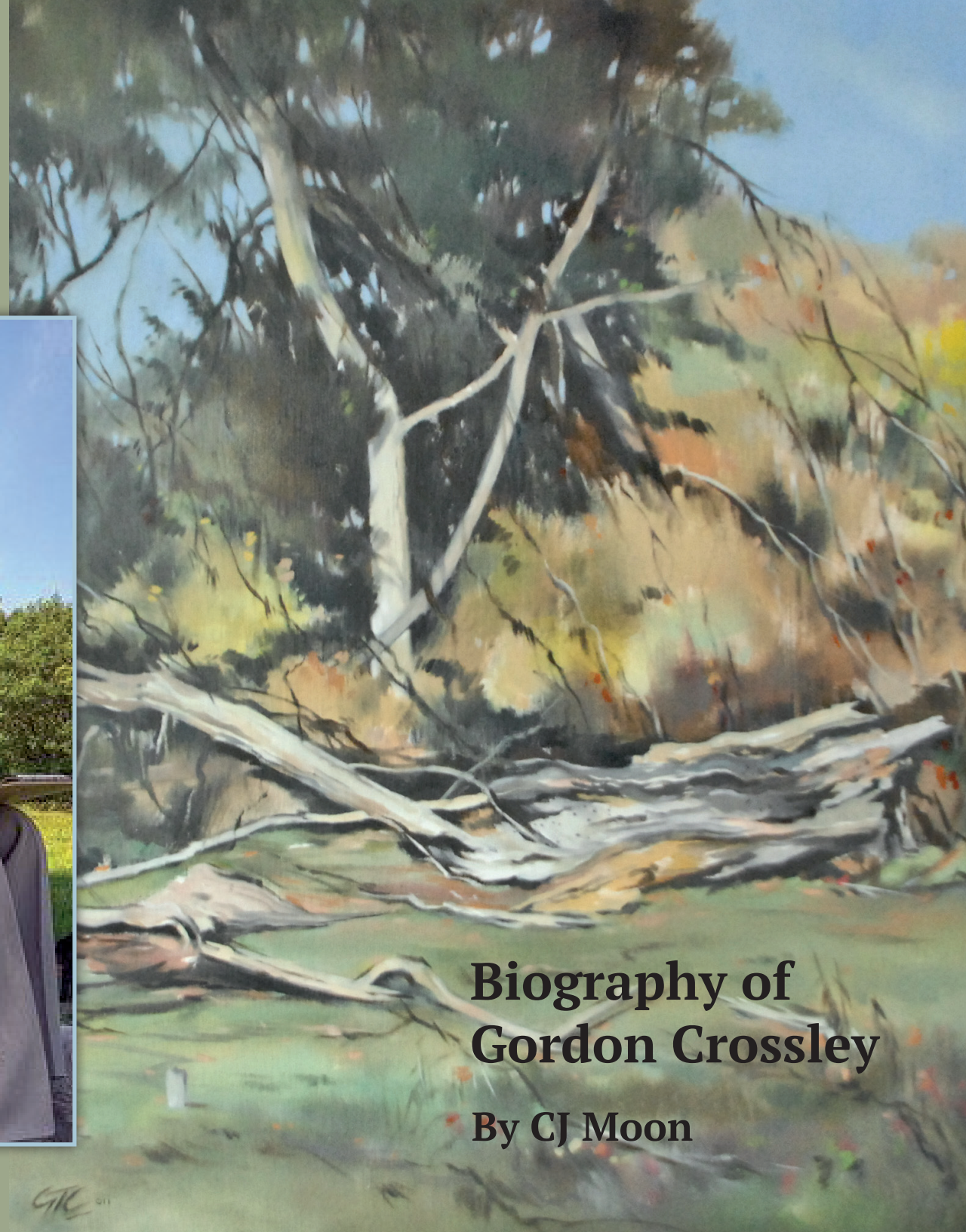


LIFE AND LOVES OF A LANDSCAPE ARTIST



**Biography of
Gordon Crossley**

By CJ Moon

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By Christopher J Moon FRSA FHEA

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Cover picture: Hatfield Forest. Page 3: Suffolk Seascape. Page 5: Hatfield Forest.

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Foreword

Gordon and I met at High Roding Tea Rooms, Essex, one Saturday morning where I was discussing art with my children, Christiana & Sebastian. Gordon had overheard our talk and politely announced that he was in fact an artist! This brief encounter would be the start of many conversations and a deep friendship leading to this biography just over one year hence. The book is a testimony to an extremely kind man, generous of spirit, brilliant artist and teacher, and patriarch to a wonderful family.

Gordon has been hung at the Royal Academy 16 times; included in group exhibitions in various London and provincial galleries; and had one man shows at the Phoenix and Gainsborough galleries. Gordon is listed in WHO'S WHO IN ART, and his paintings are held in private collections in the UK and abroad. Locally, you can see two of his paintings at the Chelmsford and Essex Museum at Oaklands Park, Moulsham Street, Chelmsford, purchased for the nation.

Gordon studied at Wimbledon School of Art (alongside Raymond Briggs of *Snowman* fame), then spent 17 years in advertising and 26 years teaching in a college of art and design.

During his RAF years, Gordon was stationed near Istres (Van

Gogh country) to paint pictures for Transport Command.

Gordon is drawn to a subject by atmosphere and design, and he has a fascination with skies. He has always been attracted to landscape painting; and this main interest continues, particularly around Sheering and in Hatfield Forest.

This book includes a selection of Gordon's work in Essex and the Suffolk Coast, the NE Coast, Sussex and overseas. There are also examples of his art from his formative years and from his days in advertising and teaching.

Gordon and his wife Jo lived in Sheering for over 40 years, and brought up their family there. Sadly Jo passed away but Gordon still lives in the family home and still paints in his studio and locally. Grateful acknowledgement is to Sophia Walcot-Earle for photographing Gordon's paintings for this book. And to Gordon's family and friends for their recollections and contributions to the text.

Christopher J Moon

August 2016

Right: *The Old Barn Matching Green*



Chapter 1

First Love Early Years

Gordon Thomas Crossley, artist, was born on 6th December, 1929 at Carshalton, Surrey. His parents were Frederick Eric Crossley, merchant, and Winifred Muriel Stears, fashion designer. Gordon was twin to Donald (sadly dying in his youth) with an elder brother John (now aged 90).

At the tender age of six, on his tricycle, Gordon meandered up the hill near his parents' home in the countryside to admire the landscape and 'long' for the day when he could paint it. At least this was his explanation to his Mother when questioned on arrival back home!

The house was not large so there was little room for painting indoors. Thus Gordon was propelled into the great outdoors at an early age - developing a keen interest in landscape which has continued to this day. His home and art studio are still festooned with many and varied beautiful scenes; and this book represents just a small tribute to his lifelong passion.

From the 'semi' in Rayne's Park Gordon attended the local primary school; one day arriving in a chauffeur-driven car. Mother had been ill and in those days the doctor would arrive at the home of his patient in a chauffeur-driven car. As the boys were late for school this resulted in quite a memorable trip.

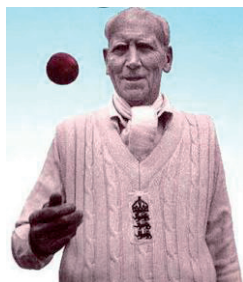


On arrival at the school, the gathering in the playground was much amused to see the boys emerge from a limousine with the door held open by the chauffeur. In fact, the chauffeur had planned the spectacle knowing the boys would be thrilled at the experience.





Above:
Gordon, cricket captain, and college team
Right:
Alf Gover, the coach



When asked by his teacher the immortal question ‘what are you going to be when you grow up?’ Gordon promptly retorted ‘an artist!’ No doubt his Uncle Wallis, portrait painter, had a hand in this decision; as it was Wallis that encouraged Gordon from an early age; and later introduced him to the heady world of advertising which we shall talk about later.

In the meantime, grammar school at Rutlish beckoned. This school is noted for being the domain of one former Prime Minister, Sir John Major, but equally so for its ‘speech book’ which had to be carried on the person at all times. Failure to produce the book to a prefect and quoting a line of speech with the correct pronunciation resulted in detention! Intonations of ‘how now brown cow’ can still be heard recalled in conversations between ‘old ruts.’ Other former pupils include Raymond Briggs, *Snowman* illustrator; Gerry Cottle, of circus fame; Tubby Hayes, jazz instrumentalist; and John Rosthill, bass guitarist for the Shadows.

At Rutlish Gordon enjoyed being coached in ‘spin bowling’ by England cricketer Alf Gover who demonstrated to Gordon that he could repeatedly bowl a ball onto a six pence piece from a full length! ¹

¹ Alfred Richard “Alf” Gover. 1908-2001, Cricketer. Born in Woodcote, Epsom, he was an English cricket player known as a deadly outswinger with a cleverly disguised break back. From 1926 to 1947, he played in 362 first-class Test matches with a record of 2312 runs scored, 74503 balls bowled, 1555 wickets, 23.63 bowling average and a 9.38 batting average. After Gover retired, he coached for a while and founded a cricket school in Wandsworth England, which became regarded as the most valuable school for the fine-tuning of cricketers’ skills. Gover was regarded as the best fast bowler in England of all time and was awarded an MBE (Member of the British Empire) in 1998. At the time of his death at age 93 in London England, he was the oldest surviving Test cricketer. Bio by: John “J-Cat” Griffith, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=6871581>.

