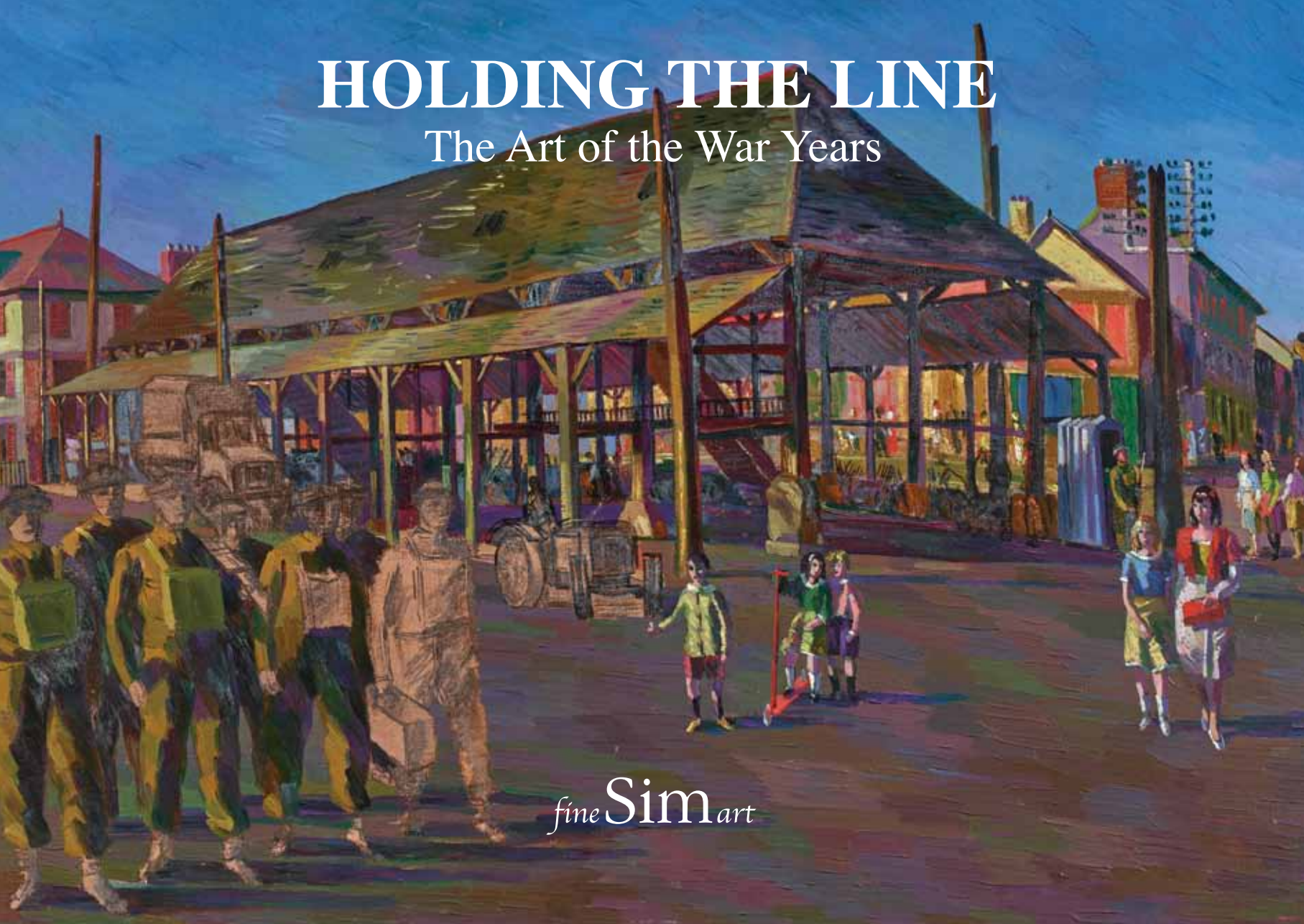


HOLDING THE LINE

The Art of the War Years



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HOLDING THE LINE

The Art of the War Years
1914-18 & 1939-45



12th Annual War Art Exhibition

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The Thrill of Discovery

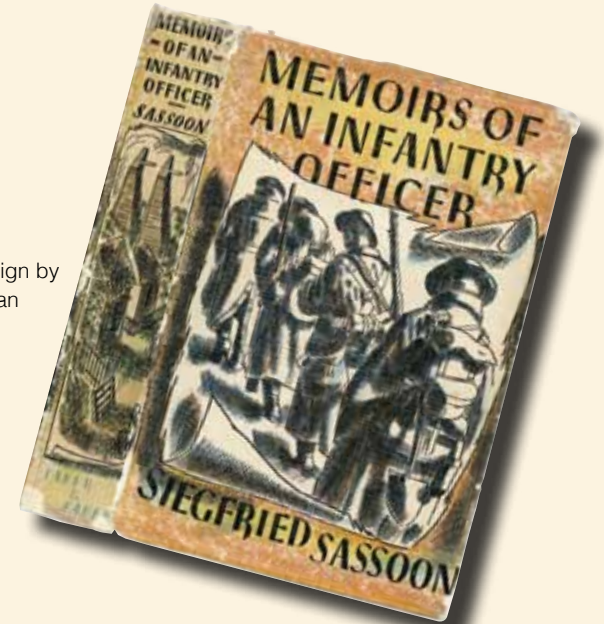
Startling new discoveries and the sourcing of major works by Official War Artists make the 12th edition of 'Holding the Line' one to savour

Our 'Holding the Line' series, which began twelve years ago with a simple joining together of two war artists' work in a single show, has grown into an engrossing annual survey. Fresh and often completely unseen material is thankfully still coming out of attics, with a growing network of private contacts contributing to the steady flow of new material.

One such contact led to the acquisition of one of the undoubted highlights of this year's collection, 'Soldiers in Town' by Barnett Freedman, an artist described, without hyperbole, as "great and unique" by David Buckman, an authority on 20th Century art, in a touching essay of appreciation (*on Pages 6-7*).

