

norman neasom







1 Lovers – A Pastoral, 1950  
mixed media  
33 x 43 cms 13 x 16 7/8 ins

# norman neasom

RWS RBSA, 1915-2010

2020



above  
2 Young Love, 1950  
pen drawing  
23 x 26 cms 9 x 10 1/4 ins

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12 Bury Street, St James's, London SW1Y 6AB  
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7287 4448



## norman neasom

There's a world we've lost in the decades since the Second World War. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, modernity and machines have stamped their mark across the countryside. 'Man made the town,' was a common enough saying in the eighteenth-century, 'but God made the countryside.' This is no longer so true: humanity's reach is almost everywhere. But Norman Neasom's paintings and drawings – like those of a number of other British artists over the past century or so, record both that old, quieter, simpler England, as well as its slow, gradual passing. In Neasom's work, we can still discover men gathering hay by hand, two old gentlemen in tweeds out for a ride, or a farmer bringing in sheep with his dog. As his obituary in *The Independent* in 2010 observed, 'Neasom's was a benign, pastoral vision in a deeply English tradition.'

Yet did this world of 'Old England' ever really exist? Writing this in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdown, I feel that yes, it did. Cycling through quiet Cotswolds lanes devoid of cars and extremes of noise, enjoying the sound of birdsong and bees, one is thrust back into pastoral tranquility. One might expect, at any moment, rounding a corner, to encounter a cart, or a horse and carriage, or a stone-breaker at the side of the road – in the way that a man in one of Norman Neasom's paintings kneels down to praise an angel that has appeared before him in the ruins of an old monastery [no. 73]. There is fear and sacrifice and a whiff of danger in the air right now, but amongst it all there is



3 Bromsgrove Fair, 1993  
pencil and wash  
18 x 20.5 cms 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$  ins



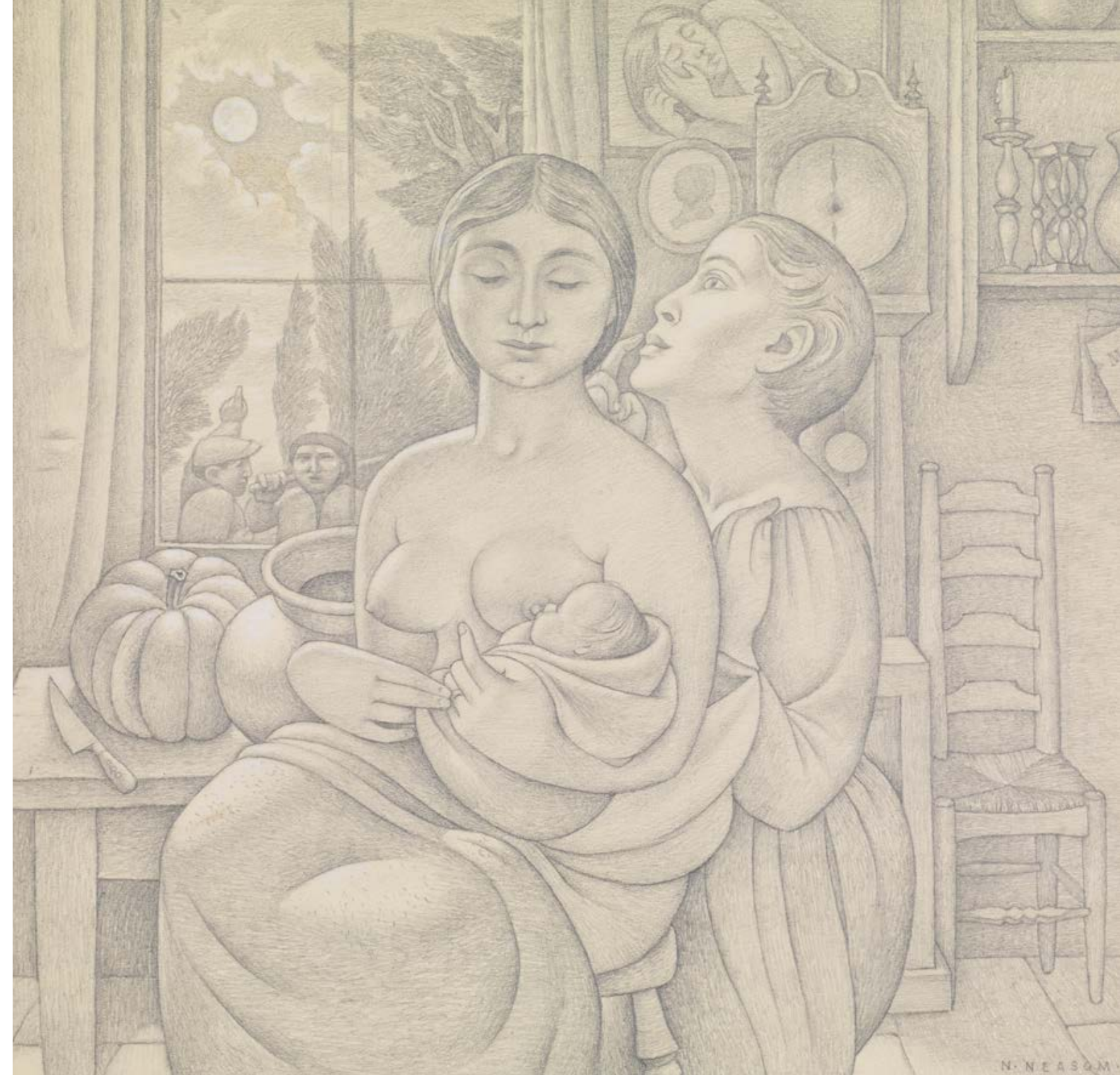
too – for those of us lucky enough to get out into it – the chance to rediscover the beauty of rural England, and the realization of a slower pace of life in which one really stops, listens, notices, appreciates – and sometimes notice angels.

And of course Norman Neasom's era was not without its own crises – all far more dangerous than ours. Thus, his earliest memory, recorded in his illustrated 2004 memoir *Birchensale: Farm Memories in Pictures*, recalls searchlights seeking out Zeppelins attempting to bomb Birmingham in October 1917. Neasom would hardly have been three years old then, for he was born early in the First World War. His family were farmers, and he grew up on Birchensale Farm, on the outskirts of Redditch, in the county of Worcestershire. The late eighteenth-century farmhouse is still there, but much of the land has now, inevitably, been turned over to housing.

He had always loved to draw, and on leaving school at sixteen Neasom went to study at Birmingham College of Arts and Crafts, where his teachers included the Great War veteran and Royal Academician, Bernard Fleetwood-Walker (1893–1965). One of Fleetwood-Walker's best-known paintings, *Amity*, in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, was painted in 1933. A young couple sit in a tranquil landscape; the young woman holds up a flower and the boy beside her looks on – more wistfully and romantically, perhaps, than the title suggests. It is a wonderful example of British realist painting from the inter-war period, and it is to this somewhat underappreciated genre that much of Neasom's work belongs. Its best-known practitioner was Stanley Spencer – who was as happy as Neasom to focus his attention on the very un-modern motif of an allotment, or an odd, amusing

- 4 Moonlight Madonna, 1968  
pencil drawing  
27 x 28 cms 10½ x 11 ins

*Neasom always considered this work  
as one of his best drawings.*







looking couple seen in the street, or an angel where it should not have been. Other (less visionary) proponents included James Walker Tucker, whose mid 1930s tempera painting *Hiking* (in the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne) is instantly recognizable: three young women out walking unfold a map in a country landscape of trees and gentle hills, whilst nestled in the valley below them there's a church, and an old stone manor-house.

With more than a hint of nostalgia, it is a period of British art that is gaining increasing attention: in 2017 the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art even devoted a whole exhibition to the 'movement' (if one can call it such), showcasing over fifty British realists from the 1920s and '30s, including Gerald Leslie Brockhurst, Meredith Frampton, Winifred Knights and Edward Wadsworth – as well as Spencer, Fleetwood-Walker and Tucker. One might also draw Eric Ravilious into this group,

*left*

- 5 Vote Looney Left, 2001  
pencil drawing  
21 x 19.5 cms 8¼ x 7⅞ ins

*opposite*

- 6 Forbidden Fruits, 1952  
oil on paper  
29 x 24 cms 11⅝ x 9½ ins







with his closely-observed watercolours devoted to the English countryside of the inter-war years.