There are also fond memories of Gordon's late twin brother Donald, and the practical jokes he played. On more than one occasion Donald arrived early to a classroom and from under the cover of the piano waited for the class to arrive before playing a ghostly tune 'as if by magic' and much to everyone's amusement – apart from the teacher! On another occasion Donald tied string to the eponymous blackboard duster such that when the teacher motioned to pick it up, it suddenly and mysteriously flew away across the desk - causing riotous laughter.

There were also theatrical productions but again it was Donald's tomfoolery that is remembered more so than any serious performance. Sneaking back stage Donald carried a ladder between the curtains; only, after disappearing stage right, he re-appeared stage left still carrying the same ladder! With his back to the stage the teacher was blissfully unaware of this comic appearance; and simply could not understand the fits of giggles before him.

There were serious moments too. At the age of twelve Gordon contracted Meningitis and was fortunate to survive. Then the science block was bombed by a rocket and the entire school was evacuated for three months. Once, when playing in the field behind their home, the boys were captivated by a 'dog-fight' in the sky - only then to realise that live rounds were hitting the ground all around them!

Then a bomber mistook their boy-scout camp for an army camp and Gordon, caught on barbed wire, just managed to release himself and dash to the outside shelter before an almighty explosion outside – and certain death had he not made it in

time. At home the shelter was the reinforced kitchen table – a haven during one air raid when Father decided to fetch water and was prevented by Mother from doing so just before the entire kitchen was blown away. Even the cat survived a shrapnel wound - leaving a clear hole in its neck!

Art College Years

Eventually Gordon commenced his long awaited study at Wimbledon School of Art where the impressive John Ward, royal portrait painter, taught him drawing. Ward is famous for teaching painting to Prince Charles; and as a guest at the wedding of Charles and Diana in 1981, sketching and painting the ceremony.



Wimbledon College of Art today



In those days the Wimbledon art course was four and a half years in length with a two year foundation. Here Gordon tried a bit of everything - stone carving, stained glass, fine art, commercial art. His first love though was painting - and inspiration came from many and varied sources including artists such as Seurat, Rousseau, Modigliani, Constable and more locally Stanley Spencer.

In the style of Modigliani, Gordon decided to paint a portrait of a girl he met on a bus. Amazingly she agreed, as long as her friend could attend for the sitting. She even agreed to expose her left breast on condition that the picture would never be hung in London so that her boyfriend would not see it! Whilst the resulting painting is captivating, and brings back memories, the experience probably reminded Gordon that he preferred to paint landscapes.

At two years there was an intermediate exam and Gordon clearly excelled at painting. His tutors determined that this was the direction Gordon should take. However, Gordon was likewise determined to acquire experience in other ways. When one tutor enquired as to why Gordon had decided not to take up painting straight away, Gordon simply responded that he 'wanted to earn a living first.' This upset the poor tutor who felt his career as an artist had been slighted; until the consoling Gordon promised that he 'would become a painter in the future' just that this would be after marriage and bringing up a family!

The War Years

Gordon's time at Art College was interrupted by the War and National Service - but not to fight! When the Ministry of Defence Education Office realised that Gordon had been at Art College they referred him to the Royal Air Force - to paint pictures! This was to be an auspicious start to his military career though. When Gordon arrived at the air base with his portfolio he was promptly put on a charge by a member of the Military Police for not saluting the flag - which was being hoisted at the time. The punishment? Gordon was instructed to paint the coal, at the entrance to the camp, white! Quite appropriate really.

Probably Gordon's Commanding Officer had a wry smile watching this new arrival set about his first task. Certainly on Gordon's part this was a lesson learned. Nevertheless, all was quickly forgiven and Gordon was sent on various missions with his paint box and easel to capture pictures of no doubt strategically important sites in the absence of a photographer. There were scenes of harbours, bridges and buildings plus whatever else would look good in the officers' mess! This was certainly a formative experience most notably allowing Gordon to be outdoors in his beloved countryside.

Indeed, although these missions were probably not absolutely vital to the war effort, the artists were treated with aplomb and given passes for hospitality akin to officers. This was much to the chagrin of one officer who was firmly put in his place by the CO for questioning why artists were to be found in the officers' mess! Perhaps the paintings were more vital than Gordon had thought? Or perhaps the CO was an art lover who did not like pompous officers upsetting the rank and file!



Gordon was inspired by the art of Stanley Spencer to paint a picture of the bombed cookhouse. The building was being used to keep bits of old glider planes and timber. Carpenters on site would often saw bits off as they needed them and the leftovers, comprising unusual shapes, captured Gordon's imagination. Later the painting was sent to the Young Contemporaries exhibition and led to Gordon being invited to join the Association of Royal British Artists (RBA). Gordon declined though as he felt he was not yet established as an artist!

After the war Gordon returned to Wimbledon to take up his studies, and some traditions remained unchanged such as playing regular cricket, until the time came to be introduced to the world of work and the heady world of advertising in particular which we shall address in the next chapter.



The Bombed Cookhouse

Chapter 2

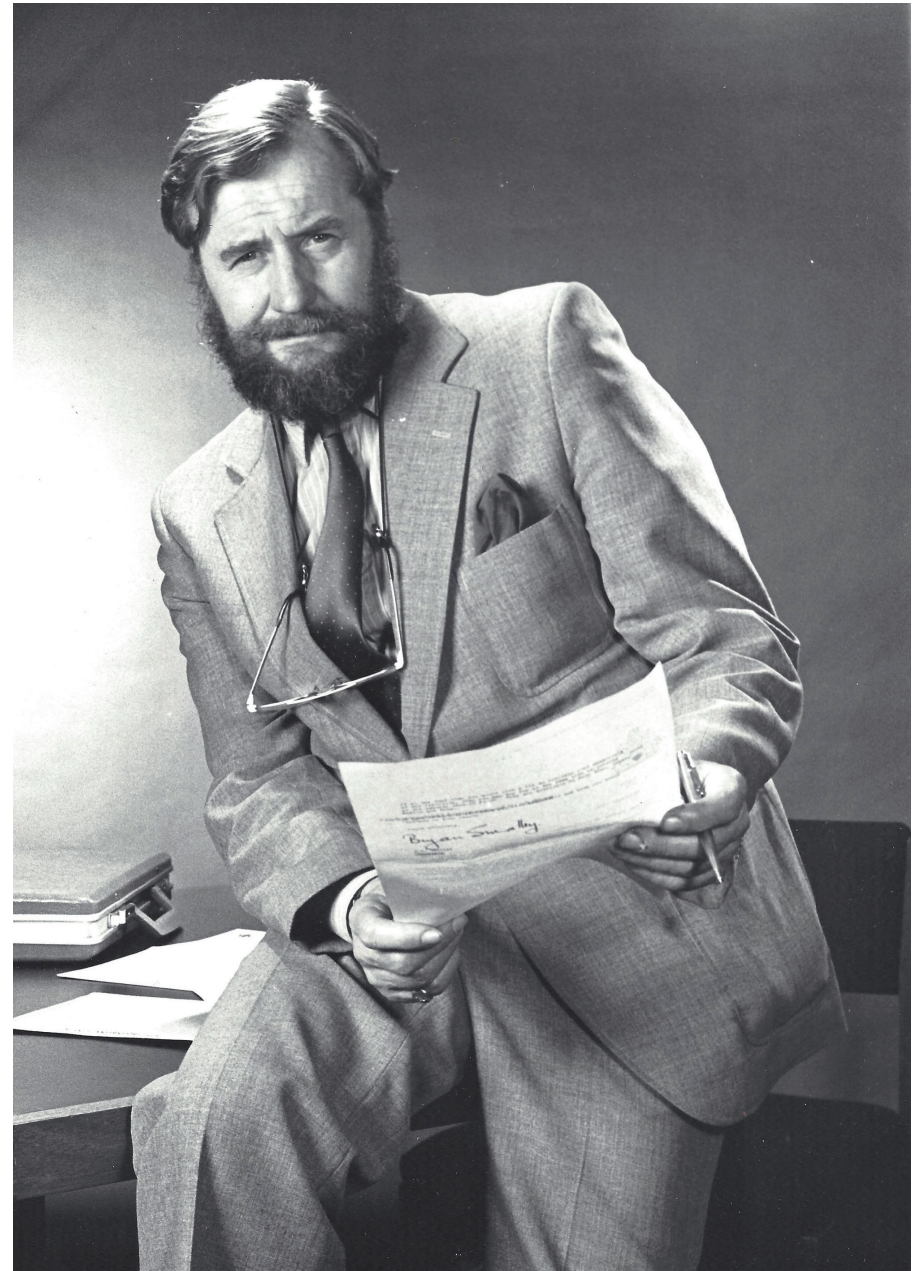
Second Love

Advertising Years

Gordon's illustrious career in advertising extended some 17 years. Most notably though this is where he met his second wife and love of his life Jo. They dated for several years before a registry office wedding; but the story of how they met is worth repeating as their life together and influence on Gordon's work has been immense. We will need to go back to the start of Gordon's advertising career.

Gordon landed his first job with Service Advertising Company. It was Gordon's brother, John, who had a friend whose father was a celebrity hairdresser in London. Cutting short the story, haha! Gordon ended up at the salon; and the hairdresser, betwixt styling, announced that one of his clients was the Chairman of an advertising agency and that he would seek an introduction for Gordon.