Freedman is one of those artists, like Edward Ardizzone and Feliks Topolski, with whom most visually literate people are familiar, mainly through his highly

Book jacket design by Barnett Freedman

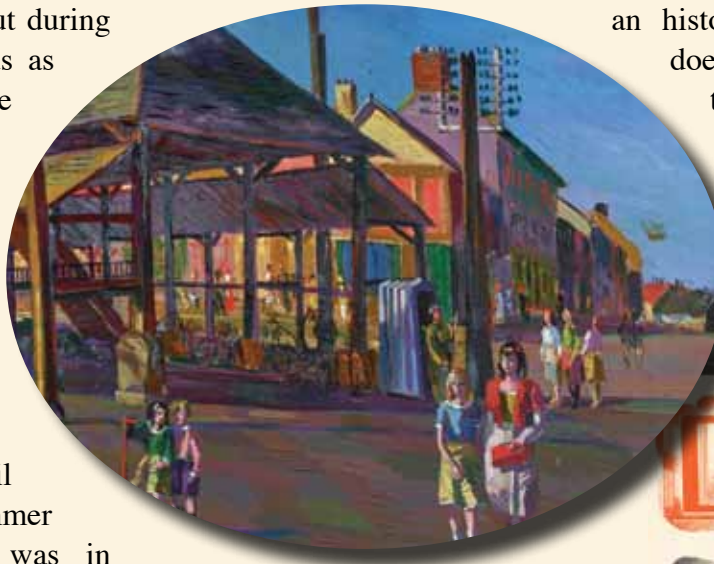


recognisable lithography on posters and book covers which, with the distance of time, now serve to define the

mid-century period in Britain as effectively as an Ealing comedy or a piece of music by Eric Coates.

But Freedman, like Topolski, was far more than a mere commercial accompanist; he was a serious artist, whose prodigious output during the Second World War stands as among the most impressive of all war artists. However, because this work was produced in harness to the national war effort, much of it languishes in public collections and never appears on the open market.

'*Soldiers in Town*', an oil painting dating from the summer of 1944, when Freedman was in Normandy following the Allied advance across Europe, therefore presents an exceptionally rare - possibly unique - opportunity to acquire a significant example of Freedman's work as an Official War Artist. Although fragments from Freedman's studio occasionally appear on the market, along with examples of his lithography, nothing of this quality has appeared



on the market in living memory. It is a treasure.

One hundred years old or more is the customary way to define the 'antique'. After a century, the dust is seen to have settled on an object, a work of art, or an historical epoch in general. One doesn't expect fresh, unexpected, transformative viewpoints to have dramatically into view.

Soldiers in Town
(detail)

Baynard Claudia
Alphabet design by
Barnett Freedman





Mobile Surgical No.1 Field Hospital

And yet, more than 100 years on, a newly discovered collection of pictures by WWI artist nurses manages to effect just that degree of revelation. The collection of satirical, ribald, occasionally grotesque, watercolours and drawings produced by artists working as orderlies and nurses in one extraordinary field hospital – Mobile Surgical No.1 – prompted one academic to describe the insights they provide into the period as “extraordinary and sometimes startling”.

It is this eyewitness proximity to the event that imbues

the kind of war pictures we specialize in with their quality of an historical object – the feeling that ‘this artist was actually there and saw this with their own eyes’.

This is particularly true of Henry Elliott-Blake’s depiction of Dunkirk. Here was a young doctor, working for the Royal Army Medical Corps, in the middle of this unimaginable scene of apparent Armagaddon, having the wherewithal and composure to get out his sketchbook to record the scene, working it up into the powerfully intense oil exhibited in this catalogue on his return. Elliott-Blake had a busy war, serving in India and Singapore (where he was wounded) as well as passing his surgeon’s exams.



Dunkirk from the Bomb-Damaged Pier

The event doesn’t have to be a cataclysm like the

evacuation of Dunkirk for it to be imbued with a palpable sense of period truth. Jack Miller's delightful watercolours of off duty life in Gosport & Portsmouth are like a series of amusing postcards to friends: a young army officer enjoying a bit of free time, employing his skills to amuse and charm. Except that with the passage of time, they have acquired an importance as historical record.



Edward Eade, Civil Defence Artist

It is also true of portraiture, with which this year's catalogue is richly endowed. Anthony Devas's deeply

sensitive portrait of his friend and fellow artist, Edward Eade is poignantly of the period: Eade's un-military delicacy is tellingly suggested by the sitter's haunted expression and long slender hands uncomfortably twisted around the arm of the studio chair.

The same is true of Anna Zinkeisen's evocative study of a child survivor of an air raid (*see page 10*). The knowledge that the sitter was one of the many victims of the London Blitz, painted by Zinkeisen during her time working as an orderly at St Mary's Paddington, informs and transforms our impression of the piece. Her portrayal of the suffering of an innocent child has a depth of association and power that is very impressive. This is Zinkeisen's wartime 'Passion' – a little El Greco of the Blitz.

Andrew Sim

fine Sim *art*

Barnett Freedman

by David Buckman

For those who admire his work, *'Soldiers in Town'* is unmistakably a work by the great and unique Barnett Freedman.

In 1939 the government decided to appoint a War Artists' Advisory Committee to record all aspects of the coming conflict. By 1945 the total yield was well over 5,500. Barnett was one of the select Official War Artists. Other artists would produce a series of works covering particular themes, some on their own initiative random pictures subsequently purchased. Barnett was uniformed with an honorary commission and a salary of £650 a year. As an official artist he joined luminaries to include Edward Bawden, Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland.

When appointed in 1940 Barnett in his late thirties was himself an artist of note. He was probably unrivalled as a lithographer, was a prolific book illustrator and an important figure in British commercial design, with postage stamps for the 1935 Silver Jubilee celebrations and advertisements for Shell-Mex and BP. This was an achievement for a son of immigrant Jewish parents, his childhood marred by constant illness.

During four years in hospital aged nine to thirteen he learned to read, write, play music, draw and paint. When working for a stone mason, he spent his evenings for five years at St Martin's School of Art. After three years' failure to obtain a London County Council senior scholarship, Sir William Rothenstein, principal of the Royal College of Art, shown a portfolio of drawings by Barnett, admitted him and eventually he became an instructor.



Freedman, war artist

Barnett taught my friends Leonard Appelbee and Frances Macdonald, who loved him for his common sense and warm heart underlying a brusque manner. It was Leonard who would be summoned to move the weaker Barnett's heavy lithographic stones.



