

Jeremy Houghton at work
in his Cotswolds studio

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Windsor Castle as it
appears in the artist's
sketchbook



Artist in Residence

From farm animals and rare breeds to pageantry, processions and portraits of the Queen herself, Jeremy Houghton's work has the royal seal of approval. INGRID SEWARD spoke with him recently

IN 2013 ARTIST Jeremy Houghton spent 14 weeks at Highgrove in Gloucestershire as artist in residence. His host, the Prince of Wales, was delighted with the results of

Jeremy's labours and later praised him for producing 'a splendid collection of unusual watercolours that truly captures the spirit of Highgrove and Home Farm'.

It was praise indeed for the young watercolourist who had by chance had the same teacher as the Prince, colourist John Ward. His pictures of what Prince Charles calls 'our cherished landscape' were then exhibited to benefit the Prince's Countryside Fund and help farmers in rural communities.

It might seem a long way from his Eton College days and his subsequent art training at the Slade, but having been born in the Cotswolds into an army family Jeremy always loved rural life and all things equestrian. For five years he was head of art at the International School in Cape Town, eventually returning to the more muted shades of the English countryside and a future as a royal artist in residence.

'Highgrove epitomises bucolic life in the Cotswolds, where the fabric of the countryside is nurtured and loved,' he says. 'My style of watercolour painting is inspired by old printing techniques, along with black and white photography of a bygone era. Hence the pictures have a timeless, nostalgic quality that recognise to move forward we must look back.'

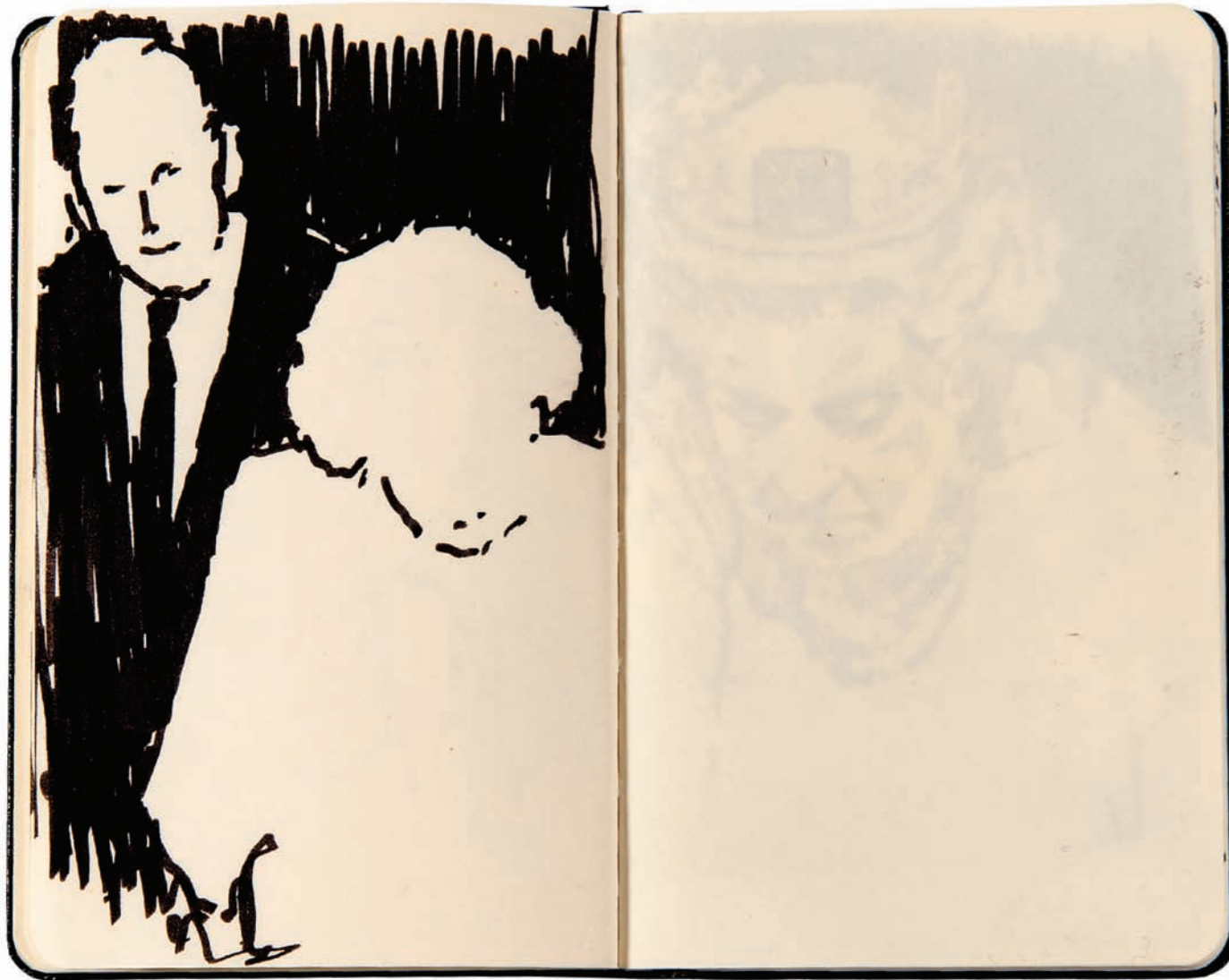
'Through my art I am interested in studying movement