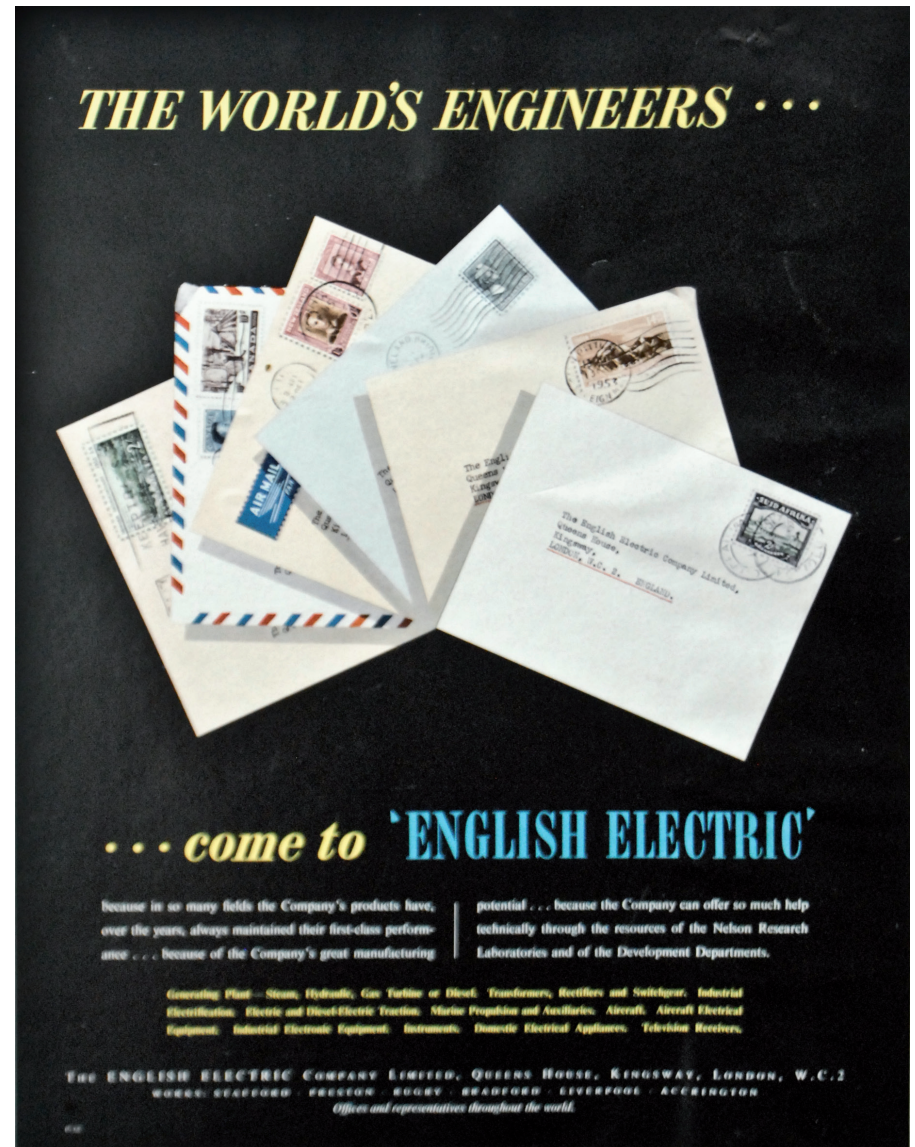
This subsequent meeting, including discussion of an amusing reference from the RAF that Gordon had 'painted some very pleasing watercolours,' led to an interview with their Creative Director and appointment of Gordon as 'visualiser.' This involved taking the design idea of one of the more senior members of the creative team and converting the idea into images suitable for showing to the client.



One such assignment is particularly memorable to Gordon as he was asked to work over a weekend freelance as the client needed the work quickly – images for a poster for English Electric. The wording had already been produced by the team but the client needed hand drawn images of stamped-addressed-envelopes rather than photographs. Gordon produced the images and was asked for a price to which Gordon wishfully suggested £6 in total which was his weekly wage in those days. The rather bemused Art Director politely said ‘Oh no, that would not do’ and offered Gordon £10 per stamp, there being eight in total, and a further £10 per envelope – as ‘this would be more acceptable to the client’. This was a small fortune to Gordon and enabled the purchase from Liberty’s of a Paul Hogarth dry-point etching (1952) of Provencal Cemetery, a new Sherlock Holmes’ pipe, and payment towards a new car!

Gordon’s artistic talent was being recognised in more ways than one. When the Chairman of his illustrious firm was away from London he left his son in charge. This was the opportunity the son had been waiting for and he promptly commissioned Gordon to paint an abstract picture for the reception – to show visitors that the firm was ‘with the times!’ When the Chairman returned he was aghast and insisted the painting was removed immediately.

Where had Gordon gained his inspiration for this commission? Sitting in the office loo where he was struck by the design of the door and its handles! This turned out to be a fine painting much to the pleasure of the Chairman’s son but certainly not to the Chairman who invited Gordon to his office for an explanation. ‘This is not your usual work Gordon’ remarked the Chairman



‘rumour has it your inspiration came from the loo door’ or words to that effect. Later the Chairman’s son was seen carrying the painting home with his tail between his legs – no doubt after a sharp telling off. The Chairman was more cross though that Gordon had been taken off his normal work to paint it!

For five years life appeared to be pretty good. Gordon's first wife was also a 'visualiser' and they lived in Sutton and worked in London and with no children there was the party scene and events and other distractions. Then everything came crashing down. It was one of Gordon's copy writers that had plucked up the courage to let him know that Monica had been seen with another man.

Their five year marriage really ended on holiday with a pronouncement by Monica that she needed some time to sort herself out. Initially Gordon tried to win her back and even went to see the eye surgeon she had been having an affair with; certainly not to punch him in the eye! There was a near breakdown suffered by Gordon; but thankfully walking into a local church one Sunday resulted in a fresh start. With support and kindness and 'coming to faith' life for Gordon moved on.

'Moving on' included Gordon securing employment at T B Browne Company, reputedly the oldest advertising firm in the country. Prior to the interview, and so as not to arouse suspicion of his intention to leave his existing firm, Gordon decided he had better leave his portfolio at a local café prior to arriving in the office. Later, when going to collect it for interview his Creative Director was seen at the same café. This meant Gordon having to smuggle the portfolio out of the back door of the café, akin to acting in a spy movie!

In those days one could not re-marry for five years, but after one year it was time to start dating again and Gordon's new colleagues were intent on 'setting him up.' At one party he was introduced to Jo and being the ever ready gentleman he drove

her home to Kew gardens in his sports car. The Austin Healey clearly did the trick as they met again at Brands Hatch before Gordon invited Jo to accompany him on another outing to Beaulieu for what was to be the start of a fine romance.



Of course there was much more than a shared interest in advertising and sports cars. Jo was a lovely Christian girl and they dated properly for four years, went to church together, were confirmed together and married until Jo's rather untimely passing from an infection of the heart. In fact, Jo had become the love of Gordon's life; and it was only the shock of this loss that reignited Gordon's passion for his other first love - painting. The daily memory of Jo has promoted a period of immense creativity continuing to this day.

To avoid Jo any embarrassment, due to dating a colleague, Gordon had decided to move to the firm of Alexander Butterfield

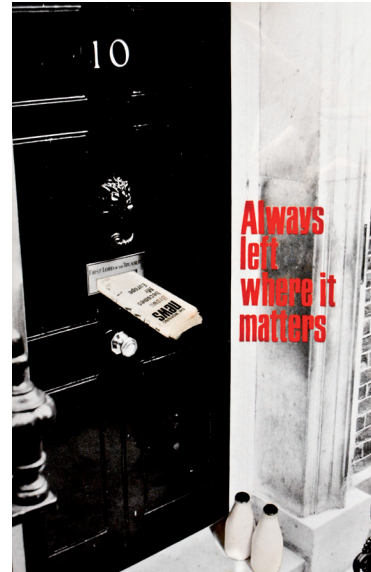
& Ayr. This was to be the pinnacle of Gordon's career in the advertising industry as Group Art Director with accounts including; Oxfam, Winsor & Newton, Quality Street, Four Square books, the seed company RHM, and The Morning News.

For Oxfam, Gordon's copywriter came up with the famous slogan 'What's on your plate this Christmas?' after visiting their office in Oxford and Gordon finding some old black and white snaps, of starving children, apparently taken by a Nun with a simple box camera. These black and white rather grainy images stood out from the more finely shot colour images appearing on other posters at the time. The resulting '16 sheet' poster for the underground is probably one of Oxfam's most successful in raising awareness of the issues – and in securing much needed donations.

Oxfam were so impressed with Gordon's work that they turned away work submitted by others when he was on holiday. This relationship continued for many years such that Gordon was able to produce more than short-term emergency action campaign material. There were posters outlining the actual assistance that Oxfam were providing to the victims of poverty and famine; and, for their 25th anniversary, details of projects to demonstrate that the perennial cycle of famine and want in the hungry could be broken.

For *The Morning News*, a new national newspaper, Gordon's team took a taxi cab and arrived at 10 Downing Street to jump out and ask the policeman standing guard at the door if they could take some photos. The policeman agreed so long as they also took some pictures of him as well! The photographer

climbed on Gordon's shoulders to take a photo of the newspaper partially posted through the No 10 letterbox. Back at the office, the caption was added 'Always left where it matters'; along with some milk bottles on the step. The poster had to be approved by the then PM Harold Wilson but did lead to several more assignments from the budding newspaper.