Barnett's forthrightness remained even when with artist Edward Ardizzone – Diz – he joined the British Expeditionary Force in France. The short, stout balding Barnett had “an enormous voice, a fund of good stories, the cheek of the devil and a great charm of manner.” On Barnett's second day at Arras, a general who was director of military intelligence asked him if he would like to paint the revered General Gort, BEF commander. Barnett responded: “No. I am not interested in uniforms.... Oh, well, perhaps I might if he's got a good head.”

With the fall of France, Barnett continued to work for the War Office, then in 1941 transferred to the Admiralty,

exchanging his honorary rank of captain, general service, for the Royal Marines equivalent. His production of watercolours and oils of submarines and battleships was shown widely. In the 1944 exhibition ‘War Pictures’ at the National Gallery his drawing of workers at an aircraft factory was chosen as cover of the catalogue.

The following year, in the book “War Through Artists’ Eyes” the critic Eric Newton praised his drawing of the complex interior of a submarine as being not only a record but for having “a clarity beyond the power of the photographer: being a hymn, it has rhythm as well as clarity.”

David Buckman has been a journalist, author and broadcaster for well over 50 years, mainly as a freelance. He is the author of the two-volume dictionary “Artists in Britain since 1945”.



Self portrait

BARNETT FREEDMAN C.B.E (1901-58)

Soldiers in Town

Oil on canvas, 1944

Provenance: Ben Uri Museum, Artist's Estate

In this extraordinary painting, available for the first time since it was painted in Normandy in 1944, Freedman's use of colour has a lithographic brilliance that sets it apart from the work of any of his war artist contemporaries. Freedman, who had been an Official War Artist since 1940, travelled to Normandy three weeks after D-Day and set about recording the physical impact of the invasion almost immediately. Precisely detailed drawing underpins all the oil paintings Freedman produced during this period, the artist sometimes allowing the underdrawing to remain visible as a stylistic device. *'Soldiers in Town'* is a case in point - the soldiers themselves are a semi-ghostly presence in drab khaki, their individuality subsumed by their military role, as they march in formation through the happy, colourful scene of the busy market town in Normandy that they have helped to liberate. Bright colour is reserved for the town and its inhabitants, the gaiety of which contrasts so markedly to the uniformed soldiery, who appear to be passing out of the scene, as indeed, in a sense, they were. The heightened colour of the scene anticipates the post-war world and the return of commerce, fashion and decoration.

*The heightened colour of the scene
anticipates the post-war world*





Soldiers in Town CAT. 1
Oil on canvas, 1944



**ANNA ZINKEISEN R.P; R.O.I; N.S
(1901-76)**

Air Raid Victim

Oil on canvas

The contrasting colours of Anna Zinkeisen's career could hardly be more marked. Like her sister, Doris, she trained at the Royal Academy Schools before becoming a highly successful society portrait painter and a darling of the *beau monde* in the 1930's. When war was declared, however, like many young women of their class, both volunteered for war service and were responsible, independently, for producing some of the most memorable and, occasionally harrowing images of the Second World War. Doris was sent to Bergen Belsen and Anna worked as an auxiliary nurse and medical artist at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington. The War Artists Advisory Committee also commissioned Anna to produce some paintings of plastic surgery operations. She also produced portraits of Nursing and Civil Defence personnel as well as ordinary people displaced by air raids, such as this poignant portrait of a haunted-looking young boy against a turbulent background redolent of a raid.

Air Raid Victim CAT. 2
Oil on canvas

GRACE GOLDEN A.R.C.A (1904-93)

Paddington Station, 1939

Pen and ink



Paddington Station, 1939 CAT. 3
Pen and ink

FIRST OF THE FEW

REG LEWIS RBS (British, 1899-1990)

Alex Henshaw, Spitfire Test Pilot (1912-2007)

Bronze (No.1 in an edition of 2 – the other resides in the RAF Museum) signed, inscribed and dated '1945' (on shoulder)

Provenance: The Artist, subsequently presented to Royal Society of British Sculptors (now the Royal Society of Sculptors)

Reg Lewis' 1945 bronze of legendary Spitfire test pilot Alex Henshaw was a personal act of homage to a man he considered to be a war hero. Lewis, a Birmingham-based sculptor, produced just two versions of the bronze, one as a gift for Henshaw (now in the RAF Museum), and the other (the version exhibited here) as a memento for himself, which he positioned in place of honour on his mantelpiece before gifting it to the Royal Society of British Sculptors, of which he was a Fellow.

Reg Lewis was 41 years old and living close to the Vickers Armstrong factory in Castle Bromwich, when he first encountered Henshaw – then a famous air racer, newly turned Spitfire test pilot. In a letter to Henshaw, written many years later, Lewis wrote: “My wife and I used to time your daily journey to the airfield [past our house in Water Orton in Warwickshire] and approximately an hour later, we would hear the roar of a Merlin engine and could often see you soaring up into the blue and then trying to break up a newly made Spitfire by diving it apparently into the deck. We always waited joyously for it to appear in its upward climb, both antics being we knew necessary.”

Henshaw was one of the cavaliers of the golden age of aviation in the 1930s, breaking



both speed and endurance flying records in a glittering career, at a time when ace flyers achieved a considerable level of celebrity. At the outbreak of war, although he toyed briefly with the idea of joining the RAF, Henshaw's extraordinary level of flying ability made him more suitable as a test pilot. One obituarist described Henshaw as "the last of the great amateurs, who under stimulus of war then became a very great professional".



Churchill and Henshaw

By 1940, Henshaw was the chief test pilot at Supermarine's Castle Bromwich Aircraft factory, which produced all versions of the Spitfire, from Mk II onwards. In order to defend the factory site against air attack, Henshaw was given the honorary rank of Sergeant Pilot by the RAF and supplied with a fully armed Spitfire.

Castle Bromwich produced roughly half of all the Spitfires used in the Second World War and each one had to be passed as fault free for delivery to the front line. It was extremely hazardous work: two of Castle Bromwich's pilots lost their lives testing new aircraft and Henshaw himself, who it is estimated tested 10% of all the Spitfires used in the Battle of Britain, had numerous forced landings and one near fatal crash, which destroyed the plane he was flying.

