

Welcome to the December 2023 edition of the Jack Russell Gallery Newsletter. We hope you enjoy reading about what we've been up to.

INCREDIBLE YEAR!

Due to your support, it's been an incredible year! Firstly, our 60th birthday exhibition this Summer at Chris Beetles Gallery in London was hugely successful. Secondly, our war veterans portrait project was such a wonderful experience all round - it's almost beyond words. I have to thank Chris Beetles and his team for their brilliant effort and commitment to making our London exhibition such a success.

They all put their heart and soul into it, and was so well received that the show was extended an extra month! From the brochure to the framing, the design of the show, to the personal touch looking after our collectors, they were absolutely superb. It's a joy to work with them!

If you missed the show click here to see the collection in full:

60th Birthday Exhibition



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OPERATION PORTRAIT

When I was learning to drive in the Stroud valleys as a teenager, my driving instructor was a veteran of the Korean War whom had been badly wounded and taken prisoner. He wouldn't talk about it much, but every so often I was able to get an answer out of him regarding his experiences during the famous Battle of Imjin River with the Gloucestershire Regiment.

A few years ago, I painted some of the last survivors from the trenches of World War One including the last veteran of all, Henry Patch. I was looking to do something on a similar vein with my home county regiment, and I remembered my old friend Sergeant Henry Peglar. Thanks to him, the idea to find and paint the last surviving veterans from the Gloucestershire Regiment - who fought at the Battle of Imjin River in 1951 - was conceived: "Operation Portrait."

I knew that there were two or three still alive as I had seen them on local television a few times, but with the help of the last commanding officer of the regiment Brigadier Martin Vine OBE, and Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum Director Matthew Holden, we managed to find ten veterans! Sadly, we lost one before we even got started, and we lost another just before the project was complete. But after four months of solid painting, their portraits were done. Little did I know of the impact it would have.

Similar to the First World War veterans, I was purely trying to assure that them and their stories would never be forgotten by immortalising them on canvas. But as soon as the word of the project began to spread, the whole world seemed to take a keen interest! Such was the media interest that BBC Breakfast TV, BBC News at Ten, ITN News at Ten, The Times and The Guardian all covered the exhibition. One of our veterans, Brian Hamblett, was one of the Korean War Veterans stood onstage at the Royal Albert Hall for this year's Remembrance Day Service, which was televised by the BBC.

The full story of the project - showing all of the portraits plus each veteran's personal stories - have been published by the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum in a book called *Final Roll Call*. All proceeds from the book go to the museum to help keep the stories of the sacrifice and heroism alive for future generations to understand. Please judge for yourself, but we honestly believe that there's not another book out there like it; it's totally unique:

Final Roll Call

On the 70th anniversary of these prisoners of war being freed from captivity and returning to England, we managed to get the last eight surviving veterans together at the museum with their families.



Throughout the painting process, the veterans would chat. A lot of these guys hadn't spoken about the horrors of that war in such depth before; some hadn't spoken about it at all for 70 years. During these chats, something truly amazing happened. Immediately after they had told their stories to us, their stature rose; their mood lightened; a smile came across their faces - it was as if a great weight had been lifted from their shoulders. I can tell you straight from the bottom of my heart; that this experience for me was priceless.

The exhibition runs at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum until April 2024:

Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum



FOLLOW ME ON INSTAGRAM

COMMISSIONS

A couple of years ago, a gentleman came up to me in the Long Room at Lord's and asked if I took on commissions. I said that I did, expecting him to suggest Lord's or possibly another cricket ground. He informed me that he was in fact Graham Keene, the oldest Britain to climb Mt. Everest. He asked if it was possible for me to paint him climbing Mt. Everest. I did jest at first, saying that I always go to the location that I'm painting, but to his credit he did offer straight away to take me to the Everest Base Camp, even though we would need six weeks high altitude training! I was a little suspicious at first, but when he explained he had exceeded Sir Ranulph Fiennes' record, I warmed to him.