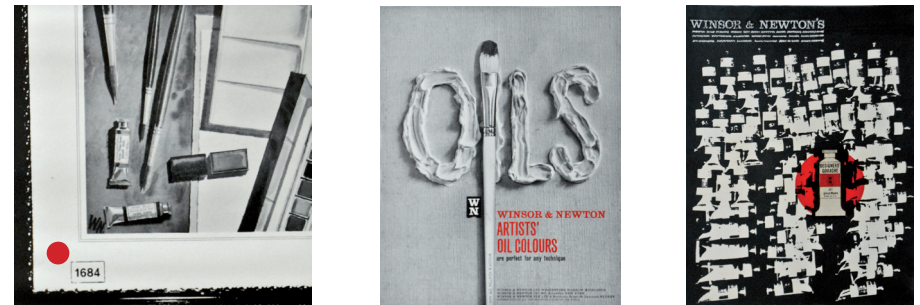


At RHM, the seed company, Gordon decided to go and see what was unique about their product line. Watching a film about their process he saw the seeds being 'washed'. Gordon asked for the film to be paused with the question 'what is happening?' and 'is that unique?' The rather bemused reply was that the seeds were being washed as 'that is what the machine did' and that this was indeed unique. Thus, Gordon had his advertising poster; an image of the machine with the caption 'our claims are landing us in hot water'. And this led to other copy including 'the whole country's going to seed' and 'seeds of discontent' highlighting the importance of good copywriting skills.



For Winsor and Newton Gordon was asked to design a poster to advertise the entirety of their product range. This included oil

paints, watercolours, and painting equipment. Gordon pondered on how this could be achieved and then realised that it was at exhibitions that the best association could be made. Thus his poster was of paintings with 'red dots' on; indicating that all the paintings had been sold. His slogan? 'No wonder Winsor & Newton always sells'. In fact, this account became quite useful to Gordon as he was granted substantial discounts on painting materials from the Winsor and Newton hierarchy.



The campaign to improve book sales of Four Square Books who published *The Man from Uncle* led to the design of a walk-through interactive set where kids could shoot and throw darts at targets, and solve various puzzles, to become an Uncle Agent. Even adults lined up to take the challenge with queues of excited children spanning out of the book store in Liverpool and around the block. Gordon even had great fun entertaining some of the real 'Uncle Agents' from the TV series as part of the PR.

The entire set was modelled by Gordon's team and approved by the client. After purchasing a book, each applicant completed a form and then entered the maze of mock rooms to complete various tasks. The successful agents were then awarded a letter written in invisible ink which they could take home to reveal a secret message. Sales of the book rocketed as did the interest in the TV series.



In fact, it was a chance meeting in Gordon's local pub with the boy that had featured atop the horse that led Gordon to recount the story of this work for the trust. Shortly after the passing of his wife Jo, Gordon had ventured to the pub for food and company. Striking up a conversation with John Mattinson Junior led to a friendship that resulted in Gordon inviting John to his 80th birthday celebration with family and friends. The ensuing conversation between Gordon and John went something like this: 'The only claim to fame I have is that my brother and I featured in a poster for Riding for the Disabled Trust,' said John, to which Gordon immediately responded 'stop right there! I was the Creative Director of the agency responsible for photographing and designing the poster!' 'It was me that was there on the day you were atop the horse!' 'Oh my goodness, what a coincidence' replied John. They have kept in touch ever since. And a copy of the original poster was found in Egypt before being returned to the UK.

For Quality Street, each year the account team had to come up with a Christmas poster. Gordon's idea was to plant the Christmas tree in a tin and use the sweets as decorations; an image that was used for many years. Unfortunately the Creative Director spotted Gordon's drawings and stole the idea as his own! Eventually this politicking caused Gordon to retire from the industry and go freelance before taking up a teaching role at Barking College reviewed in the next chapter.

For Riding for Disabled Trust, based in Chigwell Essex, Gordon was asked to design a poster to promote the charity. To achieve this Gordon decided to work pro bono. He asked a photographer to take pictures of a disabled boy sitting on a horse being led by the reins. It was a weekend and raining but the photos were taken and, although the caption 'helping them lead the reins of life again' was amended, the poster was still in use over 20 years later.



For *Playboy*, Gordon had fun deciding how to produce copy of the infamous ‘bunny girls’ and this led to amusing stories of his team carrying cardboard cut outs of girls in bunny costumes around London – as the team were not allowed to use real models! Can you imagine Gordon and his team carrying life-size cardboard cut outs of girls in bunny costumes on the tube and setting them up at various locations around London in order to prepare ideas for the editors of *Playboy* magazine? These episodes certainly show the humorous side of Gordon’s character and temperament.



When Gordon did celebrate his 80th birthday numerous friends and colleagues from over the years also sent their best wishes; and being ‘creatives’ many also sent amusing recollections of their time with him. One such story is especially delightful not least of all for the cartoon penned by Maurice Yates, one of Gordon’s former team members. Here Gordon’s colleagues decided to play a trick on him and whilst he was out of the office filled his pipe with the ends of unused match sticks - carefully hidden beneath a blanket of Gordon’s best tobacco.



When Gordon collected his pipe and left the office at the end of the day he was wondering why there was a string of staff following him out of the building. Of course when he lit his pipe there was an almighty explosion of fire and peals of laughter – the funny side of which Gordon immediately recognised and is a testament to his good nature and the respect he had fostered from colleagues throughout his career. The next stage of which was to be teaching art at Barking College.

Chapter 3

Third Love

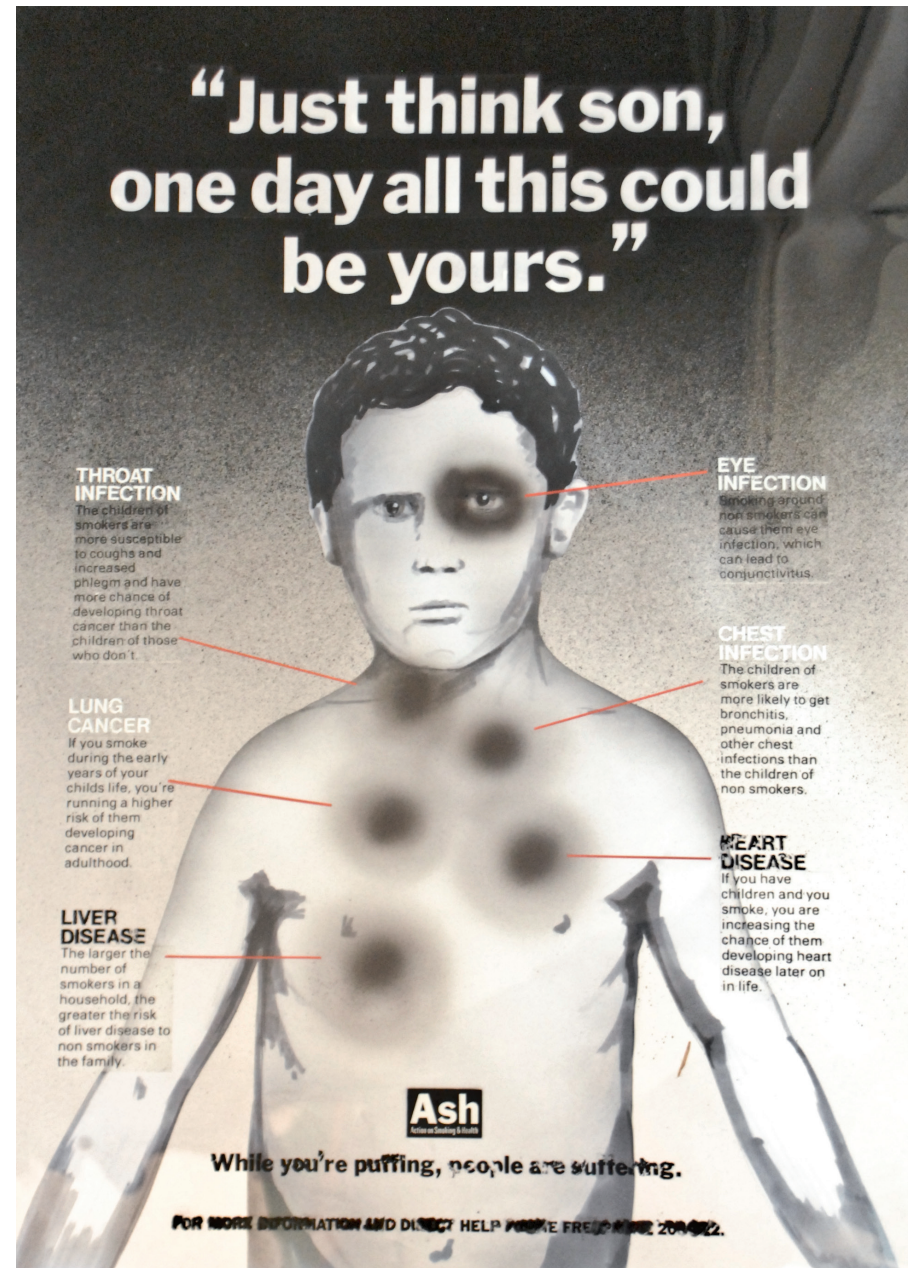
The Barking Years

Gordon began teaching at Barking College of Technology in 1967; becoming full time as a Lecturer in Graphics and Advertising very soon after that. Although Gordon was unqualified as a teacher, his experience in industry paid dividends, and invariably all his students walked into jobs on graduating.

At Gordon's initial interview the panel were surprised to be given 'briefs' by Gordon for a client and informed of just how he intended to set about using this method in his teaching of art. Thus it was Gordon that asked the panel questions and the Head of Department was clearly impressed with Gordon's style as he was offered his first teaching post.