In 1943, Lewis approached an initially reluctant Henshaw to produce a bust but after reassurances that the project was commemorative rather than commercial in spirit and the number to be produced was strictly limited to two, one for the sitter and one to be exhibited by the sculptor, he readily agreed. The pair remained in contact, corresponding throughout their long lives.



Alex Henshaw,
Spitfire Test Pilot (1912-2007) CAT. 4
Bronze



Blitz on Fleet St – St Bride's in Ruins CAT. 5
Oil on canvas

LESLIE CARR (1891-1969)

Blitz on Fleet St – St Bride’s in Ruins

Oil on canvas

Leslie Carr was a successful and versatile commercial artist in the 1930s producing highly sought-after poster designs before volunteering to work as a part-time fireman with the Auxiliary Fire Service during the London Blitz.

Carr’s considerable artistic skill can be seen to great effect in this powerful and dramatic depiction of the aftermath of a Luftwaffe strike on the Wren church of St Bride’s in Fleet St. In Carr’s painting, the nave stands open to the sky the morning after the raid, a single AFS fireman providing an effective scale note in the bottom left hand corner of the scene.

St Bride’s is renowned as the journalists’ church and perhaps that is why Carr, who worked for numerous newspapers and magazines as an illustrator in the 1930s, made a particular point of recording its partial destruction. Another oil painting of this scene by Carr was discovered in the ossuary (bone room of the crypt) of the church in 2018.

Carr was described as “one of our leading marine commercial painters” in the ‘Fire-Fighters of London’ catalogue for the North American tour of the Royal Academy Fireman Artists Exhibition in 1942. Carr joined the Auxiliary Fire Service in 1939 but was talent spotted by the Air Ministry, who employed him to produce a series of dramatic and visually exciting posters about the war effort, which called upon his accurate and dynamic realism.



THE CITY UPROOTED

HENRY SAMUEL MERRITT (1844-1963)

Merritt was a skilful topographical watercolourist, whose ability to record buildings and landscapes with accuracy was recognised by the Recording Britain project and the War Artists Advisory Committee, who bought a number of his pictures of the devastation of the London Blitz. These are of lasting record, illustrating not only the specific details of the damage wrought on familiar urban landscapes but also the unexpected vistas opened up by it – not to mention the sheer scale of the damage and the extent of the clean up operation.



Sun Wharf, Thames Street CAT. 6
Watercolour, signed



Red Lion Wharf, Bankside CAT. 7
Watercolour, signed



Detail
Red Lion Wharf, Bankside CAT. 7
Watercolour, signed

St Nicholas Cole Abbey CAT. 8
Watercolour, signed



DUNKIRK

HENRY ELLIOTT-BLAKE (1902-83) FRCS

Dunkirk from Bomb-Damaged Pier

Oil on board, initialled & dated 1940

Eyewitness pictures of the evacuation of Dunkirk from the beaches are vanishingly rare, which is hardly surprising given the circumstances. In 2019, when we exhibited John Spencer Churchill's epic masterpiece, 'Dunkirk', we described it, without much fear of contradiction, as 'unique', as all of the known 'Official' paintings of the evacuation were cobbled together at a later date by artists not present at the scene. Additionally, the Official accounts all present the scene from the point of view of the small boats at sea.

Henry Elliott-Blake, the artist responsible for this oil painting of Dunkirk from the bomb-damaged pier, was a serving soldier like Spencer Churchill, in addition to being a doctor. He had joined the RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corps) soon after the outbreak of war in 1939 and was one of those evacuated from Dunkirk.

After Dunkirk, Elliott-Blake returned to military duties in England and passed the Edinburgh and English Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons examinations in 1941. Soon afterwards, he embarked in a troopship for Singapore and was wounded in both feet when the convoy came under fire. After serving in India, he came back to England in 1944 and was posted to Stoke Mandeville where he worked with Sir Harold Gillies until his release from the Army. A founder member of the Medical Art Society, his paintings were exhibited by the Royal Society of Portrait Painters and the Royal Academy of Arts, and some still adorn the corridors of the London Clinic. He was later knighted for his services to medicine.

Dunkirk from Bomb-Damaged Pier CAT. 9
Oil on board, initialled & dated 1940



A POET AT WAR

THOMAS HENNELL R.W.S; N.E.A.C (1903-45)

Thomas Hennell made an incongruous war artist. Curly black hair barely contained in his army cap and, as Edward Ardizzone memorably observed, “string in his shoulder straps” but despite appearances Hennell was a great success in his new role, winning the plaudits of fellow artists and the War Artists Committee big wigs alike.



Hennell was excited by the ‘scent-haunted ground’ of the newly vacated battlefields: the hectic activity of the beach at Calais-Nord, troops replacing fieldworkers as the human shapes in the landscape; a bravura pen and wash sketch of ruins in Normandy and the organised chaos of airfield building in Burma – the dazzling kaleidoscope of visual stimuli offered and accepted by a man in the prime of his all-too-brief artistic life.



Ruins in Normandy, 1944 CAT. 10
Pen and wash, signed & dated '1944'



Calais Nord - post D-Day 1944 CAT. 11
Watercolour





Building an Airfield, Pegu, Burma CAT. 12
Watercolour, signed & dated 1945

FACES OF WAR



WILLIAM DRING R.A; R.W.S; R.P (1904-90)

Lieutenant Williams DSC, HMS Black Swan 1943

Watercolour signed

William Dring was an 'outstanding' success as an Official War Artist, according to the WAAC (War Artists Advisory Committee) who commended not only his achievements as an artist but also his hard work and versatility.

Dring had been given some portrait commissions at the beginning of the war, the results of which so impressed the committee that he was given a full time contract to record admiralty subjects in 1942/3, the period in which this pastel portrait was produced. He is known to have worked quickly and efficiently, pleasing his subjects with his ability to achieve a likeness. His sitters were usually newly decorated men and Lieutenant W.R. Williams had just been awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for 'conspicuous gallantry in the face of the enemy' while serving on H.M.S Black Swan, a ship used for the protection of convoys against U-boats.

