

THE SANDROCK AT WESTCOTT



During the 19th century there was a growing demand for sand from brick makers and bricklayers in the villages around Dorking, and the Sandrock was an important and very visible source at the foot of Coast Hill, immediately after crossing the Pipp Brook on the approach into Westcott¹. Having been abandoned as a sand pit in about 1870 the cliff face of Folkestone Sands is now obscured by trees, but this was certainly not the case when John Beckett (1799-1864) painted this picture.

Beckett was born in Dorking, the son of a tailor and youngest of eight children. He began work as a house-painter and decorator but successfully turned his hand to more artistic work. He lived at 5 South Street, near where the War Memorial now stands, and was evidently successful insofar as he also owned another property in Howard Road and leased another on Flint Hill.

He painted in oils and most of his compositions were landscapes in the neighbourhood of Dorking. His work was exhibited at the London Institution in 1846, and he invariably included his favourite dog in the picture. Several of his works are in the Dorking Museum including this recently restored scene.

¹ The site has been classified as a RIGS (Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Site) and is now officially known as the Coast Hill Quarry.