Gordon set the students tasks as though he was a client commissioning the student to complete a real world task. One student was tasked to design a poster for Ash, the anti-smoking charity, and Gordon was so impressed with the resulting poster highlighting various diseases and caption 'Just think son, one day all this could be yours' that he showed the work to Ash. They were equally impressed such that they paid the student and used the poster. Another such poster for Ash was captioned 'I gave my wife everything in life. I just pray I did not give her cancer!'

Student poster for Ash





Gordon teaching a student who went on to head his own firm

For Guinness Gordon invited the whole of the ‘Guinness design team’ from J Walter Thompson to come to the college and spend time talking to the students and explaining their approach. As you can imagine the students were absolutely delighted to be mixing with the professionals; and learning from a real client what they were expecting from advertising agency creatives.

One of the J Walter team was Sue Molineux, who also worked for ‘Saatchi’, and later became one of Gordon’s colleagues at the college. Sue is still friends with Gordon to this day and was able to describe her first memories of Gordon and his teaching. ‘Gordon was dressed quite formally with a striped blazer and bow-tie, bearded with glasses and an enormous smile.’ They clicked instantly, she said.

The students too felt reassured by Gordon’s strength of character and demeanour. Sue described how foreign students warmed to Gordon as he had the ‘air’ of an English Gentleman - which was reassuring to parents leaving their daughters in England to study! Likewise, the local ‘bash street kids’ had caught Sue’s attention ‘Oi Sue, that Mr Crossley...he ain’t half posh with that bow-tie’ and ‘ain’t he clever...he can make a paintin’ yer know [sic].’

Some parents even regarded it as a sort of ‘finishing school’ though this image was rather quashed when two attractive ‘east-end’ girls, strutting down the corridor, reacted to some suggestive comments from a boy. One of the girls delivered a timely upper cut to the boy culprit – flattening him to the floor – without even breaking stride. Apparently both girls went on to good finance jobs in the city and would often be seen with a swarm of admirers on their heels!

The method that Gordon had adopted to teach the students was so successful that when the students entered design competitions they invariably won hands down. On one occasion, Gordon was asked to receive the winning cup and promptly went up after his name had been called out, only to return to the podium a further two times as Barking had won all the cups in the competition!



Gordon receiving another cup

Often Gordon would produce copy himself for the students to reproduce in fine detail. For example, for Oris watch company, Gordon painstakingly drew a luxury wristwatch and hence showed in precise detail what the students were expected to achieve with their own efforts. This meant that students learned exactly what they would need to do as though for a real commission.



Gordon's hand drawn image of an Oris watch

After ten years Gordon was appointed Senior Lecturer but only on his condition that the promotion was given in recognition of his teaching rather than an indication of any new administrative responsibility.

In fact, Gordon later turned down the opportunity to become Principal Lecturer as his love of teaching trumped any desire to get enmeshed in more admin' related tasks.

Gordon's unique style of teaching did sometimes cause consternation. Students that were late were locked out of the class. And at least one junior member of staff was told off by Gordon for reading his newspaper in class when he was supposed to be teaching. This disciplined approach paid off though as both students and staff learned to respect Gordon for his rigorous approach. What mattered to Gordon was doing his very best for the students – so that they loved art but went on to get good jobs when they finished their course.

One student that was late and locked out of the class confronted Gordon the following day only to be shown the painting that Gordon had produced and given the comment 'This is what you missed.' The student was not late again! On another occasion Gordon hung one of his own paintings for the students to 'criticise' but without telling them it was his. The students were so impressed with the painting, hung alongside numerous others to 'crit,' they challenged Gordon to reveal the painter's name. 'Mine, of course' said Gordon with a wry smile!

Barking College was an old Victorian building, red brick, with two internal quadrangles with cherry blossoms and iris's flowing inside. Gordon described the school as 'The Alamo' and on one occasion the school was actually assaulted by locals such that the staff had to barricade themselves in for fear of attack. New annexes were built over time but Sue says these resembled 'Eastern European ferries' - steel boxes and rather hollow sounding! At least Gordon's team had been able to set up in the 'Old Refectory' which offered some respite from the stresses and strains of everyday academic politics.

On one occasion men with clipboards arrived at the refectory



Gordon leading an excursion of his creative pals

to inspect the students work but on Sue's calm instruction that 'they could not enter with clipboards as these would interfere with the computers' the clipboards were promptly left outside! The climate was professional and hard-working but fun. And there was a social side too with trips to galleries and exhibitions; even sightseeing to the coast.

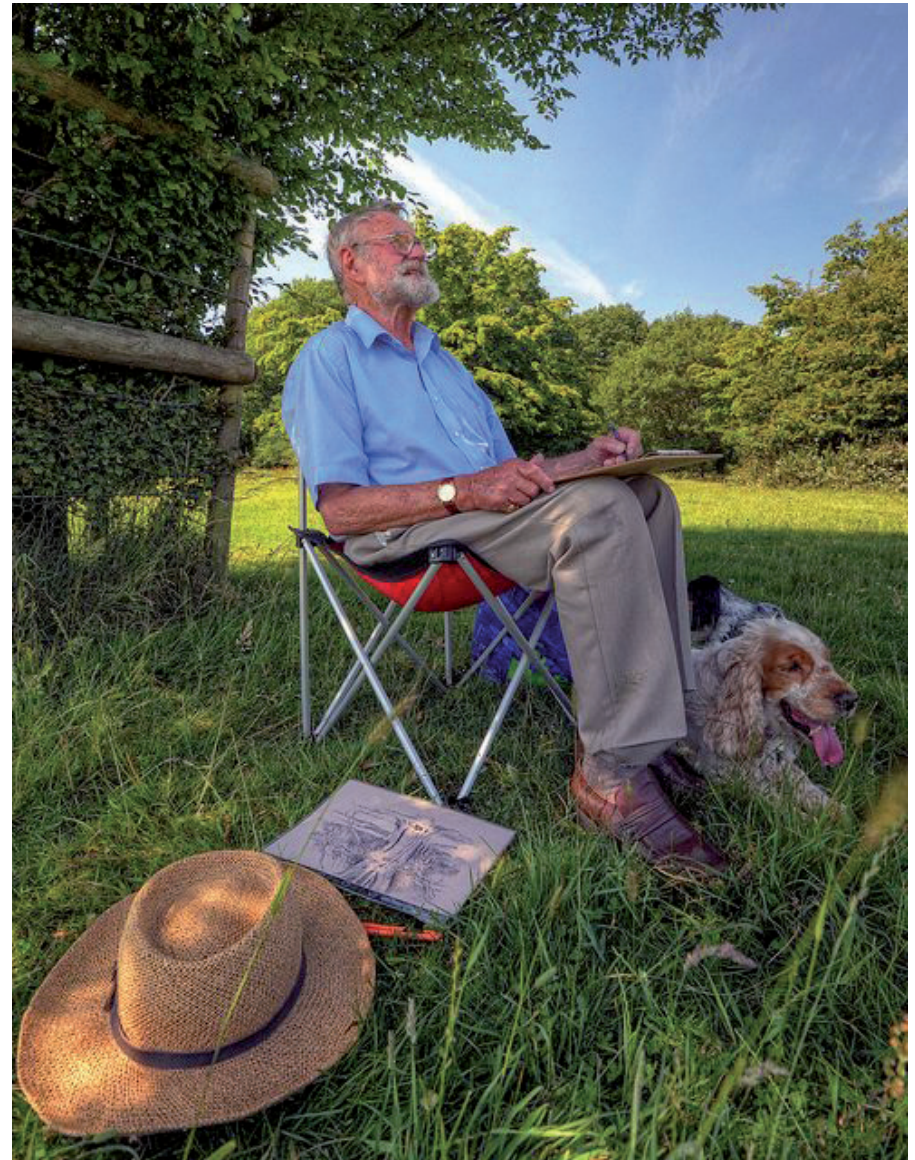
One colleague, with a prosthetic leg, played glorious tricks on unwitting members of the public at the beach by pretending that his leg had been bitten off by a shark! According to Gordon, he would leave his artificial limb under a towel, hop down to the waves and then emerge from the water shouting 'shark, shark!' causing considerable distress to passers-by until all was revealed from under the towel.

Whilst teaching was the major preoccupation for Gordon there were opportunities taken to foray out into the countryside again to paint. This provided useful respite but also some very strange encounters. On one occasion Gordon had set up his easel in a field only for a cow to come and lick the paint off the canvas. On another occasion, on a windy day, his canvas was swept up by a gust over a wall; and when Gordon went to retrieve it he ended up being chased by a rather disgruntled bull! Then there were the dogs. Gordon appeared to have more of a calming influence on them and often dogs would meander over to where he was painting to loll at his feet.

By 1994 Gordon had decided to retire from full-time teaching to spend more time painting in his studio. However, he continued to teach one day per week. Quite a few students have kept in touch over the years. Several had been successful themselves and gone on to run their own creative agencies.

For example, John Plunkett met his wife Patsy whilst studying at Barking; and even though he has also now retired was delighted to recall many happy memories of his time there and of Gordon in particular. John's diary is testimony to daily life at the art college and charts the transformation from the more traditional methods of design education to the more vocational oriented ethos epitomised by Gordon.