The National Maritime and RAF Museums are replete with Dring's work in oil and pastel.

Lieutenant Williams DSC
HMS Black Swan 1943 CAT. 13
Watercolour signed



JOYCE PLATT (1920-2010)

Margaret Arbuthnot Lane (1918-2003)

Oil on canvas, 1939

A young woman with thick, wavy hair and an even thicker blue serge jacket stands on an airfield in Essex, posing a tad shyly with flying helmet and goggles in front of a training aircraft. It is the spring of 1939, a few months before the declaration of war and 20-year-old Margaret Lane has just passed her exams to become a fully-fledged pilot. In front of her, at an easel, is a young woman of similar age called Joyce Platt, a newly enrolled student at the Royal Academy Schools, painting a portrait of her accomplished contemporary. It is a striking image, somehow redolent of the expanding confidence of young women at the time.

Just a few short months later, however, this scene would have been an impossibility, as all recreational flying was suspended at the outbreak of war in September 1939. Lane lost no time in joining the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) as a reservist just before the war but was insufficiently experienced to put her flying experience to use. She performed other duties, including driving an ambulance. Lane was a remarkable all rounder: a keen Classicist, with a passion for Greek literature, she was also a top class tennis player, winning the Wimbledon Junior Tennis Championship in 1936 (she continued working as a professional tennis coach until the 1980s). After the war, she also took up sailing, buying her own yacht and farmed a smallholding near Chichester.



Margaret Arbuthnot Lane (1918-2003) CAT. 14
Oil on canvas, 1939

IAN MACDONALD GRANT (1904-93)

Self portrait

Gouache, signed and dated '1941'



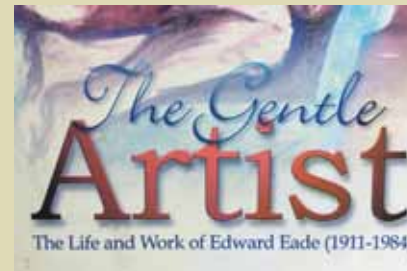
Self portrait CAT. 15
Gouache, signed and dated '1941'

ANTHONY DEVAS (1911-58)

Edward Eade, Civil Defence Artist (1911-84)

Oil on canvas

Anthony Devas didn't let the war interfere with his career as an exhibiting artist – he is recorded as having taken part in at least 30 group exhibitions during the war and is described in Meirion and Susie Harries definitive book *“The War Artists”* (Publ Michael Joseph 1980) as “one of the most successful of the War Artists Advisory Committee’s portraitists”. Although he was declared unfit for active service, Devas, who lived in Markham Square in Chelsea during the war, volunteered as an Air Raid Warden and also performed firewatching duties. Devas was a leading member of the Civil Defence Artists Association, a collective of artists employed in Civil Defence activities, such as stretcher bearing, ambulance driving and firewatching. The Group also included the sitter in this portrait, Devas’s exact contemporary, Edward Eade, who had also been declared unfit for active service. Eade’s biography, written by his son, Oliver, is entitled *‘The Gentle Artist’*, a quality captured in this



delicate and sensitive portrait, which depicts Eade in his warm firewatching clothes. According to his son, Eade hated the war, which he described as “a hideous monster from hell released upon mankind” but did his duty fire watching and on a searchlight battery. He also used his artistic skills to decorate RAF staff canteens and offices at Hendon with murals and pictures (see below).



Edward Eade, Civil Defence Artist (1911-84) CAT. 16
Oil on canvas



WISH YOU WERE

Jack Miller's charming watercolours from wartime Gosport show that fun was possible even in the darkest hour of the war



The Floating Bridge Ferry,
Gosport, Wartime CAT. 17
Watercolour

HERE

JACK LAWRENCE MILLER (1916-87)

Off Duty in Wartime – Gosport in 1941

1941 was arguably the darkest period of the Second World War and yet, in this delightful – and exceptionally rare - set of watercolours and drawings, a young Royal Artillery Officer called Jack Miller showed that fun and humour hadn't entirely been expunged from the daily lives of servicemen and women. Clearly produced in an unofficial capacity, without reference to the censor, Miller depicts a relaxed, happy and attractive picture of a wartime port. A fashionably swim-suited woman and happy children are seen playing and sunbathing incongruously and somewhat comically amid the tank traps and barbed wire on the seafront and relaxed mixed service couples are depicted smooching on the ferry between Portsmouth and Gosport. There is also a fascinating pair of watercolours showing the now defunct 'Floating Bridge' chain ferry disembarking at Gosport that has an air of bank holiday about it. Without the uniforms and military paraphernalia, the artist's work could well have been a set of holiday postcards. Miller trained at Goldsmith's School of Art before joining up and would go on to become a successful painter of horses and racing after the war. The Dictionary of Equestrian Artists describes the artist's 'highly individual' approach to painting "in design, composition and wit".



Wartime Sunbathing CAT. 18
Watercolour



Fraternising on the Ferry CAT. 19
Watercolour

The early Allison-engined Mustangs were mainly used by the RAF in photo reconnaissance and Army co-operation roles, which is possibly the reason an army officer like Miller had access to an RAF hangar to make this rare, informal watercolour.



RAF North American Mustang in Hangar CAT. 20
Watercolour



Disembarking CAT. 21
Watercolour, signed & dated '41

Basking amid the Tank Traps CAT. 22
Watercolour





*Comer of train
from Bedford to Olney in Bucks.
Oct. 7th 43.*

Careless Talk Costs Lives CAT. 23
Graphite, dated Oct 43



BARRACK MESS DECK, - 30.7.43 - MESS HOD E. J. H. F. H. 2000.