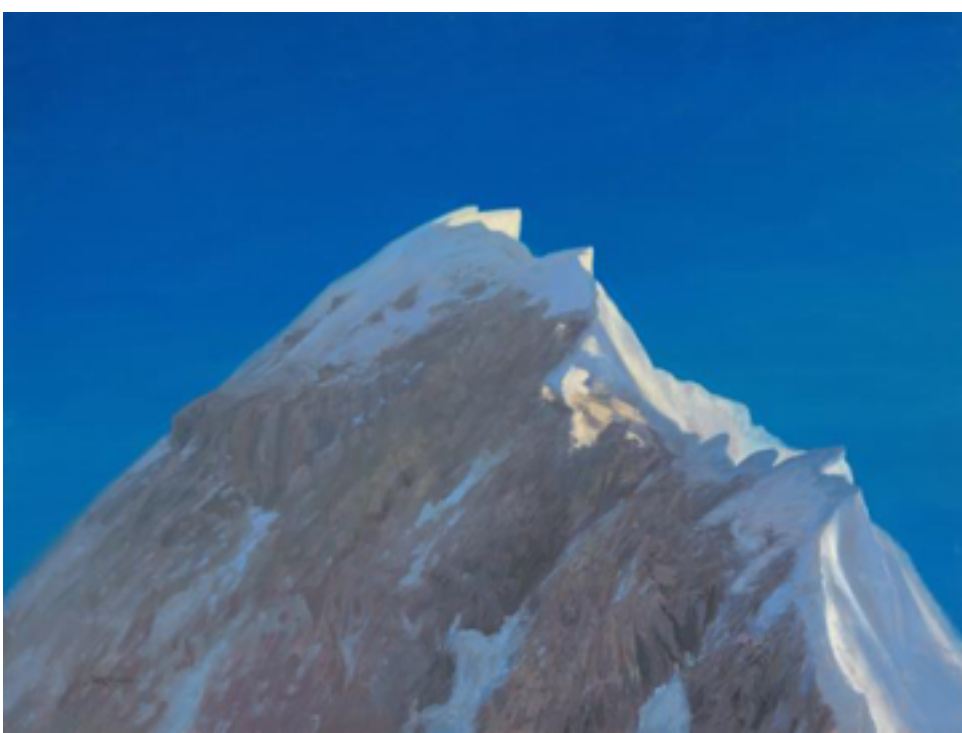
He also told me that he was a wicket keeper, so from that point, there was no turning back! Graham didn't ask for three paintings, but using the references he gave me I didn't think there was any other way of trying to capture the enormity of his achievement. A lot of people die up there, you know! Many are much younger than Graham.

When researching expeditions and climbers on Everest, and noticing that many had failed to make it to the summit - or if they had made it, could still die on the descent due to lack of oxygen - my respect for Graham went up a million fold.

Top o' the World

Luckily, I didn't have to risk my life painting Graham's commission, but I take my hat off to all those who attempt the climb.

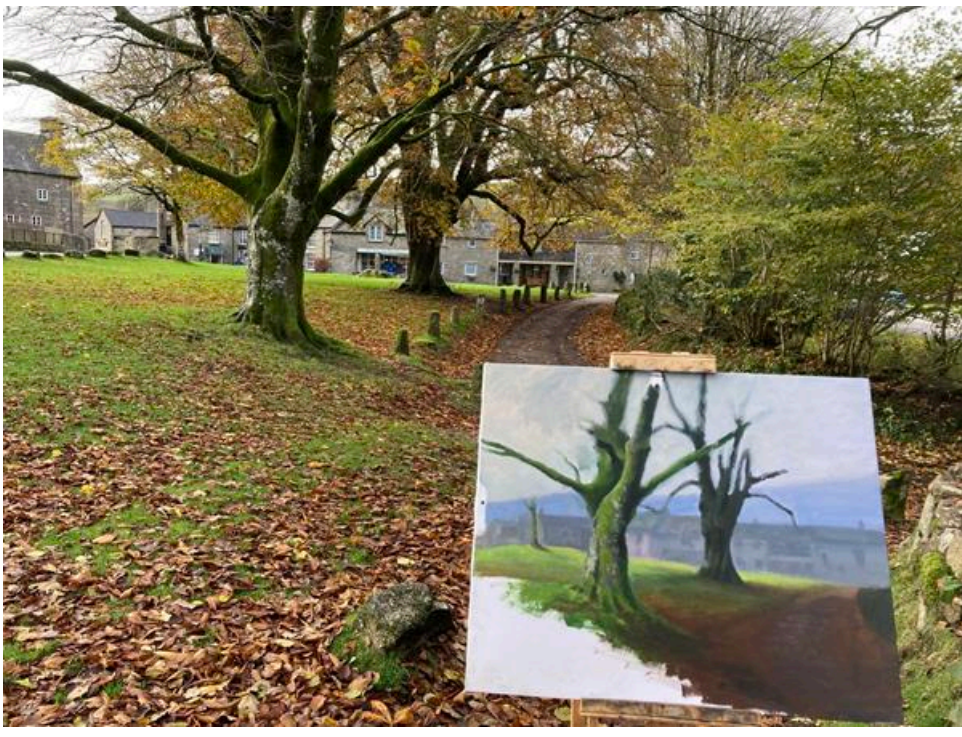
Fortunately, I went to the "Top o' the World" in the comfort of my studio!



WORKS IN PROGRESS

Amidst all these adventures, I have been out and about painting in other magical locations including Windsor, Dartmoor (can't resist a tree!) and the South Coast.

Keep an eye on my [Twitter](#) and my [Instagram](#) accounts to see how these and other pictures are progressing.



VISIT MY YOUTUBE CHANNEL www.youtube.com

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who has helped make 2023 a very special year. Without you, this artist wouldn't be an artist! Have a wonderful Christmas, and Happy New Year.

See you in 2024!

Jack Russell MBE



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