Clearly there are many fond memories of being classically trained in sculpture, life drawing, and technical illustration. Room C5, the life drawing room, was a focal point for much frivolity. This was where Quentin Crisp chained himself to the radiator to evoke being enslaved; and hung himself from a rafter



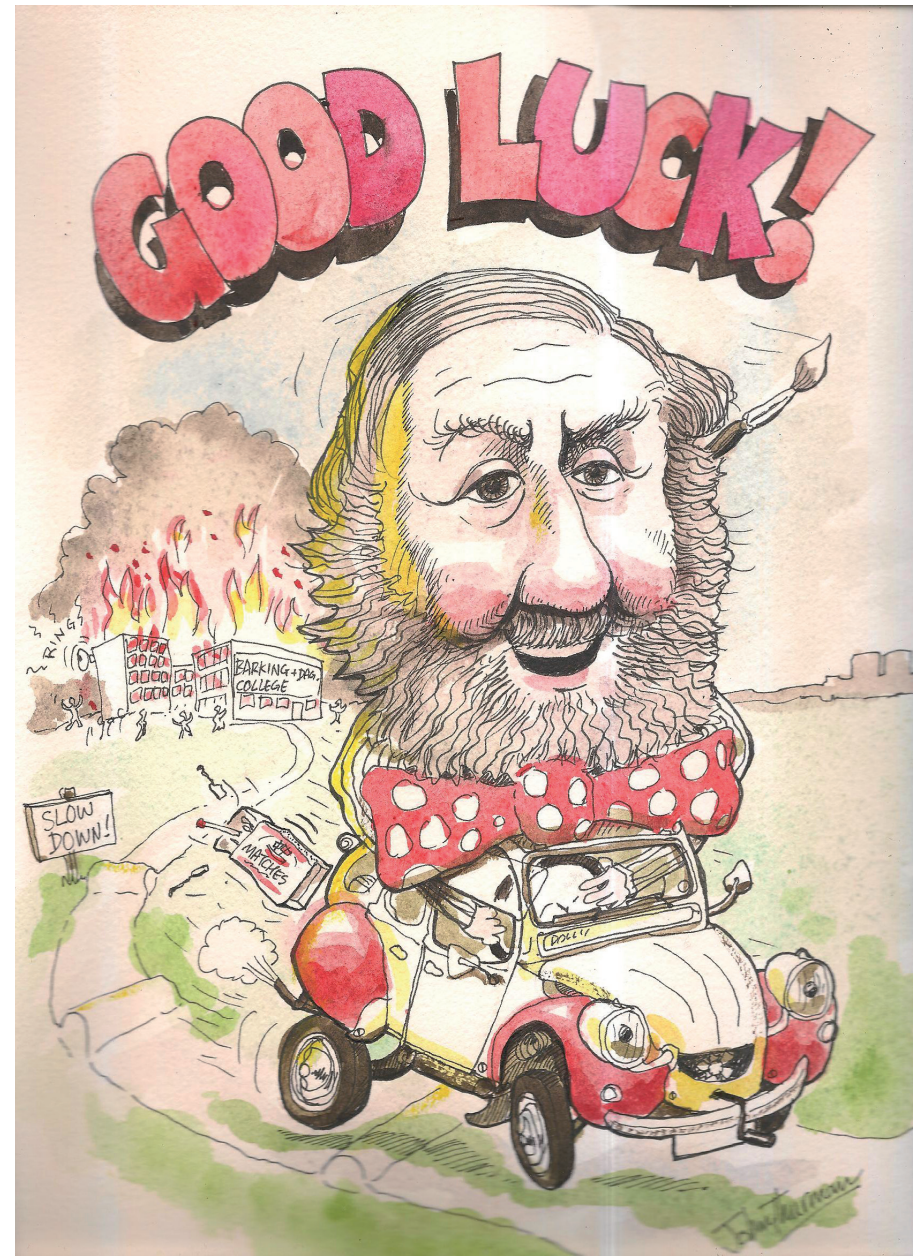
Gordon sketching with dogs, not his, at his feet

to portray Michelangelo's portrait of the crucifixion. Other well-known tutors included Thomas Hartley Jones, Bernard Carolan & Wolf Goldberg.

The door was pasted with a montage of images of celebrities and other so-called 'clunky' individuals. Sometimes, bins of rubbish were precariously pitched above the door to cascade down on unwitting victims - though Gordon apparently never suffered this fate! There was a great social scene with parties and dances and various performers including Jethro Tull (still performing today) and the band Cream. Two students even eloped to Gretna Green.

Gordon was remembered for always being happy, never cross or grumpy, a pleasure to have as a teacher. Gordon always wore a three piece tweed suit with his trademark bow tie (worn so that he was smart but unlike a tie would not dip into paint pots) and of course his pipe with plumes of smoke.

The friendship between teacher and student was such that Gordon was invited to attend the Christening of John and Patsy's daughter (later to become Cambridge rowing captain); and John and Patsy attended Gordon's 80th birthday celebration. John is now retired from owning his own design practice and spends his spare time book binding - agreeing to repair a binding for Gordon in exchange for a small landscape painting. 'Not a print' was John's agreed bid. Perhaps Gordon had finally met his match!



Chapter 4

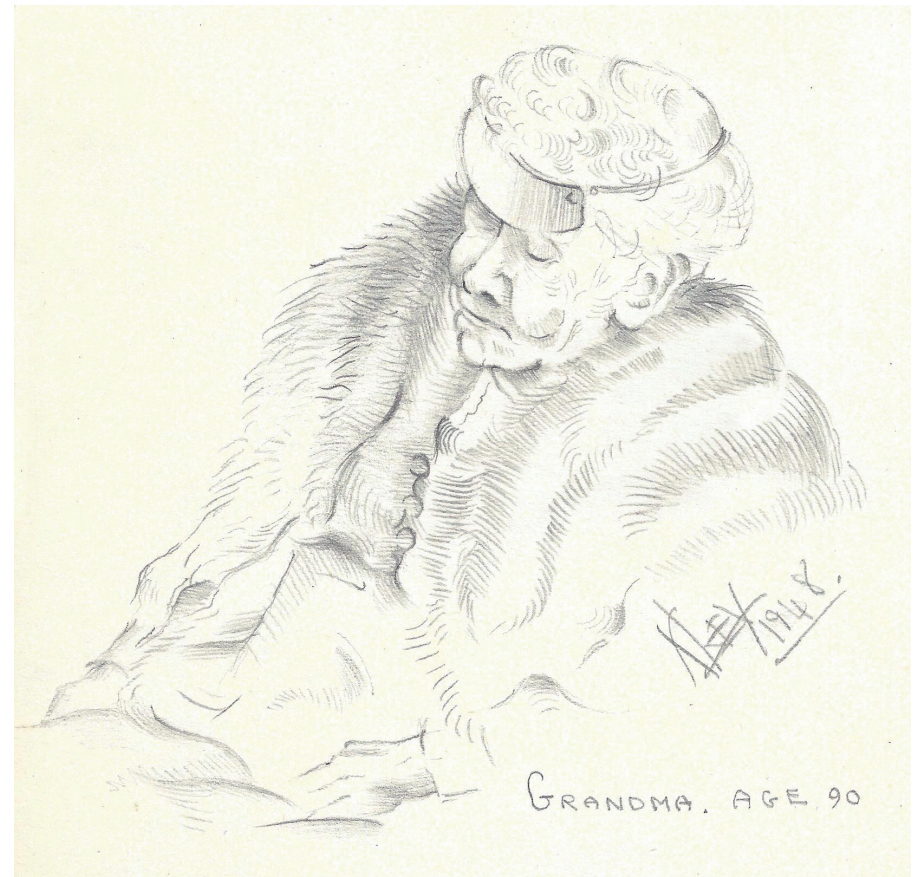
Family Love

Gordon's oldest living relative is his elder brother John; aged 90 but constantly travelling and living life to the full. John now lives in a purpose built retirement village in Surrey but is often travelling; especially to the USA to be with his own sons and their families. When home in the UK John recalled numerous memories of Gordon and himself growing up. Grandfather, Frederick Crossley born 1860 in Coventry, had been a chemist after WW1. With Rose Emily (affectionately known as Big Grandma) they produced four sons: Cecil, Frederick, Leslie and Doyle; three of whom were budding actors.

Father, Frederick Eric, decided acting was not the life for him, and so went to work in Liberty's department store in London as a sales clerk and then, more exotically, in Robinson's department store in Kuala Lumpur. Many years later Gordon was pleased to see one of his paintings on display in Liberty's, a fitting tribute he thought to his father having worked there all those years before!

At that time wholesale was the trade to be in and Father branched out as a liquor merchant – driving around Malaysia on a two-stroke motorbike; collecting monies from the owners of various tin and rubber plantations and probably having a tippie at each location.

Drawing of Grandma by Gordon in 1948



Father had met Mother in London and they were married in KL with a honeymoon in Sumatra. Three boys arrived on the scene: John and the twins – Gordon and Donald. By now Father had a blue Morris Oxford car and was playing tennis and golf in his spare time; and water polo for Singapore. There was a metal toy car with pedals for the boys to play with; and they enjoyed 'eskimo' pies at the golf club.

Then there was the 'Depression' and Father lost his position; and the family returned to London. Father then working as an insurance agent in Rayne's Park where they lived. In KL the family also lost £600 investment in a tin mine but Father was persuaded to reinvest and survived on the 100% dividend until WW2 when the mine was flooded by the invading army. The shares were re-validated after the war and were eventually sold in the 1980s – but only for about £10K in total.

Much of life for the boys centred on schooling and Rutlish School in particular. John had vivid memories of the Head Teacher EAA Varnish OBE who 'ruled with an iron rod.' In fact, John described him as firm but fair – allowing boys to decide if they were guilty of reported misdemeanours and to decline the cane if they said they were innocent. Apparently no boy declined!