Barrack Mess Deck CAT. 24
Graphite

JAMES ROBINSON (fl 1940s)

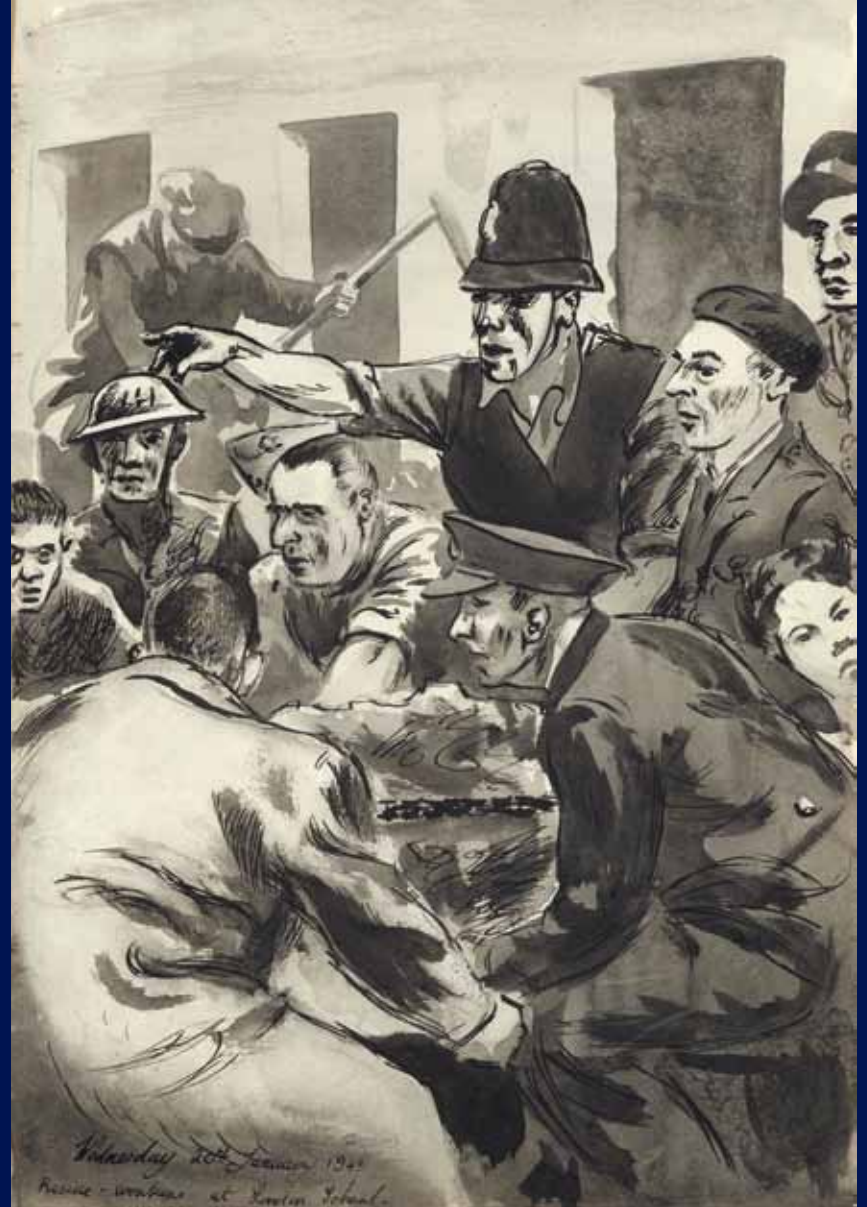
Royal Navy Instructional Film Unit

James Robinson was a young sailor, whose technical drawing skills led to his being seconded to the Royal Navy's Instructional Film Unit, drawing story boards for their films. He made a sketchbook while travelling around the country, putting his observational skills to good use.



Self portrait CAT. 25
Graphite

Rescue Workers at London School CAT. 26
Pen and wash, dated Oct 43



LAUGHING THROUGH THE TEARS

Robert Altmann's comic *tour-de-force* 'M.A.S.H' was thought to be the first example of satire applied to a warzone field hospital, but sixty years earlier, a group of talented artists were doing precisely the same thing on the Western Front.

It was, admittedly, a highly unusual mobile field hospital, financed and run by a dynamic and beautiful American heiress, Mary Borden, assisted by a troop of English nurses to treat wounded French soldiers. Here, a group of artists, called up as nurses and orderlies, somehow found the sense of humour to exorcise the horrors they undoubtedly witnessed and to produce the most extraordinary collection of touching, ribald, comical watercolours and drawings.

Mobile Surgical No.1, as it was known in English, was no genteel convalescent home but a front-line field hospital treating casualties direct from the front. Mary Borden, who would later achieve fame as an author and even as the writer of erotic lyric poetry (inspired by the English lover whom she nursed in another field hospital), was an impressive and persuasive figure, who convinced a sceptical French military establishment that she could provide an efficient and effective field hospital within their rigid bureaucratic requirements.



FERNAND LE BOURGEOIS DE LA NOË
Madame Borden-Turner – La Directrice CAT. 27
Watercolour, signed & dated 1917



A Sanctuary on the Western Front

By Professor Christine E. Hallett

Professor of Nursing History at the University of Huddersfield and Director of the UK Centre for the History of Nursing. Dr Hallett is the author of many books on the subject including 'Nurse Writers of the Great War, which includes a fascinating account of Mary Borden's life.

'Mobile Surgical No. 1' was the brainchild of American-millionaire-turned-London-socialite, Mary Borden, who used her inherited wealth to fund and direct what was to become one of the most famous hospitals on the Western Front. Established in the summer of 1915 to care for French wounded soldiers, it was located in Flanders, one mile from the Belgian/French border and about ten miles from the front-line trenches.



Mary Borden

The recent discovery of a selection of finely-wrought sketches and paintings by patients and orderlies at Borden's hospital adds immeasurably to our understanding of its nurses and their work. Hitherto, only the words and photographs of the nurses themselves have been available. Now, for the first time, that spotlight has been turned on the nurses themselves, and we can view them through the

lens of those who experienced their care or assisted their work.

An aspiring novelist, Borden wrote a moving account of her work at Mobile Surgical: The Forbidden Zone (published by Heinemann in 1929). She also drew into her hospital a number of other nurse-writers – all feminists and astute literary women – including avant garde modernist, Ellen La Motte, and the writer Maud Mortimer Clapp. In the late-summer of 1916, Borden moved south to set up a

“The result offers extraordinary and sometimes startling insights into how those men viewed their female counterparts and carers”

new hospital for the planned French-British assault on the German lines that would become infamous as 'The Battle of the Somme'. In the Spring of 1917, the unit moved about twelve miles north to Adinkerke, but it was badly shelled by German Gotha Bombers. To escape the bombardment, Mobile Surgical moved a second time – back south to Rousbrugge. Here the nurses stayed, until the German advance of March 1918.