Trained in this manner that rejected much of early twentieth-century Modernism, Neasom retained it for the whole of his career. It characterizes his paintings of English landscapes that are almost visionary in both their attention to detail and their sense of the spiritual in place. His more cartoon-like drawings and caricatures are something slightly different. Closely observed,

*left*

**7** Gremlin Town, 1945

pencil pen & wash

47 x 35 cms 18½ x 13¾ ins

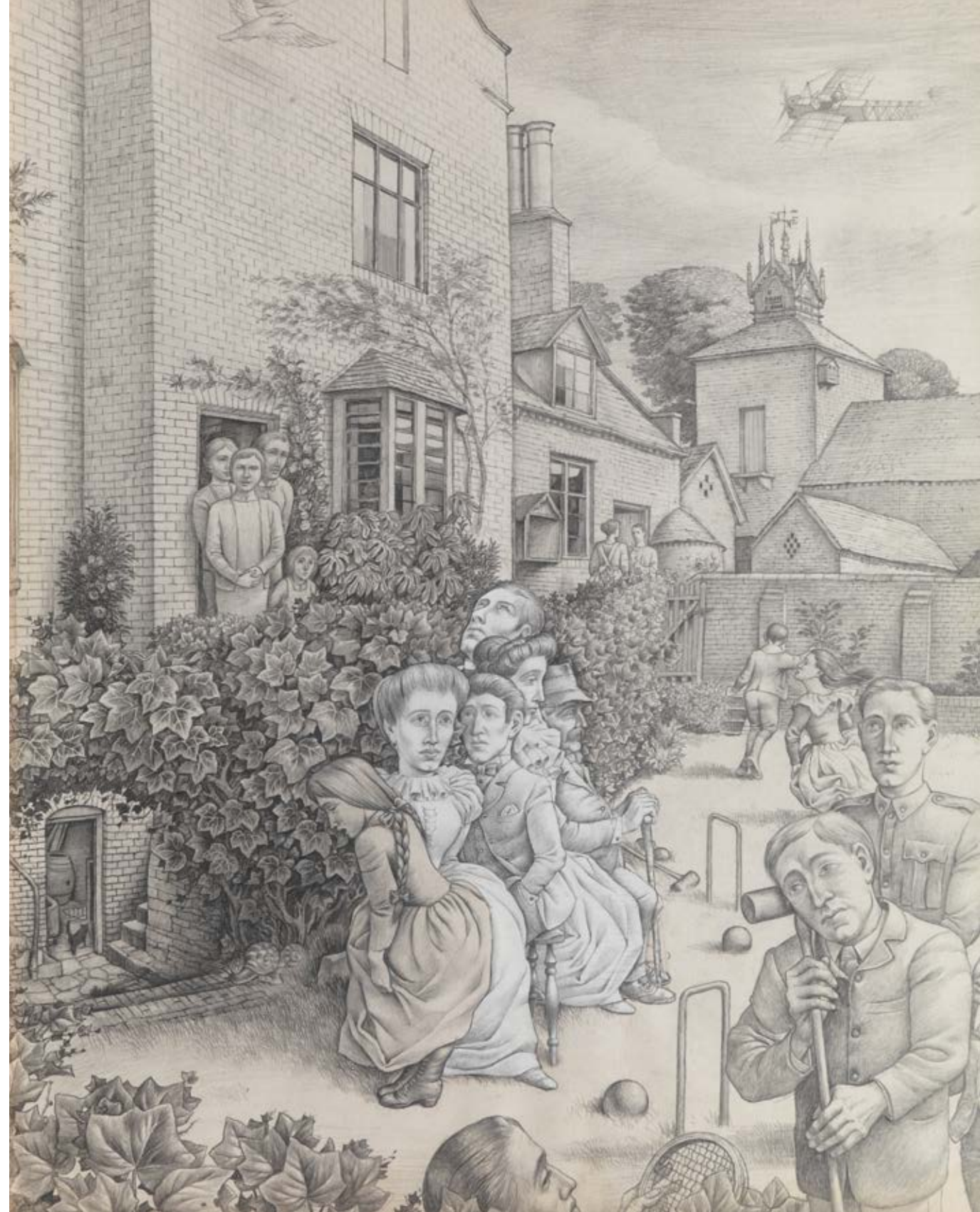
*opposite*

**8** Hadzor – Family Group, 1972

pencil drawing

63 x 50 cms 24¾ x 19⅝ ins

*Norman's mother was Ethel Palmer, the Palmers farmed Hadzor Court Farm between Hanbury and Droitwich. The drawing is of the Palmer family circa 1914/18 at the rear of the farm house.*





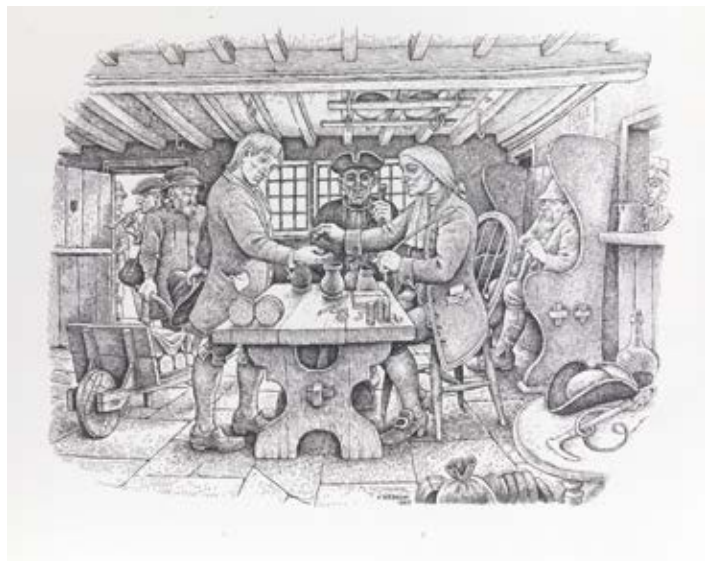
they take a joy in the everyday life of both the pastoral and urban worlds: an old lady out shopping, a group of ramblers by the sea-side, a couple on the beach. Some are a little more strange and mystical – with more than a hint of the magic and the superstitions that for centuries underlay rural life. Perhaps the artist these works most closely resemble is Beryl Cook, and her comical paintings of hen nights and tea parties. It is interesting to note then, that when the mayor of Redditch met Neasom towards the end of the artist's life and remarked that some of his work reminded him of Cook's, Neasom replied, 'She copied me.'

In the immediate years after he left art school Neasom put his skills to use working for various illustrated magazines in London – including *Punch*, and he continued to illustrate books through to the end of his long life. But with the outbreak of war in 1939 he returned to Birchensale, to work on the family farm. He also volunteered with the St John Ambulance, and by night served with the local Civil Defence. With Birchensale lying on the flight path of German bombers once again heading for Birmingham, one day incendiary bombs were dropped upon the farm – an incident he captures in one of the works in this exhibition.

At the end of the war Neasom was invited to return to Birmingham College as a teacher, where his most famous pupil was the Birmingham-born Terrence Parkes (1927–2003), who would go on to work as the cartoonist 'Larry' for *Punch* and *Private Eye*. Fleetwood-Walker was still working at the School in those days, and it was he who perhaps introduced Neasom to south-west England, for he often took students to Cornwall to study. When Neasom married in 1948 his honeymoon was spent in Torquay, whilst Salcombe – another seaside resort in



9 Loading the Blue Waggon, 1989  
pencil and wash  
23 x 16 cms 9 x 6¼ ins



Devon – was a regular holiday destination in the 1950s and 60s, and the scene for many of his best paintings.

After eight years teaching at Birmingham College of Art, Neasom took up a teaching post at Redditch School of Art, which offered him a chance to return to the county where he had grown up. He eventually became Head of Department, but following his retirement in 1979 he continued to paint. He has been widely collected, and his work is in the permanent collections of Her Majesty the Queen, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Royal Watercolour Society, the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists and the West Midlands Arts Council. He died in 2010, at the age of 94. Though highly appreciated in his own lifetime, it is only posthumously that his work is fully achieving the recognition it deserves. It takes us back, and reminds us of all the simpler, more innocent things that are most important in everyday life: people, places, nature – the spiritual, the mystical and the comical.