On one occasion though the Head was so disappointed that the Cricket first XI had lost the opening three matches of the season that he caned the entire team; they still lost the next match! Perhaps the Head felt guilty as he duly presented each boy with the ashes from the cane in a little silver box, with their initials engraved on, when they left the school.

The Sports Master is also remembered, Tubby Kirkwood, and in 1937 the school had three boys in the England v. France public schools tournament which they won! All the Crossley boys learned to play sport; with John excelling at golf and Gordon at Cricket. In fact, Gordon recalls being taught to swerve the cricket ball by the England cricket bowler Alf Gover; skills which Gordon used for many years playing for the school team, during his advertising career, and then locally.



Alf Gover bowling; and inspecting a cricket bat

Later the school was bombed and John recalls having to cycle to school to collect work from the Master to be completed at home as there weren't any spare classrooms. When his school years finally ended, a chance encounter by his Uncle Leonard of an executive from Shell (his car had broken down) lead John to be called up for an interview. In fact, the interview was prefaced by him playing cricket at short notice for the Shell team; and the interview went very smoothly after that! John was appointed straight into 'shipping movements' where log books were collected and processed from all over the world. Some were still blood stained and salted as a result of the war!

The war did interrupt John's and Gordon's careers but sadly Donald was no longer with them, after taking his own life; perhaps due to bullying at school. John was posted overseas and largely lost contact with Gordon apart from family occasions. It was really only after John retired (early at 55) that they renewed their kinship and the mutual respect for quite different pathways in life developed. Only recently John admitted that he did not know just how good a painter Gordon was and how successful he had been!



A great deal of Gordon's patriarchal role and love for his extended family and friends is portrayed in the book produced for his 80th birthday celebration. This beautifully composed collection of happy memories was collated by Gordon's son Matthew from the responses received to birthday party invitations; accompanied by an RSVP to forward recollections of time spent with Gordon over the years.

The matriarch of the Crossley family is clearly Gordon's beloved Jo. The love they shared is self-evident from their photographs together; but is also demonstrated in the many and varied cards Gordon continued to send to Jo long after they were married.



For example, when they holidayed in Scotland Gordon picked some gorse to present to Jo; and later included the same piece of gorse on a card with the caption 'With my love of gorse.'

Hearing Jo's dulcet tones was clearly welcomed by Gordon as depicted in the cartoon of him listening to an old gramophone with hearts coming from the 'loud speaker'.

And when Jo was knitting a new jumper for Gordon, another Gordon card appeared in her lap politely reminding her of his chest size and not to forget the length (due to an earlier effort that was much too short!).

Gordon and Jo lived in Sheering, Essex. The village probably derived its name from the Saxon personal name Scira – perhaps there was a concerted effort in tree clearance and building by Scira’s people sometime in the early Saxon period?

In the *Little Domesday Book* of 1087, Sheering appears as a substantial settlement with 32 acres of meadow, woodland for a hundred swine, a mill, and the unusual distinction of possessing a mule – one of the only two mules mentioned in the book (the other being in Norfolk!).

The village and environs have been much the subject of Gordon’s art work over the years. Today local village life centres on St Mary’s, the parish church of Sheering, two pubs and the café, Ellie’s Brunch.



The church has evident signs of Gordon’s influence; most notably Gordon’s painting of multiple crosses hung on the back wall of the church with a tiny explanation designed to be read with a magnifying glass. To summarise, Gordon was asked to paint a picture that evoked Easter. The result is a painting quite unlike any other picture Gordon has painted. In fact, Gordon felt that he had been entirely at the liberty of ‘The Holy Spirit’ and produced a remarkable picture of light shining onto palm crosses and then emanating out in beautiful colours; the Holy Spirit touching everybody. Quite allegorical really!



Gordon and Jo hosted an Alpha group at their home. And Gordon has continued with monthly prayer breakfasts to this day. Both were very active in the church with Gordon being appointed Church Warden for 12 years; and this inevitably involved organising numerous social and fundraising events.

An extension to the family home was built to house an art studio and clearly being married to Jo and bringing up such a lovely family inspired many and great works of art. There were numerous local scenes and forays to the coast, to nature reserves and occasionally abroad. And when not out and about Gordon could often be found providing lessons or exhibitions to ardent admirers of his work. Gordon's popularity was much to the amusement of Jo and the children.



The Children

The eldest child is Tamsin. Tamsin's creative spirit is clearly displayed with her drawing of cartoons featuring her Dad. The first delightfully recalls an incident camping when Gordon, consumed with easel and paints, suddenly jumped up yelping. The entire campsite turned to see Gordon with his shorts around his ankles and 'grotesque' orange 'Y-fronts' off his bottom revealing a bright red sting from a wasp on his left buttock. Everybody fell about laughing.

On another camping trip in West Wales the family had ventured out for a walk but lost track of time and found themselves shrouded in the dark. There are fond memories of having to pitch a tent in a buttercup field on a slope in the rain; and spending the night having their sleeping bags hauled up the slope by Gordon and Jo; until Jo hit on the bright idea of impeding their slippage with wellies strategically positioned down the hill.



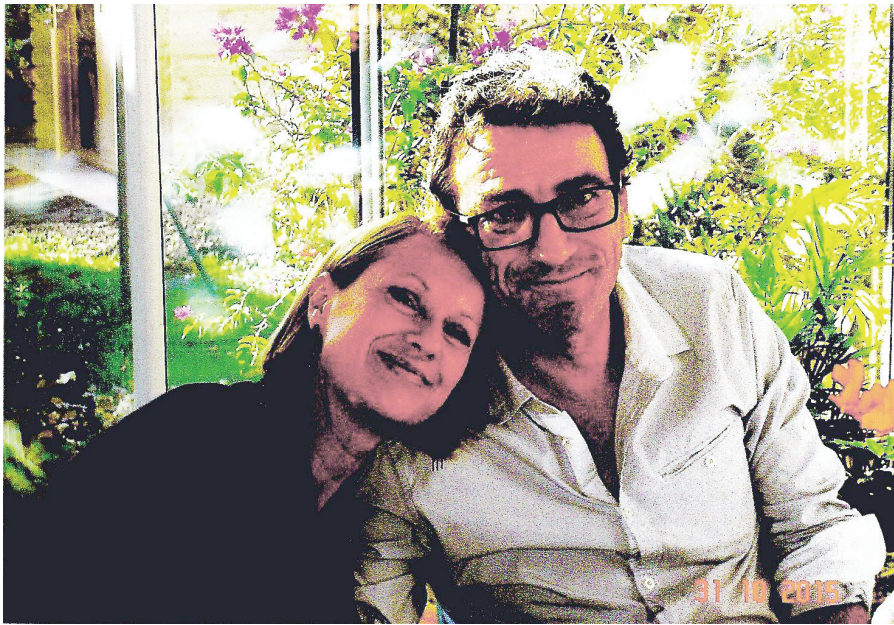
On another occasion Gordon had been painting up a ladder but lost his balance and came crashing down. He was left on the floor covered in paint. Fortunately Gordon was not hurt and saw the funny side eventually. This salutary lesson reminded Gordon he should stick to painting landscapes rather than landings!

These happy memories of a somewhat bohemian childhood also gave Tamsin a love for art; and she excelled at school without much effort achieving her 'O' and 'A' levels early. In fact, Tamsin now realises that this lack of effort was in part due to having all her art materials on tap from Gordon; not to mention the avid 'crit's' of her work!

The creativity has continued to flow with Tamsin now supplying arty crafty supplies to gift shops and boutiques across Sussex where she lives with husband Darren in a beautiful arty crafty house with two girls Molly (now sailing and skiing instructor but also studied 'A' level Art and has fond memories of projects on Chagal and Modigliani) and Robyn - a PA in the City for an IT company - fluent in Italian.

Next eldest child is Lucy, a PA in Paris. Lucy also recalls how her Dad made them laugh. On one holiday in France Gordon was asked to go shopping for coffee. How do you say "Please can I have some coffee? In French" he asked. Lucy hastily taught Gordon a few French phrases and waved him off to the shop with Anna - one of his other daughters. On arrival at the shop, Gordon held up an empty packet of coffee and politely asked the male assistant 'Bonjour Madame, Comme ca silly play' handed over the money and added 'Merci Madame' and 'Au Revoir Madame.'

More fits of giggles followed when the entire encounter was re-told back at home. This time with Anna's description of the male assistant, a rather burly French farmer in a string vest!



Lucy with husband Bruno

Lucy recalls that when she was about seven Mum gave all three of the kids the job of 'finding Daddy' for the first time; as Dad used to paint in the fields in the middle of nowhere. 'He would stay away all day long and we would take him lunch or a coffee flask. He was so pleased when he saw us! Tamsin, Matt and I used to walk over the fields and track him down with our dog Ben in the lead. Ben always knew where to find Dad and always arrived first.'

In Lucy's memory it was usually hot and Dad was always tired and thirsty and very pleased to see us. 'He'd show us what he was painting and we'd watch him continue a little. He told us to

look at a cloud and asked us what colour it was. I knew never to say white!!! I looked for the colour in the white, pink or yellow, sometimes the shadow underneath was grey but you didn't say grey, but grey with a little red or grey with a little blue and a little red.'



One of Lucy's pet portraits

‘Dad taught me to look into colour, dissect it and reproduce it. He taught me to appreciate shapes, pointing out a spiky branch or a knobby tree. He showed us the composition of his painting and how he moved things about to his taste. I thought that was fun! The power of recreating a scene!’