While Ms Borden and the other English nurses are clearly objects of desire, and occasionally the most outlandish and inappropriate erotic fantasy, to the male artists in the hospital, they are also accorded a degree of reverence and respect not often accorded to themselves.



Mary Borden – Nurse

Even their boss, Chief Medical Officer Ollivier is depicted as a stiff backed and rather absurd figure, the pinnacle of a ridiculous and rather chaotic pyramid of command that is mercilessly mocked. It is always done with affection, however: Ollivier with his fat dog called Dianne and immensely tall assistant, Perruche, who somehow managed to rear partridges. The menagerie was completed by a pet goat and a squirrel.

Even the horrors of war are laughed off. The shelling of the hospital and its hasty evacuation by train is depicted, with typically ribald gallows humour with the nurses giving piggybacks to the wounded, who obviously take the opportunity to become better acquainted.



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
Silhouette of Doctors, Orderlies and their pets CAT. 28
Pen and wash



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
The Angels of the Office CAT. 29
Watercolour, signed & dated 1917

MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
Letters from Home CAT. 30
Watercolour, signed & dated 1917





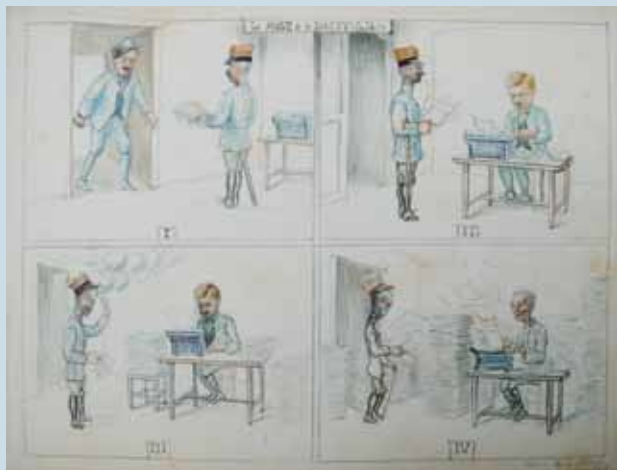
MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
'Dr Ollivier assailed for Permissions' CAT. 31
Watercolour, signed & dated 1917



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
Overwhelmed by Bureaucracy CAT. 32
Watercolour, signed & dated 1917



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
Evacuating the Wounded CAT. 33
Watercolour



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
The Muse & the Typist CAT. 34
Watercolour



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
Mary Borden's Fellow Nurses CAT. 35
Watercolour



FERNAND LE BOURGEOIS DE LA NOË
La Directrice (Mary Borden) discusses her plans for 'Le Petit Paradis' CAT. 36
Watercolour



FERNAND LE BOURGEOIS DE LA NOË
'It is too late, Monsieur le Médecin Chef, she's married' CAT. 37
Watercolour



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
The Arrival of Reinforcements CAT. 38
Watercolour



FERNAND LE BOURGEOIS DE LA NOË
 Saucy Vignettes CAT. 39
 Watercolour



MARCEL L'ENFANT (1884-1963)
Stretcher Party CAT. 40
Watercolour

THE LINKS BETWEEN US

A group of charming drawings sheds light on a benign Polish invasion of St Andrews in WWII

Lt. Col WIKTOR BERNACKI (1895-1956)

Free Polish Army in Scotland

Lt.Col Wiktor Bernacki was a senior Polish Army Officer, part of a large contingent of 'Free Poles' who found themselves on the East Coast of Scotland after the fall of their country in 1939. Broadly speaking, the regrouped Poles had been charged with the defence of Scotland against possible invasion and, although there were significant numbers of Poles dotted all along the coast from Montrose to Dunbar, the main concentration was in Fife, in the area between Dunfermline and St Andrews.

Bernacki was the Commander of an elite group of the Free Polish Army, known as the 'Silent Unseen', broadly the equivalent of the SOE (Special Operations Executive), who were being trained to parachute into occupied parts of Poland and operate behind enemy lines. Remarkably, he was also a talented draughtsman, recording the military and civilian life in St Andrews with humour and panache.

Bernacki appears to have been one of the many Poles who attended art classes at the University of St Andrews, organised by two artist sisters, Winifred and Alison MacKenzie, as his name appears on a list of exhibitors at their 1944 exhibition and some of his drawings show students at a drawing class.