**David Boyd Haycock**

*Author and Curator*

*left*

**10** The Needle Master Pay Day, 1983

pen drawing

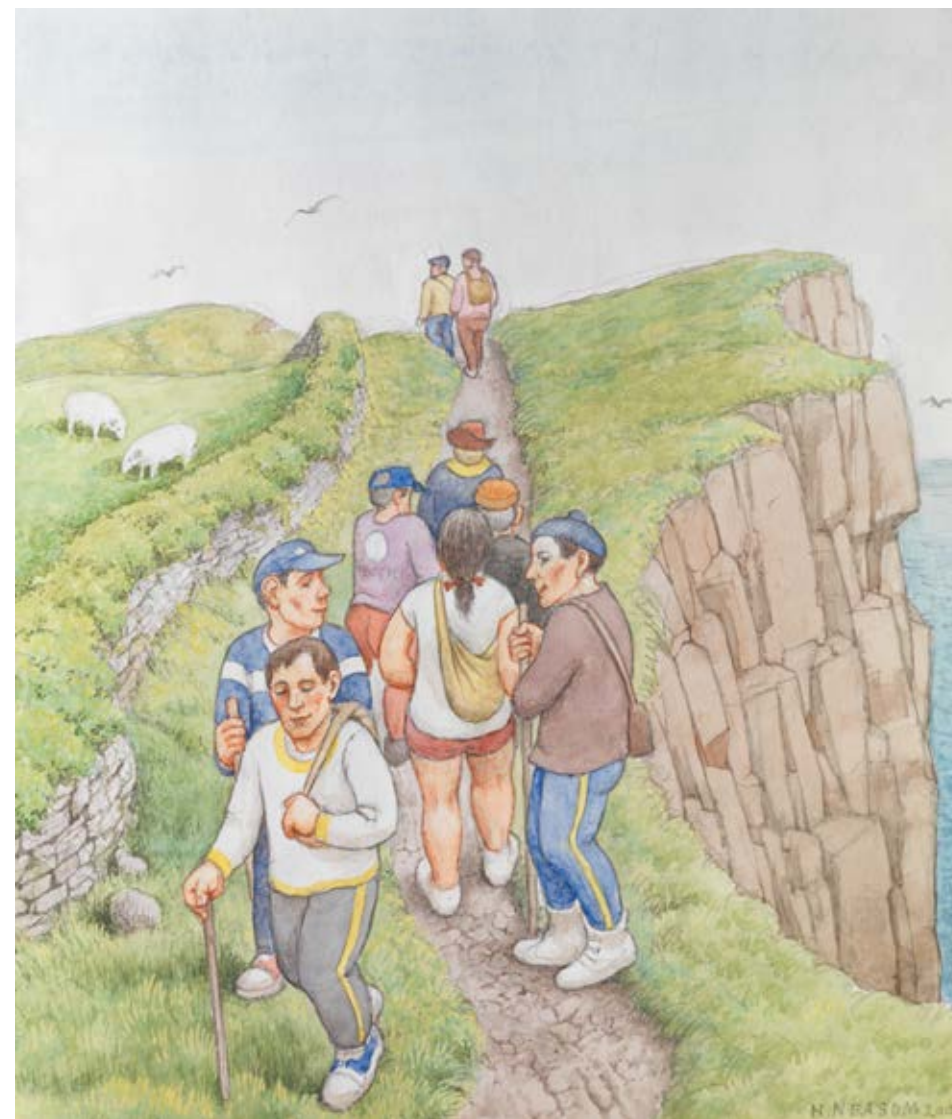
32 x 33 cms 12½ x 13 ins

*opposite*

**11** The Pembroke Coast Walk –  
St David's Head, 2000

pencil and wash

22 x 17 cms 8¾ x 6¾ ins

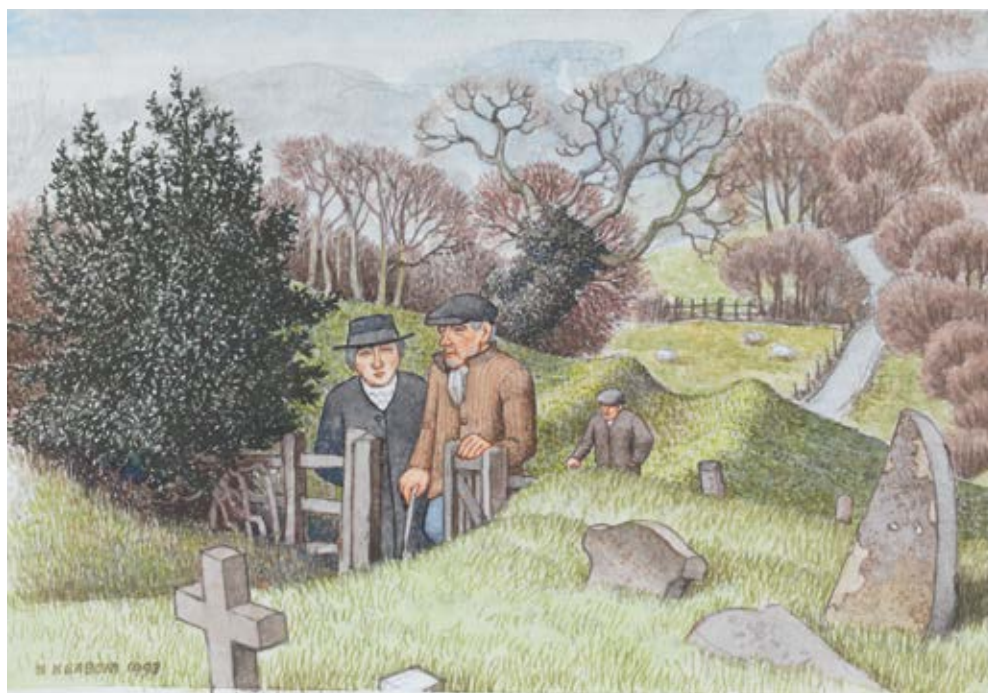






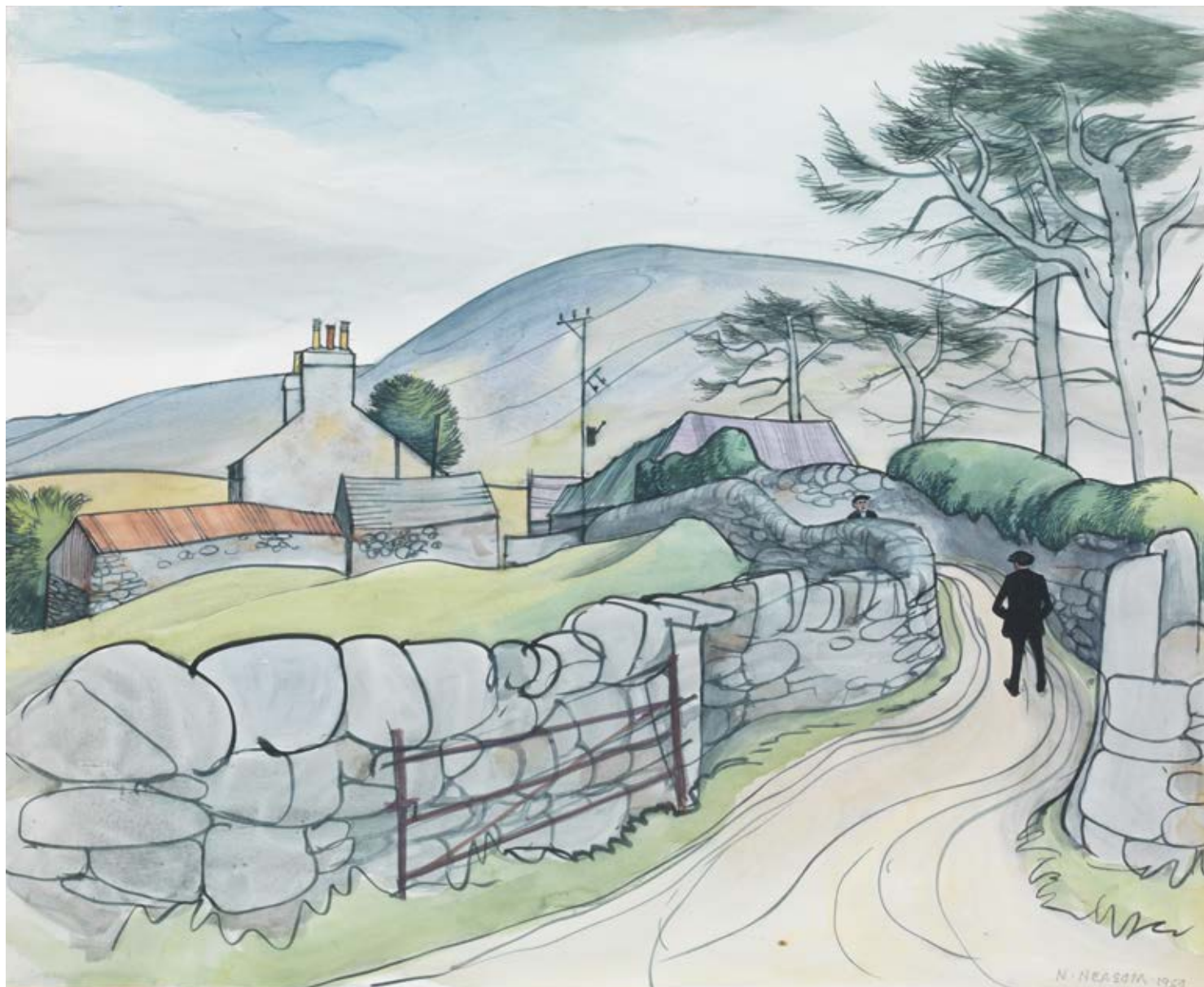
12 Muskets Way – Walkies Time, 2003  
pencil and wash  
12.4 cm x 11.4 cms 4 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  ins

13 Sunday Morning – Hanbury Churchyard, 1993  
pencil and wash  
12.6 cm x 18.4 cms 5 x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins



14 The Priest House Huddington, 1994  
gouache  
19.5 x 23.5 cms 7 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins





15 Farm above Bethesda, 1969  
watercolour  
52 x 64 cms 20½ x 25¼ ins



16 Upper Galty, 1973  
pencil and wash  
28 x 37.5 cms 11 x 14¾ ins





17 Summer Walk, Bredon Hill, Helping Hands, 1996  
pen drawing  
24 x 21 cms 9½ x 8¼ ins



18 Couple by a Gate, 1945  
pen drawing  
23 x 17.5 cms 9 x 6⅞ ins

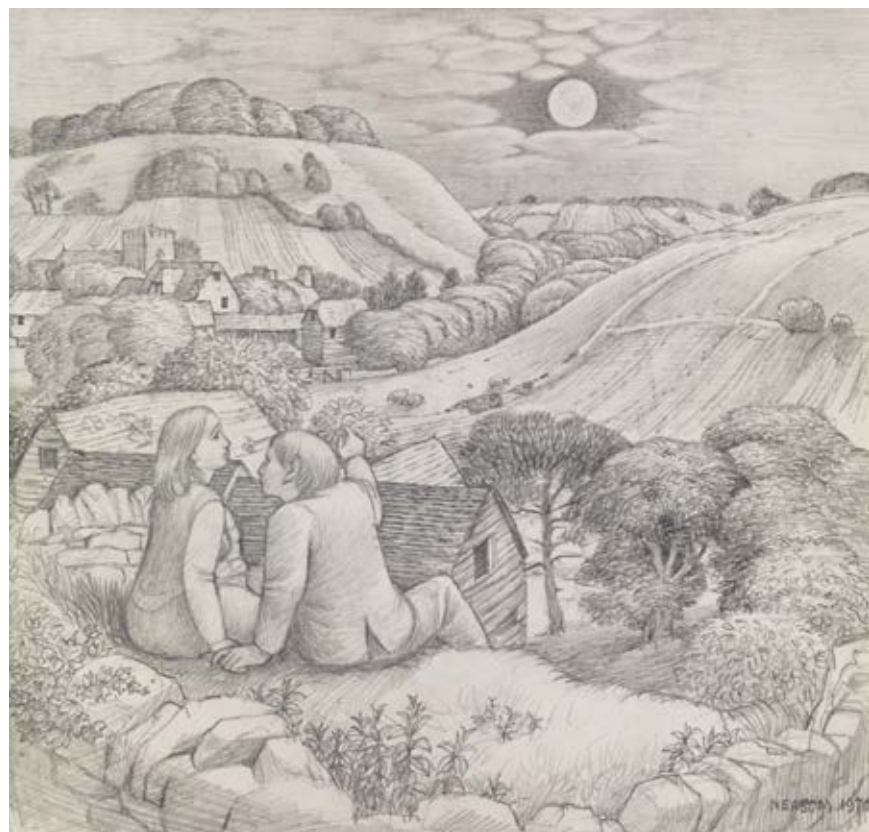


19 Rhydd Gwynedd N Wales SE view, 2000  
pencil and wash  
18 x 21 cms 7⅞ x 8¼ ins





20 Midday Rest  
pen drawing  
15 x 13 cms 5 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 5 $\frac{1}{8}$  ins



21 Moonlight Meeting, 1976  
pencil drawing  
22 x 23 cms 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 9 ins



22 Above Talsarnau, Gwynedd, 1991  
gouache  
11.5 cm x 15 cms 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 5 $\frac{7}{8}$  ins





23 The Way Home, 1943  
drawing and wash  
18 x 20 cms 7 1/8 x 7 7/8 ins

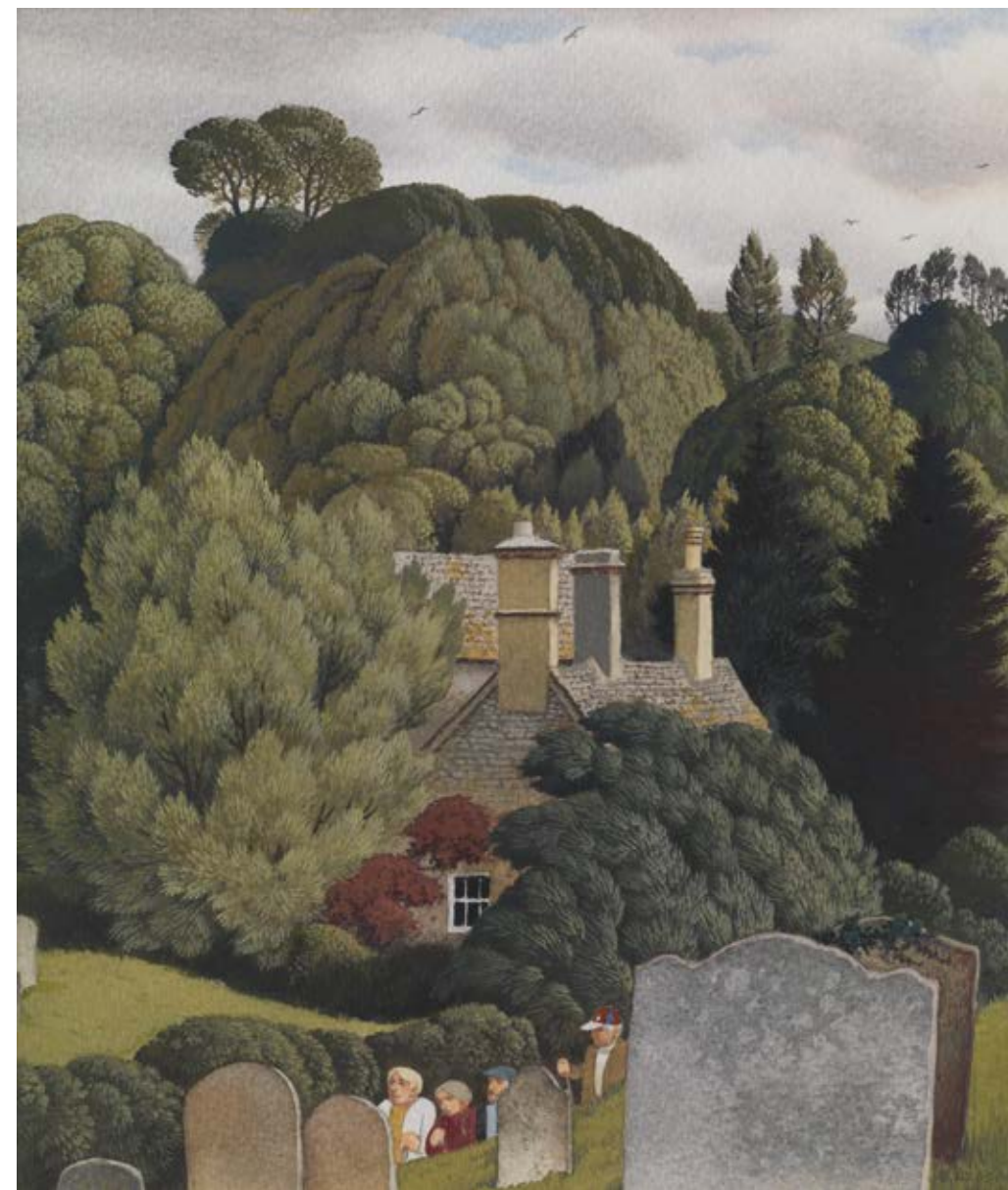


24 Field near the Kennels, Hewell, 1934  
mixed media  
34 x 44 cms 13 3/8 x 17 3/8 ins





25 Kineton, 2000  
pencil and colour  
20 x 12.5 cms 7<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> ins



26 Summer Walk Little Buckland, 1994  
gouache  
23.5 cm x 20 cms 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 7<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> ins





27 Sapey Brook, Autumn, 2003  
pencil and wash  
22.5 cm x 32 cms 8 7/8 x 12 5/8 ins



28 The Malverns from Bushley Green, 1965  
gouache  
45 x 60.5 cms 17 3/4 x 23 7/8 ins





29 Homecoming, 1976  
gouache  
25 x 26 cms 9 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins



30 Evening Conversation, 1979  
gouache  
26.5 cm x 28 cms 10 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 11 ins

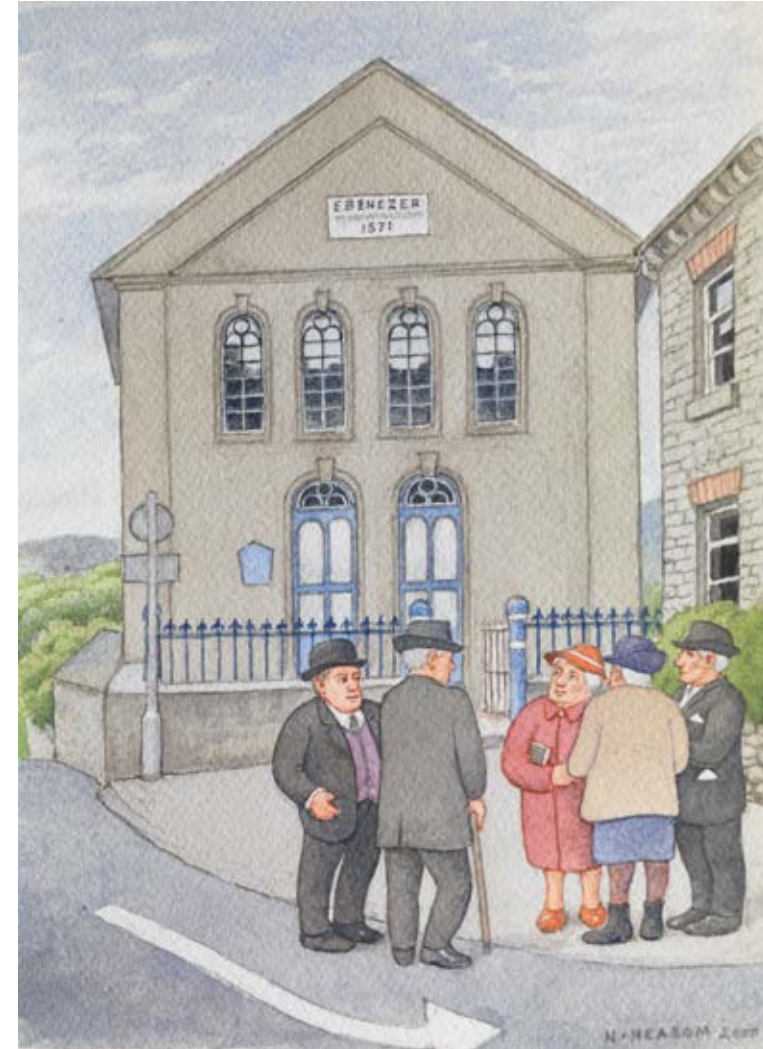




31 Black Country Conversation, 1998  
pencil and wash  
21 x 30 cms 8¼ x 11¼ ins



32 The Brown Fur Coat, 1997  
pencil and wash  
17.5 cm x 13 cms 6⅞ x 5⅛ ins



33 After Chapel Chat St David's, 2000  
pencil and wash  
25.5 cm x 17.5 cms 10 x 6⅞ ins





34 Elegant Company in the Grounds of Coughton Court  
gouache  
15 x 21 cms 5 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins



35 Powis Castle, 1999  
gouache  
26 x 30 cms 10 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins





36 Visitation (preparatory sketch for  
Engineering Employers Federation  
mural, Birmingham), 1957  
pencil drawing  
17 x 22 cms 6¾ x 8⅞ ins



37 Foundrymen, 1948  
pen and gouache  
18 x 15 cms 7⅛ x 5⅞ ins



38 The Riveters, 1936  
pencil and wash  
38 x 56 cms 15 x 22 ins





39 The Shooting Party, 1965  
gouache  
24 x 27 cms 9½ x 10¾ ins



41 Welsh Hill Farmers, 1984  
pencil and wash  
21 x 26 cms 8¼ x 10¼ ins

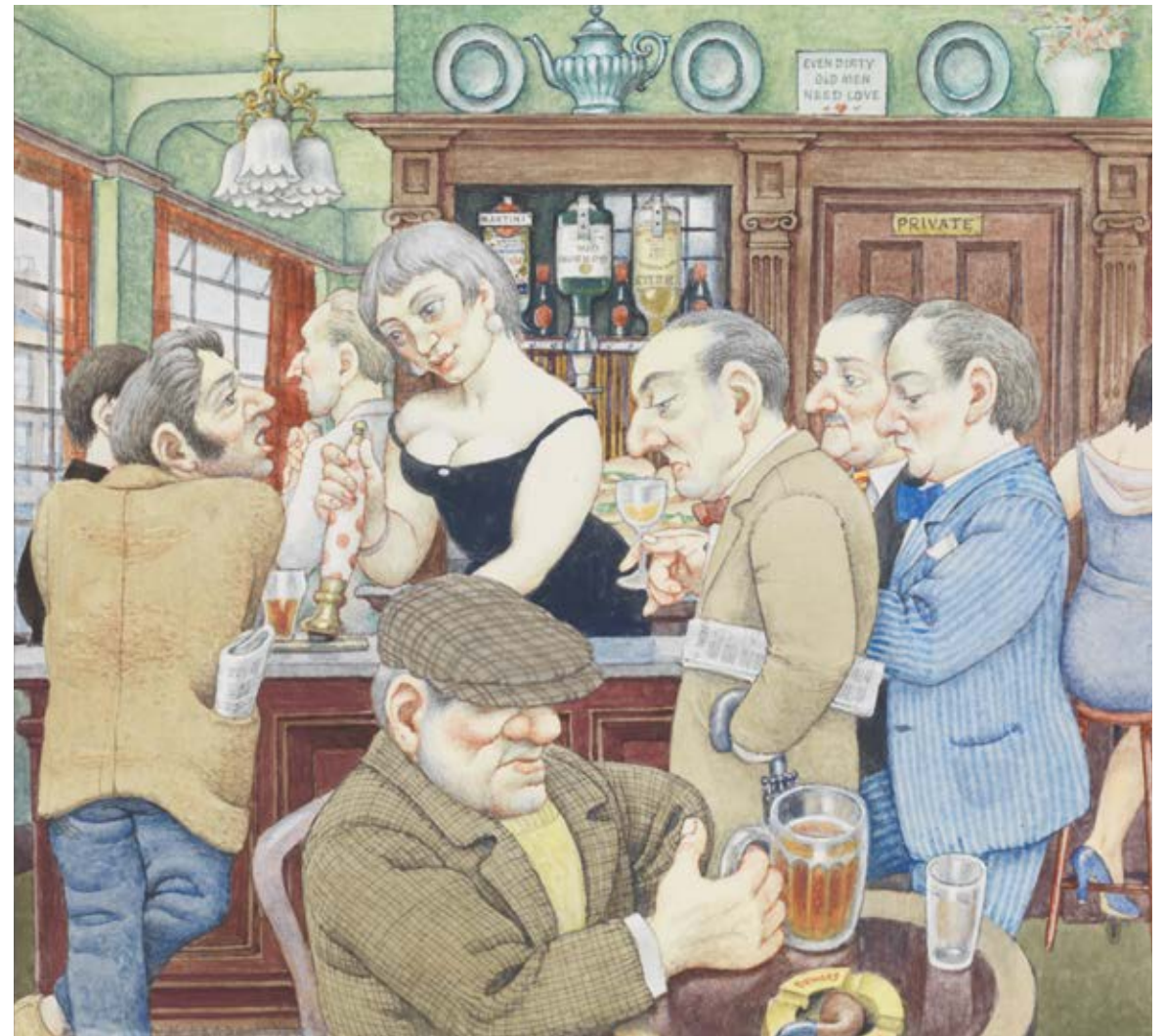
40 Shooting in the Snow, February, 1947  
pencil and wash  
25 x 35.5 cms 9¾ x 14 ins







42 Muddy Gateway  
pencil and wash  
23 x 21 cms 9 x 8¼ ins

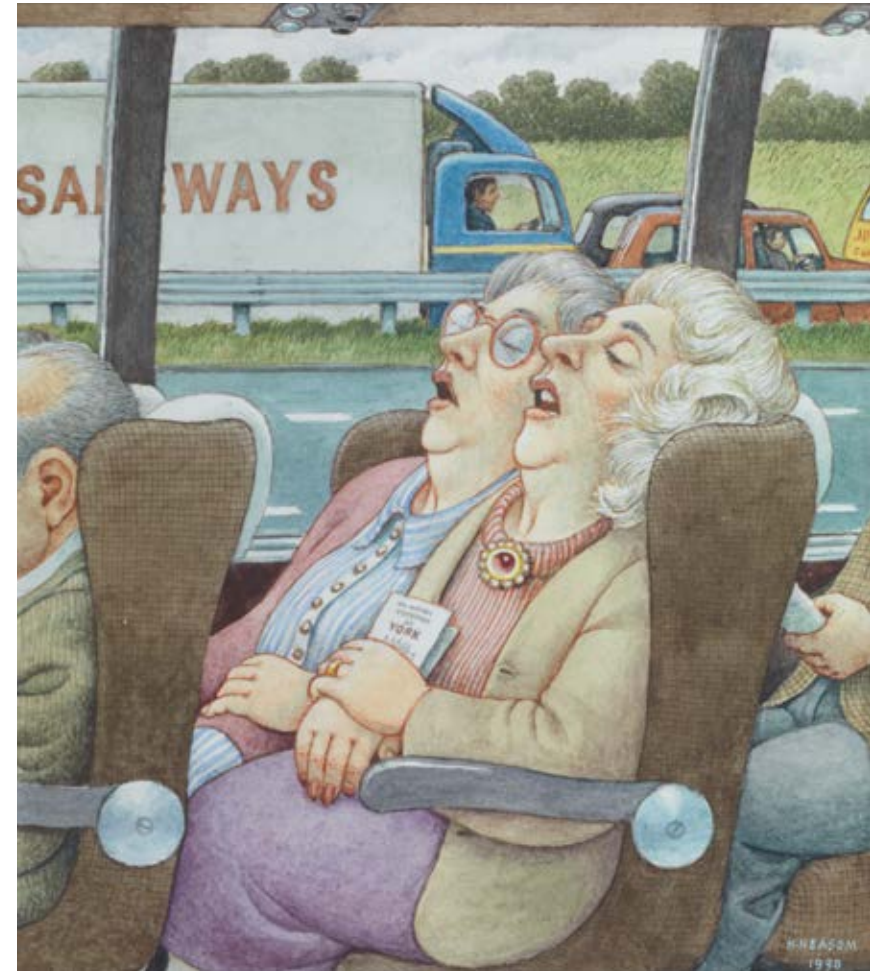


43 Barmaid in Black Velvet, 1984  
pencil and wash  
21.5 cm x 23.5 cms 8½ x 9¼ ins  
Possibly 'The Red Lion' Duke of York St, St James





- 44 Night-time Car Interior, 1938  
coloured pencil  
13 x 18 cms 5 1/8 x 7 1/8 ins
- 45 The Newspaper Salesman, 1950  
pen and wash  
26 x 17 cms 10 1/4 x 6 3/4 ins



