

DIGGING FOR VICTORY

A Private Collection of Thomas Hennell's wartime rural watercolours



fine Sim art



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“*A peculiar and enduring beauty*” is how Arnold Palmer, the editor of the ‘Recording Britain’ project described the qualities imbued in Thomas Hennell’s watercolours of rural life in mid-century Britain.

What strikes the observer about a Thomas Hennell watercolour is that it is both beautiful, in its deft capture of the fleeting elements of landscape and weather in a satisfying work of art, but also that it is an accurate and felt observation of rural life at a moment of great upheaval, by an artist and a man wholly steeped in that element.

Hennell’s first commission from the War Artist’s Advisory Committee (W.A.A.C) was to record the harvest of 1941, principally because the Ministry of Agriculture believed that there was a ‘special interest’ in the subject of wartime food production. Nobody was better fitted for this job than Hennell, a countryman at heart, with an intimate and profound knowledge of agricultural life and a poet’s eye for the beauty of his subject.

The watercolours illustrated here were collected over many years by another rural artist, Peter Coate, who had a particular fondness for Hennell’s rural watercolours, which reminded him of his own childhood.

All but one (a charming drawing from the late 1930s) date from the Second World War and mostly feature the landscape of Hennell’s native Kent, which he recorded not only for the W.A.A.C but also for the Pilgrims Trust and the Recording Britain project. Two important pictures from Hennell’s later career as a full-time salaried war artist in Normandy (also from the Coate collection) have also been included.

Andrew Sim

***All pictures from the collection of the artist
Peter Coate R.W.A. (1926-2016)***



Spring Cabbage - Picking Winter Greens *Watercolour 29 x 47cm*



Working a pair of horses *Watercolour 19 x 30cm*



Mr Wiggins, the son of the shepherd, Richard Wiggins (1820-1913) wearing his father's smock *Reed pen 30 x 31cm*



Ploughing, with sunburst *Watercolour 30 x 47cm*



Horse and Cart, with figures, Ridley Watercolour 30 x 48cm



Clearing the Orchard, Eldridge Farm, Ridley *Watercolour 29 x 47cm*



Bagging potatoes, Ridley *Watercolour 34 x 47cm*



Chateau D'Esquelbecq, Nr Dunkirk 1944 *Watercolour 32 x 45cm*



Devastated harbour, Calais 1944 *Watercolour 35 x 46cm*

Spring Cabbage - Picking Winter Greens

Watercolour, signed

Exhibited: 'Countryman to War Artist' No.37

29 x 47cm £2,950

Working a pair of horses

Watercolour

Exhibited 'Drawn from Nature' a touring exhibition, Jan 1981

Ex: Rex Wailes collection

19 x 30cm £1,950

**Mr Wiggins, the son of the shepherd, Richard Wiggins
(1820-1913) wearing his father's smock**

Reed pen

Exhibited: 'Drawn from Nature', Jan 1981

'Countryman to War Artist' No.45

Literature: 'The Land & the Mind' Jessica Kilburn, P.167

30 x 31cm £1,250

Ploughing, with sunburst

Watercolour

30 x 47cm £2,750

Horse and Cart, with figures, Ridley

Watercolour, signed

Exhibited: 'Countryman to War Artist' No. 42

30 x 48cm £2,950

Clearing the Orchard, Eldridge Farm, Ridley

Watercolour

Exhibited: 'Countryman to War Artist' No. 40

29 x 47cm £2,750

Bagging potatoes, Ridley

Watercolour, inscribed & dated 27 April, 1942

Exhibited: R.W.S. Spring Exhibition, 1942

34 x 47cm £2,950

Chateau D'Esquelbecq, Nr Dunkirk 1944

Watercolour, signed (Censor's stamp verso)

32 x 45cm £3,250

Devastated harbour, Calais, 1944

Watercolour

35 x 46cm £2,950

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All pictures available from receipt of this booklet.

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