A Soldier's Kit CAT. 41
Pastel



Signals on the Links I CAT. 42
Watercolour



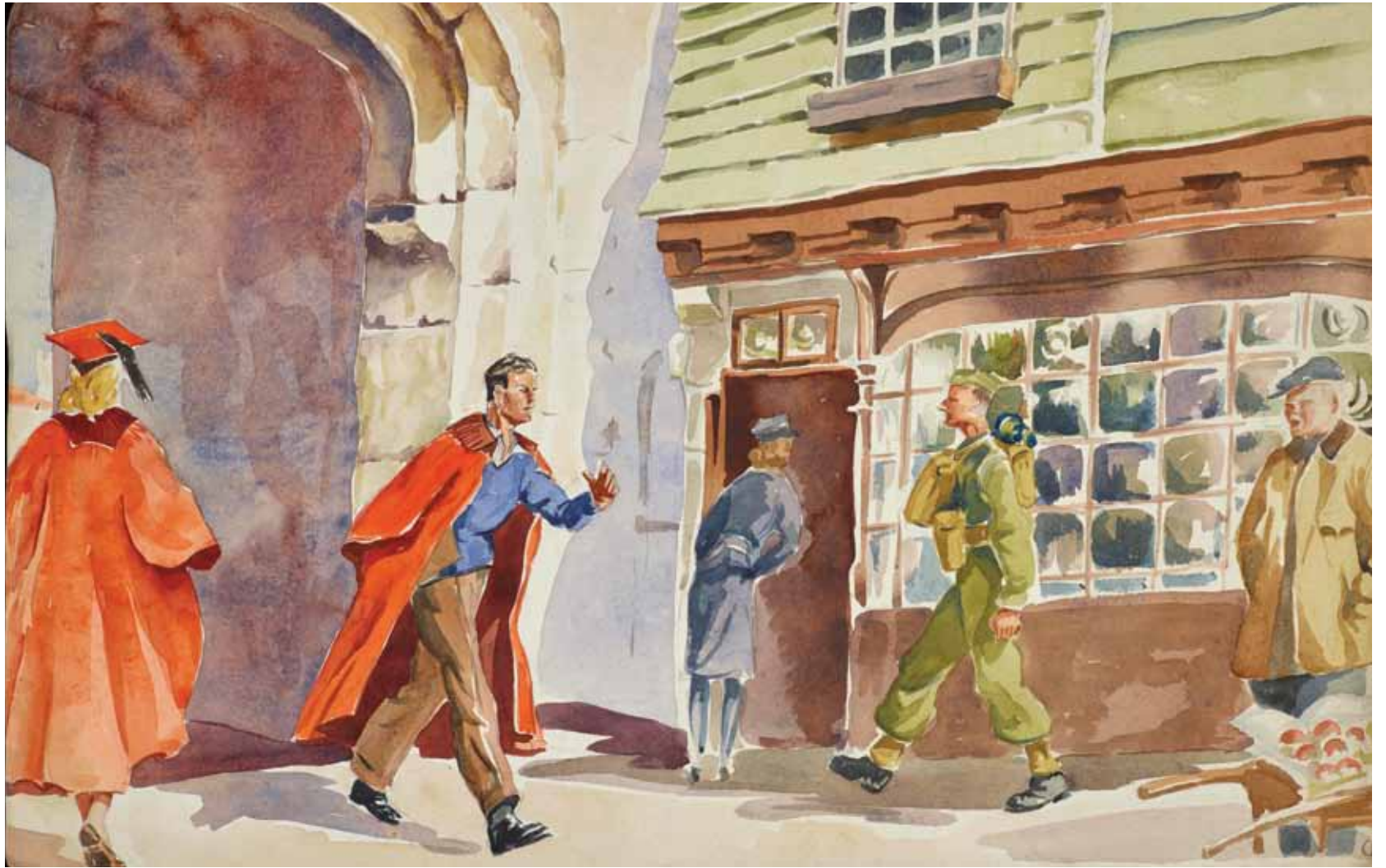
Signals on the Links II CAT. 43
Watercolour, signed & dated 1942



The Drawing Class CAT. 44
Graphite



Soldier Sketching CAT. 45
Pen and Wash



St Andrews in Wartime CAT. 46
Watercolour



Polish Officers Love a Uniform CAT. 48
Watercolour

Town & Gown – Fraternalising in St Andrews CAT. 47
Watercolour



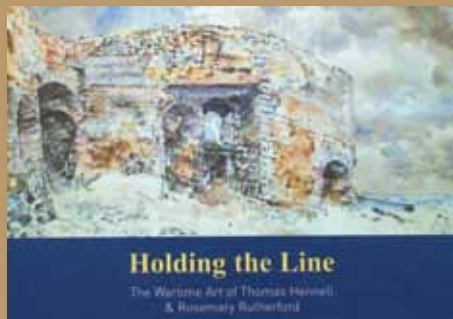
Signalman CAT. 50
Graphite

'Poland' – A Country Reborn CAT. 49
Graphite

12 Years of HOLDING THE LINE



Holding the Line October 2011



Holding the Line 2010



Holding the Line September 2012

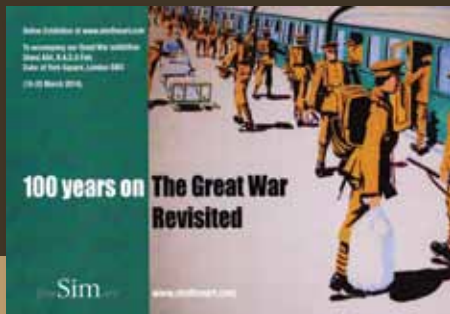


Holding the Line November 2013



Holding the Line September 2014





On-line Exhibition 2014



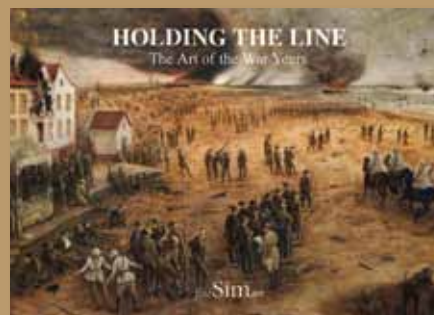
Holding the Line September 2017



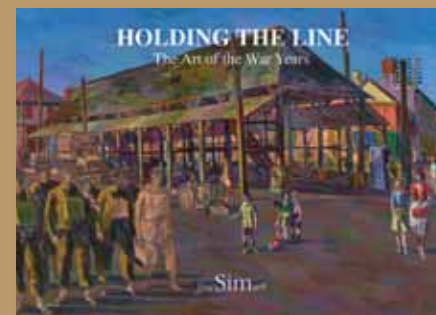
Holding the Line October 2020



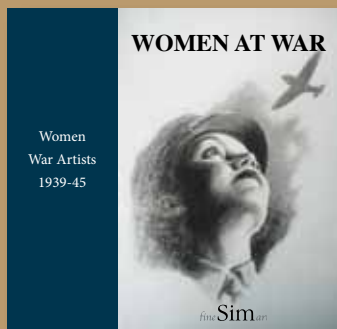
Holding the Line November 2015



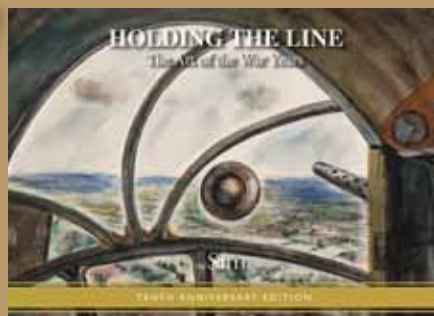
Holding the Line September 2018



Holding the Line October 2021




Holding the Line November 2016



Holding the Line September 2019

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Matthew Hollow

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Ant Graphics Design Services

Contact: Andrew and Diane Sim
Email: simfineart@btinternet.com
Telephone: 07919 356150