- 46 The Coach Trip, 1990  
gouache  
17 x 16 cms 6 3/4 x 6 1/4 ins





47 Coach Tour – Falmouth, 1999  
pencil and wash  
19.7 cm x 21.9 cms 7¾ x 8⅝ ins



48 Pub Watch, 1999  
pencil and wash  
21.5 cm x 21 cms 8½ x 8¼ ins



49 Thoughts on the RBSA Selection Day, 1984  
gouache  
17 x 20.5 cms 6¾ x 8⅝ ins

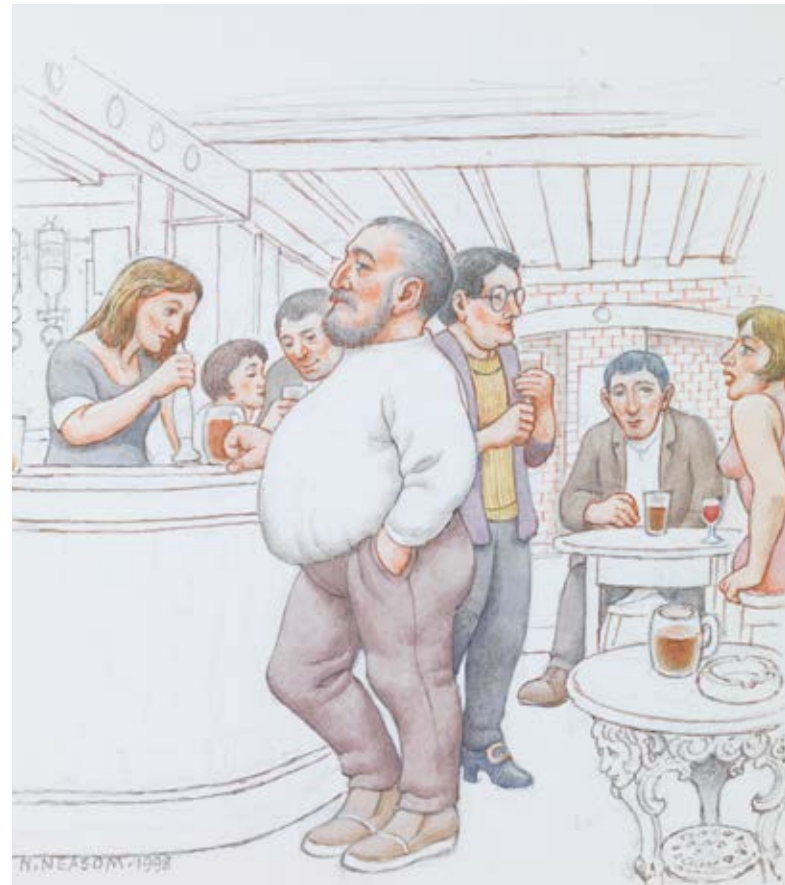




50 Seen at the Bar  
Woodland Cottage, 2001  
pencil and wash  
20 x 12.5 cms 7 7/8 x 4 7/8 ins

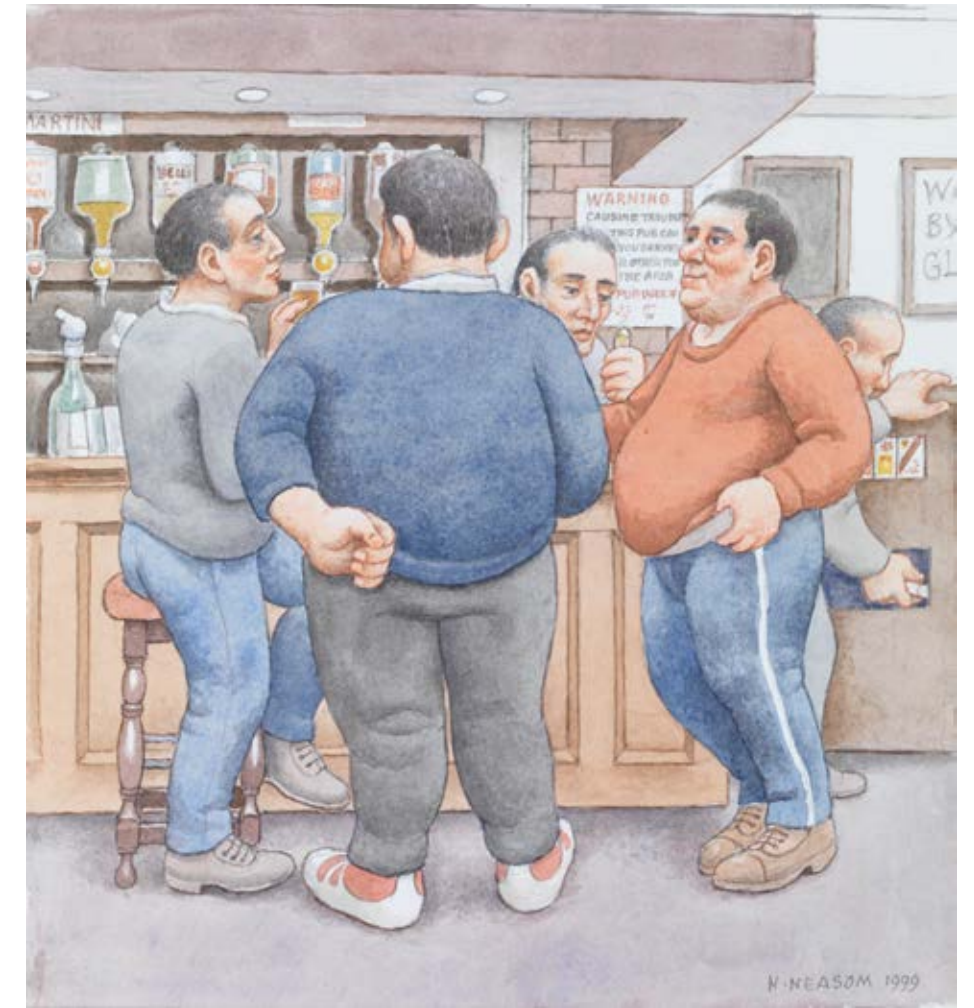


52 Admonishment at the Bar, 2004  
pencil and wash  
16.5 cm x 15.2 cms 6 1/2 x 6 ins



51 Beer Belly in the Brook  
at Elcocks Brook, 1998  
pencil and wash  
18.4 cm x 16.5 cms 7 1/4 x 6 1/2 ins

53 Woodland Cottage  
Bar Heavies, 1999  
pencil and wash  
30 x 21 cms 11 3/4 x 8 1/4 ins







54 The Smokers, 2003  
pencil and wash  
19 x 21.5 cms 7½ x 8½ ins



55 The Old Man of Axmouth, 1990  
pencil and wash  
32 x 22.5 cms 12½ x 8¾ ins



56 The Carvery, Red Lion, Bradley Green, 2005  
pencil and wash  
16.5 cm x 20.5 cms 6½ x 8¼ ins

57 Pub Dominoes, 1992  
pencil and wash  
13.5 cm x 13.5 cms 5¾ x 5¾ ins







58 Heinkel Raid, 1940  
pencil and wash  
26 x 22.5 cms 10¼ x 8⅞ ins



59 The ARP Man, 1940  
pencil and wash  
18.5 cm x 17 cms 7¼ x 6¾ ins  
*Redditch 1941*



60 Civil Defence Rescue, 1942  
pencil and wash  
25 x 30 cms 9⅞ x 11¾ ins  
*Redditch 1941*





61 Cutting the Corners, 1992  
pencil drawing  
21 x 24 cms 8¼ x 9½ ins



