally evolving over the centuries into a medieval turret, and this physical reference to antiquity thereby evokes an ancient landscape.

Roveredo is the most notable preparatory work for one of Clarkson Stanfield's most famous paintings, [The Battle of Roveredo 1796](#). The Royal Holloway College's work depicts the Napoleonic battle, when the French defeated the Austrians, and was described by a contemporary viewer as 'Mr Stanfield's crowning effort'.¹ The present work is painted from a slightly different viewpoint, and does not depict the battle.

Instead Stanfield's focus is on capturing the magnificence of the landscape. The idea of depicting the *Battle of Roveredo* may have been in Stanfield's mind as early as 1832, when an engraving of Roveredo was published in that year, in Heath's *Picturesque Annual* after one of his drawings.² Again, although the viewpoint is slightly different, the vantage point is essentially the same, and it is the staffage that differs. In addition to the present work there seem to have been at least thirteen other studies for *The Battle of Roveredo 1796*, although many of these appear to have been simple sketches, and most are unrecorded since the nineteenth century.³

Stanfield spent time travelling extensively throughout Italy and was renowned for his paintings of various topographical scenes. Much of his work, such as *Roveredo*, was directly informed by his many travels abroad, since whilst travelling he would make an extensive number of sketches. He was meticulous in

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organising his sketches, keeping them numbered and ordered. Later he would refer to these sketches in his studio to produce oils and watercolours, but rarely did he paint them from life. His first tour was to Italy in 1824 with fellow artist William Brockedon (1787-1854). In 1830, after several short trips to France, he embarked on a major trip to Venice, via Germany, Switzerland and Austria. The next ten years included more trips to Germany and Italy. In 1843 he toured Holland and in 1851, the date of the present painting, he toured France and Spain with his wife, Rebecca. He built up an extensive collection of sketches from these trips and would often take delight in using them to recount his journeys to visitors.

¹ *The Athenaeum*, May 10 1851

² Leitch Ritchie, *Heath's Picturesque Annual: Travelling Sketches in the North of Italy, the Tyrol, and on the Rhine*, (Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, London, 1832), p.185, plate 16.

³ See Chapel, J., *Victorian Taste: The Complete Catalogue of Paintings at the Royal Holloway College* (A. Zwemmer Ltd., London, 1982), pp. 134.

Provenance:

Thomas Williams of St. John's Wood, 1870;
T. O. Reilly;
by whom sold, Sotheby's, 5th November 1974, lot 92;
where bought by Apollo Galleries, Croydon;
with Thomas Agnew & Sons, London.

Exhibitions

London, Royal Academy, *Exhibition of the Works of the Old Masters, Associated with a Collection from the Works of Charles Robert Leslie, R.A., and Clarkson Stanfield, R.A.*, 1870, no.162.

Literature:

James Dafforne, *Pictures by Clarkson Stanfield, R.A.: With Descriptions and a Biographical Sketch of the Painter* (J. B. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1874), pp.32-33;

Jeannie Chapel, *Victorian Taste: The Complete Catalogue of Paintings at the Royal Holloway College* (A. Zwemmer Ltd., London, 1982), pp. 134-135.

Artist description:

Clarkson Stanfield is often wrongly referred to as William Clarkson Stanfield. The son of Mary Hoad and James Field Stanfield, an Irish actor and author, he was apprenticed to a heraldic coach painter at the age of 12, but in 1808 he abandoned this and went to sea in a collier. In 1812 he was press-ganged and spent two years on HMS *Namur*, the guard-ship at Sheerness. After being discharged as the result of an injury in 1814, he joined the merchant navy, sailing to China in the Indiaman *Warley* in 1815. Soon after his return in 1816 he missed his ship and became a scene painter, first at the Royalty Theatre, Stepney, and then at the Royal Coburg, Lambeth. There he was later joined by David Roberts, who became a lifelong friend, and in 1822 both men were employed as scene painters at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. During the next

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12 years Stanfield established himself as the most talented scene painter of his day, causing a sensation with some of his huge moving dioramas such as the scenes of Venice in the pantomime *Harlequin and Little Thumb* (1831). Meanwhile he was building an equally impressive reputation as an easel painter. He first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1820 and continued to exhibit there regularly until his death. He was elected ARA in 1832 and RA in 1835. He was a founder-member of the Society of British Artists and became its president in 1829.

Stanfield was regarded as the greatest British marine artist of his day. The public preferred the immediacy and high finish of his sea paintings, as in *A Market Boat on the Scheldt* (1826; London, V&A), to the misty visions of J. M. W. Turner's later years, and John Ruskin praised him at length in *Modern Painters* (1843–60), drawing particular attention to his truthfully observed skies and his astonishing ability to render the movement and transparency of water. His most impressive work is the vast *Battle of Trafalgar* (1836; London, United Services Club). It combines his expertise at drawing ships with the scene painter's talent for working on a large scale. A tour de force on a much smaller scale is *On the Dogger Bank* (1846; London, V&A), which shows a Dutch fishing boat in gale force winds. His portrayal of stormy seas in this picture stands comparison with the work of the van de Veldes, Claude-Joseph Vernet and Turner. Other major works include *Tilbury Fort—Wind against Tide* (exhibited RA 1849; Port of London Authority), *HMS 'The Victory' Towed into Gibraltar* (exhibited RA 1853; private collection, see 1979 exhibition catalogue, no. 304) and *The Abandoned* (exhibited RA 1856; untraced), a powerful image of a dismasted ship which won a First Class Gold Medal at the Exposition Universelle, Paris (1855).

In addition to his oil paintings, Stanfield produced many watercolours, the best of which have the spontaneity of watercolours by Bonington, an artist he much admired. He also furnished illustrations for several books, notably *Stanfield's Coast Scenery* (1836) and *Poor Jack* (1840), a collection of sea stories by Captain Marryat. In 1847 he and his family moved into the Green-Hill, a large house in Hampstead. It became a meeting-place for writers and artists including William Makepeace Thackeray, Edwin Henry Landseer, C. R. Leslie and Charles Dickens, a devoted friend who was later to describe Stanfield as 'the soul of frankness, generosity and simplicity, the most loving and lovable of men'. Stanfield also contributed illustrations to Dickens's Christmas books and designed sets for his amateur theatricals.

Collections

Stanfield is represented in the following collections: Victoria and Albert Museum, London; University of Liverpool Art Gallery & Collections, UK; Atkinson Art Gallery, Southport; Guildhall Art Gallery, London; Torre Abbey, Torquay; amongst others.