and light. This is enhanced by the seasons and how farming communities adapt year in, year out, to work in harmony with nature. The characters from these communities – man and beast – are what make such places tick. Highgrove is no different and I hope my work illuminates their importance and goes a small way in helping other less fortunate rural areas cope with the demands of the 21st century.'

Jeremy's royal patronage began after he left Cape Town and immersed himself in his own work. He needed a theme and, since he enjoyed the ceremonial aspect of the Army, he decided to concentrate on military paintings. A small exhibition entitled *All The Queen's Horses* led to him being asked by a couple of Gentlemen at Arms who liked his work to paint them for their 500th anniversary the following year.

'I was put where I wanted to be – just on the edge of what was going on and painted all the ceremonial occasions,' Jeremy recalls. 'I attended the State Opening of Parliament in a smart suit and sat sketching away. I had a good position so I could see everything and even went to the rehearsals the night before. My final painting for them was when the Queen came to St James's Palace and presented colours.'

Through his Establishment connections Jeremy's talent did not go unnoticed in royal circles. A member of Prince Charles's Highgrove staff learned he was a local boy and told him he must do some paintings of Highgrove. Jeremy was delighted and almost immediately received a letter asking when he wanted to start. ▶



ABOVE: The unmistakable outline of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, with a further portrait of the monarch wearing a diadem showing through from the next page

OPPOSITE PAGE: Her Majesty out riding with head groom Terry Pendry in the Home Park at Windsor

The carriage procession to Windsor Castle at the start of the President of Ireland's state visit, 8 April 2014

'I had licence to roam – there was a blank canvas,' Jeremy recalls. 'It was my interpretation of Highgrove and I could come and go as I pleased. Having quite a lot of time there I tried to find a theme; I felt that the house and the gardens were quite well known and commercial, but the estate was more of an untold story. The rare breeds, the Old Spot pigs, the horses, the funny chickens and so on. It felt very nostalgic.'

'The Prince has the ways and means to run a farm like that, but he was pioneering methods of farming. I didn't ask people to stop and pose. I lurked in the shadows and recorded what I saw. I hoped that way I could provide an interesting viewpoint of life from within.'

When Jeremy had completed his Highgrove residency he was invited to sit down with the Prince and show him a selection of the work over a cup of tea. 'It was very informal chat between two artists,' Jeremy remembers. 'The things that have been done at Highgrove are his vision. He planned it 30 years ago. His vision was my inspiration.'