63 Harvest Supper, Birchensale Farm  
gouache  
35 x 44 cms 13¾ x 17½ ins



62 Tobias and the Angel, 1968  
pen, pencil and wash  
24 x 30.5 cms 9½ x 12 ins





64 Resting by the River near Pixham Ferry, 1937  
pencil and wash  
12 x 17 cms 4¾ x 6¾ ins



65 St James Oddingley, Worcs, 2002  
pencil and wash  
25 x 26 cms 9⅞ x 10¼ ins



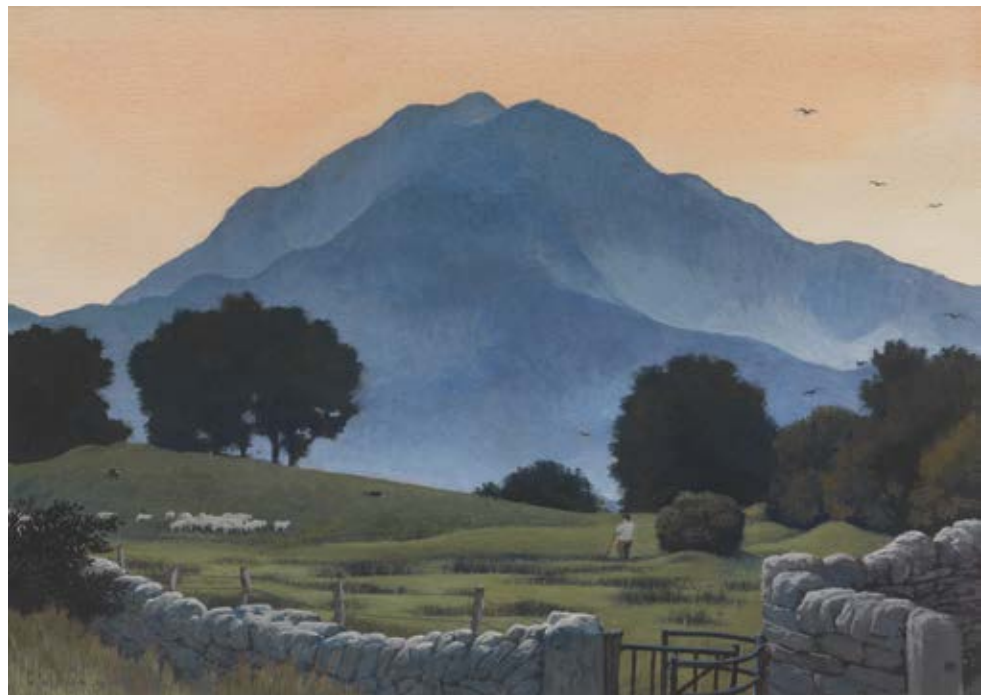


66 Quiet Afternoon, 1968  
pencil drawing and wash  
23 x 28 cms 9 x 11 ins  
*Exhibited RA Summer Show 1970 no. 647*



67 Covering the Seeds, 1936  
monochrome pencil wash  
38 x 52.5 cms 15 x 20 7/8 ins





68 Moel Hebog, Snowdonia, 1985  
gouache  
24 x 34 cms 9½ x 13⅜ ins



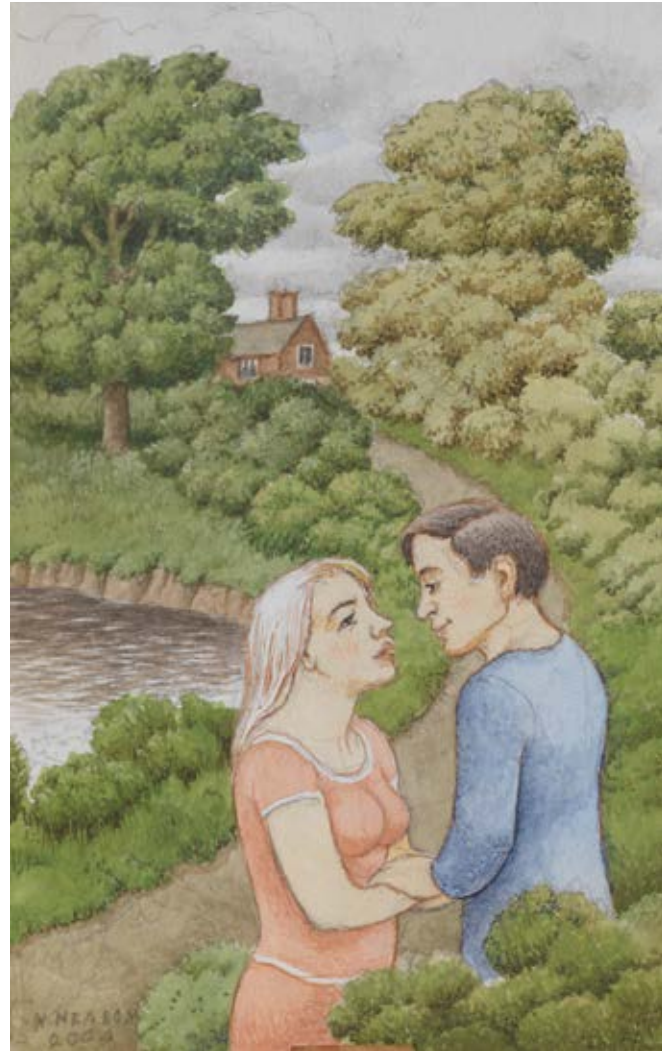
69 The Snowdon Horseshoe from Capel Curig, 1971  
gouache  
56 x 76.5 cms 22 x 30⅞ ins





70 "Who is it Who Follows?"  
pencil drawing  
17.5 cm x 22 cms 6 7/8 x 8 5/8 ins

71 The Walk to the Paradise Gardens,  
but with a Happy Ending, 2004  
pencil and wash  
22.5 cm x 13 cms 8 7/8 x 5 1/8 ins



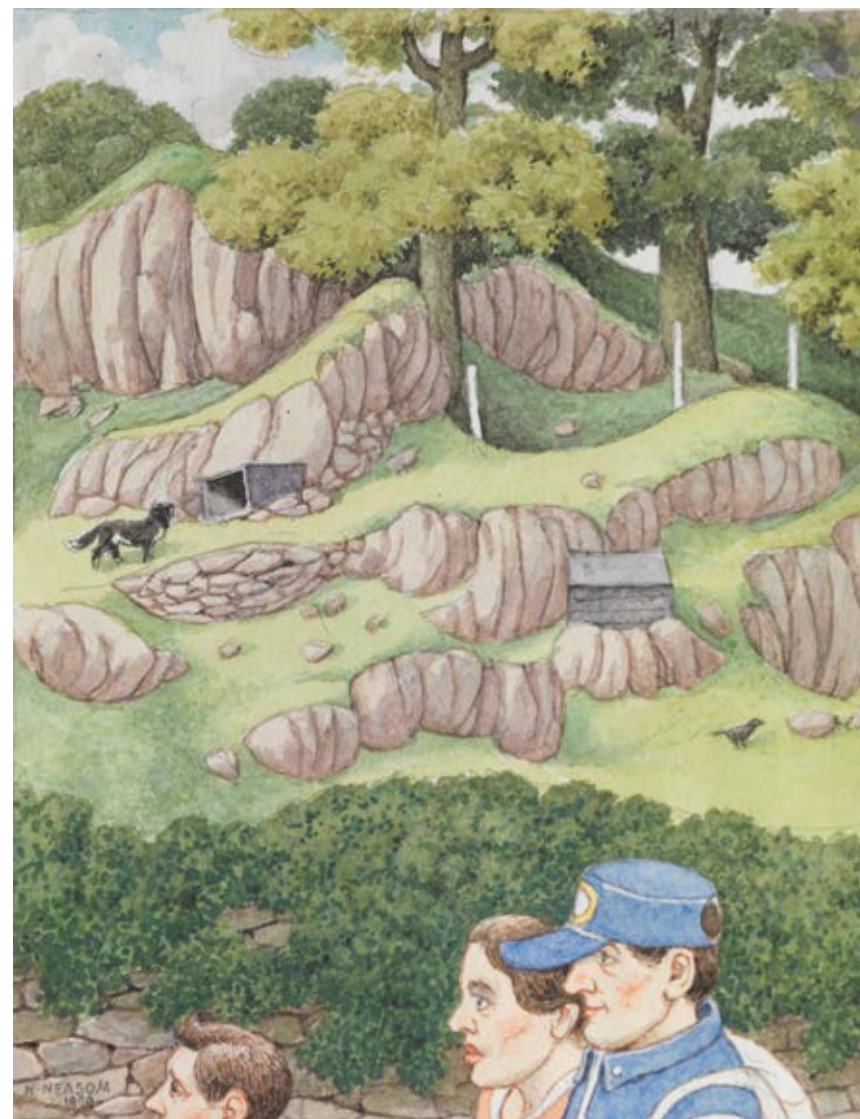
72 Little Comberton Church, 1990  
gouache  
30 x 37 cms 11 3/4 x 14 5/8 ins





73 Old Lady, 1998  
pencil and wash  
11.5 cm x 10 cms 4½ x 3⅞ ins

74 Tilehouse Allotments, 2004  
pencil and wash  
20 x 14 cms 7⅞ x 5½ ins



75 Beddgelert Spring, 1999  
pencil and wash  
18 x 14 cms 7⅞ x 5½ ins





76 Tile House Lotters, 2003  
gouache  
11 x 29 cms 4 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 11 $\frac{3}{8}$  ins



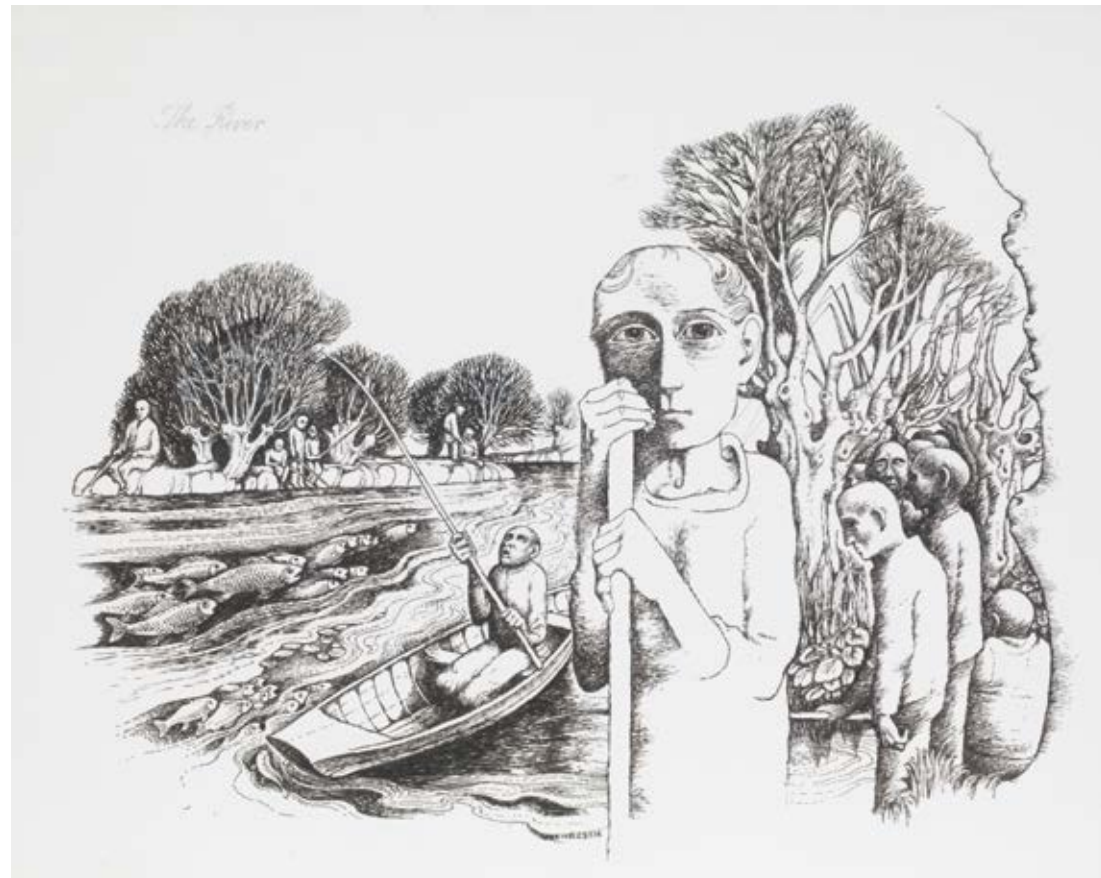
77 The Visitation, Malmesbury Abbey, 1950  
pencil and wash  
24 x 28 cms 9 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 11 ins



78 Farmer pulling Turnips  
pen drawing  
10.8 x 20 cms 4¼ x 7⅞ ins



79 The River, 1962  
pen drawing  
27.5 cm x 35 cms 10⅞ x 13¾ ins



80 Country Life Memories, 1990  
pencil and wash  
23 x 30 cms 9 x 11¾ ins

81 North Gate to Bordesley Abbey circa. 12C, 1974  
pencil drawing  
26.5 cm x 36 cms 10⅞ x 14⅞ ins







82 The Fiddler, 1935  
pencil and wash  
11 x 18.5 cms 4 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins

83 The Village Fair The Boxing Booth,  
c. 1928  
pencil and wash  
20 x 26 cms 7 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins



84 Accusations, 1952  
pencil and wash  
28 x 28.5 cms 11 x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins





above

- 85 Pirton Grange Nursing Home, 1993  
pencil and wash  
21 x 29.5 cms 8¼ x 11½ ins

opposite

- 86 Café, 1967 (detail)  
pencil drawing  
45 x 52 cms 17¾ x 20½ ins

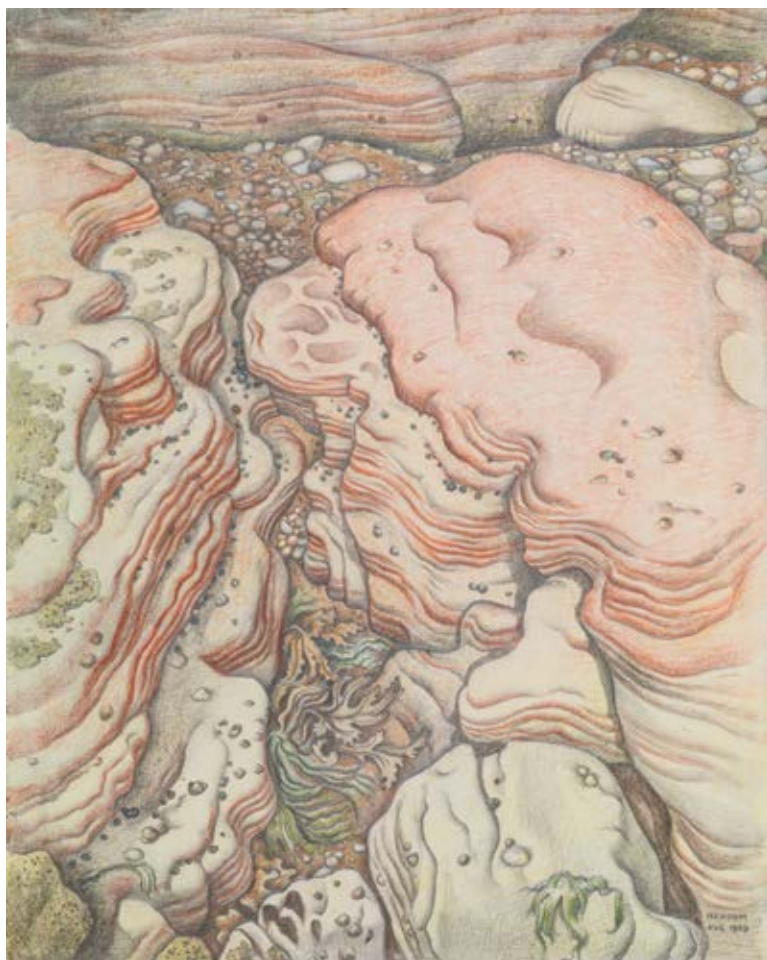






87 Sea Shore Still Life with Stones, 1947  
mixed media  
17 x 19 cms 6¾ x 7½ ins

88 Winkles, Torquay, 1949  
pencil and colour  
28 x 23 cms 11 x 9 ins



89 Pembrokeshire Coastline, 1982  
gouaches  
21 x 30 cms 8¼ x 11¼ ins





90 The Watch House Salcombe from Mill Bay, 1964  
gouache  
38 x 55 cms 15 x 21½ ins



91 Fort Charles Salcombe Devon, 1959  
gouache  
38 x 54.5 cms 15 x 21½ ins





92 The Beach at Milford on Sea, 2002  
pencil and wash  
20 x 12 cms 7<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ins

93 The Fleet leaving Whitby, 1960  
gouache  
38 x 54 cms 15 x 21<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ins



94 Christchurch Harbour, Muddeford, looking out through 'The Run', 1975  
gouache  
57 x 79 cms 22<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 31<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> ins





95 Storm in Arcadia, Nymphs and Figures by a Temple, 1981  
gouache  
32 x 44 cms 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{8}$  ins



96 Under Milkwood – Dylan Thomas  
Owl over Bethesda – Captain Cat – Small Town at Night  
gouache  
28 x 58 cms 11 x 22 $\frac{3}{8}$  ins





97 December Afternoon, 1981  
gouache  
9 x 12 cms 3½ x 4¾ ins  
*Table Mountain (above Crickhowell) with  
Hay Bluff in the background*



98 The Angelus Bell Harvington Worcs., 1998  
gouache  
23 x 16 cms 9 x 6¼ ins



norman neasom RWS RBSA, 1915-2010

1915	Born 7th November at Birchensale Farm, Redditch, Worcestershire	1959	Succeeds Rodney Hodge as Principal of Redditch School of Art
	Attends Redditch County High School	1959	Founder Member of the Wagtail Sailing Club
1931	Wins Scholarship to Birmingham College of Art, and works under Bernard Fleetwood-Walker, Harold Holden, Henry Sands, Michael Fletcher and William Colley	1961	Redditch School of Art joins Redditch College
			Neasom becomes Head of Art at Redditch College
1935-39	Works in London as an illustrator for 'Punch' magazine and for other journals in London and Birmingham	1962	First family visits to Mudeford
		1970/74/76	Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions
1939-45	Works at Birchensale Farm as a farmer on a Reserved Occupation, also taking on St John's Ambulance and Civil Defence duties in Birmingham	1972	Art Department moves to Peakman Street premises in Redditch
	Applies to War Artists' Advisory Committee	1979	Retires from Redditch College
1945	Joins staff of Birmingham College of Art (taking students to locations throughout the city, eg to Elmdon Aerodrome, the Gas Street Basin, and Ansells Brewery)	1978	Elected to the Royal Watercolour Society
	Visiting lecturer at Bourneville Art College	1996	Presents Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with painting (of Punk rockers in front of the Woodland Cottage pub in Mount Pleasant)
1947	Elected to Royal Birmingham Society of Artists	2004	Publishes 'Birchensale Farm Memories in Pictures 1918-1942'
1948	Marries Jessie	2010	Dies 22nd February
1951	Birth of daughter Helen	2018	Exhibition at Messums
1953	Joins staff of Redditch School of Art	2020	Exhibition at Messums
1955	Birth of daughter Jeannie		
1956	First family visits to Salcombe		

Norman Neasom's work is represented in numerous public and private collections, including those of Her Majesty the Queen, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Royal Watercolour Society, the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists and the West Midlands Arts Council.



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The Studio, Lords Wood, Marlow, Buckinghamshire.  
Tel: 01628 486565 www.messums.com  
Photography: Steve Russell Printed by DLM-Creative



99 Secret Meeting, 1951  
pen and wash  
25 x 19 cms 9 7/8 x 7 1/2 ins  
RA Summer Show 1974, no.287





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