Some of Jeremy's friends – Lord Vestey, Master of the Horse; Toby Browne, Crown Equerry; and Andrew Ford, Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's Office – then suggested to the Queen that the young artist did the same thing at Windsor Castle as he had done at Highgrove. Her Majesty agreed and for the next six months Jeremy worked at Windsor. His theme this time was to look at things 'through the eyes of a horse'.

'The heartbeat of the castle has always been the mews,' he says. 'To this day the royal horses' roles interlink both public and private life, so the portrait of Windsor through the eyes of a horse gave me the necessary "blinkered focus" as well as the outreach to venture into the Great Park, the home of the horse show, Guards' Polo on Smith's Lawn and the procession to Royal Ascot. The Royal Windsor Horse Show was fascinating as they stabled over 100 horses there from the King's Troop in the indoor riding school, which they divided into loose boxes.'

'It was poignant because 2014 was the centenary of the start of World War One and there I was looking at identical horses, identical gun carriages and identical uniforms. I felt I could have been standing there in 1914. It was an extraordinary and moving sight and sound to see 100 horses exercising in the park in the early morning.'

Jeremy was at the castle for six months, but he didn't stay as he felt at the end of a week he needed to step back from it and let his ideas unravel and give himself time to reflect.

'You feel it when the Queen is there,' he says. 'When she is in residence there is energy in the air. She rides every day in the summer with Terry Pendry, who she has been riding with for over 20 years. If you want to know anything about the Queen people ask Terry, as he knows everything. He is so loyal – he is one of the hardworking talented people around the Queen and is in charge of the mews with the Crown Equerry.'



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Jeremy Houghton with a liveried member of staff at the Royal Mews, Windsor Castle

Chickens at Highgrove, one of many works produced while artist in residence at the Prince of Wales's Gloucestershire estate

Toe to Toe, a watercolour of Her Majesty's Foot Guards on parade



When Jeremy had completed his time at the castle he staged an exhibition called *The Spirit of Windsor*, the profit from which went to the Horse Trust, whose patron is the Princess Royal. The trust cares for retired military horses, just as they did before and after the Great War.

'Jeremy observed Castle life through the eyes of a horse,' Princess Anne noted. 'His beautiful sketches and paintings have cleverly captured what goes on behind the scenes at Windsor.'

After it was all over Jeremy was invited to Buckingham Palace to show a selection of his work to the Queen and Prince Philip. 'We set up the paintings in a drawing room,' Jeremy recalls: 'It was just me and Prince Philip, Sam Vestey and the Queen. I took a good cross-section of paintings including some I had done of the fell ponies she rides. Her favourite is a little pony called Balmoral Erica and during the residency I did a small painting of the two of them at the Windsor Horse Show.'

'The Queen was quietly stroking Balmoral Erica's nose. I put this on an easel and presented it to her. She seemed chuffed. Apparently the next day she was sitting having breakfast in her dining room with my little painting on an easel in front of her. It was just a picture of her as a lady who loves ponies. I have this sweet vision of her at breakfast looking at my painting.'

Jeremy's sketches tell a lot more than a photograph as they capture the spirit of the subject. He has a wonderful sketchbook full of little images of the Queen; never far from his side, he could grab it at any time to record a fleeting moment. To get the unique 'negative' effect he employs on many of his paintings he uses a masking fluid that he paints on with a brush which, once dry, provides a seal.

'I see and work in the negative,' he says. 'So I apply masking fluid to all the bits of paper I want to keep white to seal those bits off. Once it is dry you can then apply your layers of watercolour and I apply my blues and browns to get my sepia tones, and once the watercolour washes are dry, I peel off the masking fluid. It leaves you with a print-like quality, which looks like an old negative.'

Jeremy feels that as the past is such an essential part of his royal work he found a style that transcends through the past to the present.

'Prince Charles said to me "Our mountains are as important as our cathedrals. We must look after them." My paintings pay homage to that vision and I try and choose scenes that might have been the same 100 years ago. I like playing around with time.'

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