‘Later, Dad had a canvas which he kept for us. I would spend what seemed like hours trying to do a masterpiece only to see it whitewashed ready for the next person. I ended up not worrying about making a masterpiece and just enjoying the exercise of reproducing what I saw.’

‘We had to draw using Dad’s method but I did end up knowing how to do it. Dad so much wanted to help us that I ended up doing portraits so that I could do my own thing. He wasn’t so interested in portraits and I felt it was only by doing a good portrait that I could impress him, my landscapes would never be good enough.’

Lucy’s husband Bruno, also an artist, had great pleasure recalling how Gordon showed his sporting prowess to the French by beating them at a game of Boules! This story and the rest of the trip was neatly prefaced by Bruno suggesting that Gordon had liked their good French wine so much the cellar was now empty; but Gordon’s taste buds for snails and frogs legs were left well and truly intact! With Gordon also mistaking a male baker for a lady with the phrase ‘Donnez-moi deux croissants Madame?’ and one local farmer offering to sell his tractor to Gordon for one of his paintings, Gordon is very much a wanted man in the Republic of France!

Bruno’s own art has achieved critical acclaim where they live

outside Paris with Bruno being awarded the ‘keys to the town’ by the local Mayor. And Bruno’s wonderful drawings have featured in a number of books, in French, but presented to Gordon as testimony to their duel passion favouring hand-drawn pictures over computer generated images. Their boys, Tom and Ryan have been studying medicine and business respectively.

Third eldest child is Matthew who had not particularly enjoyed art at school and recalled being totally bored at having to draw ‘still-life’ of cornflakes boxes. On one occasion, a letter was sent home to Gordon, the known artist, by the art teacher assuming that Gordon would be upset at his son messing about in his art lessons. In fact, Gordon just said ‘don’t do it again’ and left it at that.



Matthew with sisters Anna and Tamsin

This is also reminiscent of days out with Gordon when the children were young. At the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge Gordon sometimes left the kids on the back stairs whilst he wandered off to view paintings. Matthew recalled how he would play with his sisters behind the giant Chinese vases that many years later achieved national news by toppling over and taking £1000s of pounds to restore. Perhaps a lucky escape for the children; and for Gordon too!

Matthew also described Gordon as a bit of an enthusiastic but relatively naïve ‘hob-knobber.’ On one occasion Gordon arrived home in Sheering to relate how he had been chatting to a lovely young man from Sheering Hall. Gordon had been commissioned to paint the house some years before and had said to the new owner ‘Oh yes, a fine house, you must be a wealthy man to be able to afford that place. What line of work are you in?’ Steve Harris replied that he was a musician. ‘Oh, any good?’ Gordon retorted. The name of the band was ‘Iron Maid... or something...’ recalled Gordon ‘...never heard of them!’

For Matthew, his Dad was always full of surprise encounters with people from all walks of life: doctors, teachers, monks, musicians, actors and business people. Rich or poor Gordon always had time for them - especially if they were interested in art. Popular culture, trends or fashions had little occupancy in the Crossley household. TV was ‘a small black and white fuzzy machine’ up until the 1980s when their first colour set was purchased. The radio was always tuned to Radio 4, apart from early morning bouts of loud Hindi music.

There was a sense of freedom to explore the world. Matthew recalled being allowed to walk around Sheering village and

Matching Green alone at the age of 8 or 9, being dropped off at Epping station for a day out in London at 11, and Paris by night at 16. There was a sort of faith that all would be Okay and a natural desire for all the children to live life to the full. And of course, the house was filled with art including paintings and sculpture. With numerous visits to galleries, museums and exhibitions.



Matthew married his childhood sweetheart Tracy, whom he met at school, and started and grew a building firm designing and building beautifully crafted homes and extensions; and Tracy teaching in the local primary school. Their home is a haven for family and friends and often a refuge for new guests at their church – King’s Community Church – where they also lead an Alpha course. Their home is another gallery for Gordon’s paintings and a great source of pride.



Gordon as a White Rabbit with Jordan, granddaughter, and groom Jim

More recently the bohemian side of Gordon's influence on children and grandchildren was borne out with the wedding of his granddaughter Jordan. The entire wedding was themed around characters from children's literature. Gordon was delighted to attend as a 'white rabbit' with a classic jacket and waistcoat and a sign pinned to his back saying 'I'm late for a very important date'.

The wedding was held on the green outside Matthew and Tracy's home in Great Notley with the Vicar dressed as Captain Hook and the best men as Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. Their role was neatly 'exposed' when one of the best men had to unzip his fly to retrieve the wedding ring. Later there were hilarious speeches all caught on film; and Gordon danced the night away.

The Christian influence is also evident in the interests of his granddaughter Tessa now studying for her MA in Theology at Exeter and considering PhD study on how the Bible is portrayed in English Literature. Grandson Freddie is now studying Quantity Surveying at Sheffield and will probably join Matthew in the family firm at some point. Grandson Joseph has just completed his GCSEs and is hoping to study art and design at college. He would thus be carrying on the art tradition.

Sadly during the course of writing this book Matthew was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Following treatment, the support of family and friends, and much prayer from all concerned, his condition stabilised such that Gordon painted a special picture – from his favourite area in France. This was a challenge to Gordon not least of all for being unable any more to visit and paint in situ.

However, the resulting painting from a photograph was thought by Matt to exactly capture the scene.



The youngest of the four Crossley children is Anna who lovingly recalls how her Daddy once lost her in the fog at Hatfield Forest. Fortunately they were quickly repatriated and now laugh about their numerous outings together. In fact, Gordon avidly and proudly recalls how one lady was surprised to hear a girl so young (about 7 years old) could identify all the main classical painters from their paintings at the Fitzwilliam Museum. So perhaps the children were not left on the back stairs all of the time!

And this love for art has continued to this day with ongoing lessons from Gordon in oils. The most recent work involved both Gordon and Anna reproducing a photograph of the Horseshoe Nebula from the Hubble Telescope. Gordon proudly displaying his technique in capturing the amazing colours from such a distant galaxy. The photograph was provided by Anna's Cambridge scientist husband Corin, famed for mathematically mapping the spread of diseases, who also reproduced a 3-dimensional image of the B-crystallin protein to remind Gordon that as an artist Gordon had such extraordinary vision!



They live in London and Anna now models and sings in a band Sparkle Darkly; writing her own songs and teaching music in her spare time. There are several videos on youtube with links from the band's facebook page at:
<https://www.facebook.com/sparkledarklylondon/>
and music clips at:
<https://sparkledarkly.bandpage.com/>.



Anna modelling; and singing with Sparkle Darkly





Gordon still experiments with new techniques; and after watching a bonfire display at the author's house painted this atmospheric picture of the fire and sparks and distant fireworks using a paint roller and scratching the surface to achieve the full effect.

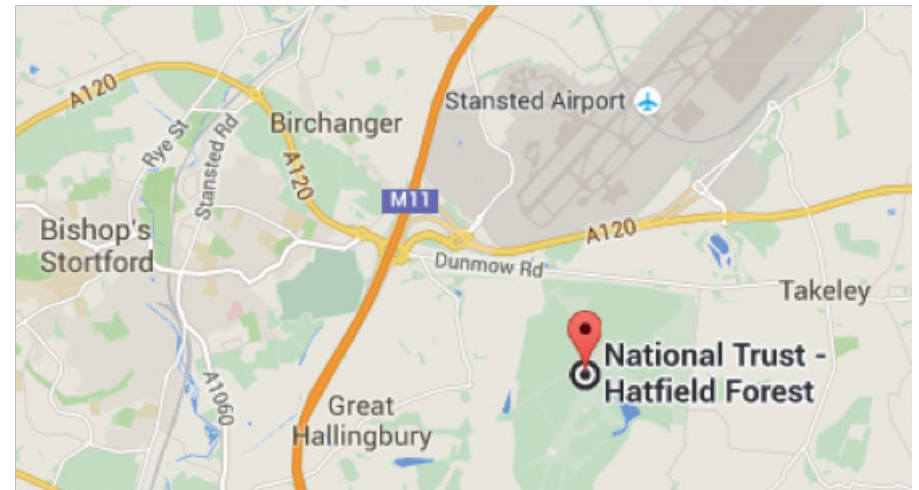
Gordon continues to give lessons to friends, family and acquaintances; still exhibits his work in local galleries; and can often be found in Hatfield Forest painting – with a portfolio of samples in the Shell House. The next chapter focuses on Hatfield Forest and includes an art trail of Gordon's work so that those interested in seeing some of the actual scenes that Gordon has painted can choose easy or moderate trails to locate some the scenes he has chosen.

Chapter 5

Love of Nature

Hatfield Forest Art Trail

Gordon, to this day, still spends time sketching and painting in Hatfield Forest. And he is recognised as being the non-resident artist by staff there from the National Trust. He can be seen regularly pitching his easel and director's chair across from a tree or view; and has quite often had pictures purchased on the spot from admiring passers-by. This chapter provides a sample of Gordon's paintings from Hatfield Forest rather than too much narrative – as the paintings rather speak for themselves.



We have organised the art trails into short (also suitable for disabled), moderate and longer walks. As you enter Hatfield Forest (Takeley, Bishop's Stortford, Essex, CM22 6NE) there is a car park at the entrance that can get quite busy. However, this is a good place to start a short walk from to see some of the scenes that Gordon has painted.

The first site is an open area of land with clumps of twisted and torn trees and branches. Look out for the tree with a hole; an ideal picture frame! And can you see the animal faces in the tree on the right?





Take the board walk on the left at the end of the path. Continue on through the gate and you can search for the fallen trunk below. Further on there is an optional path to the right to the edge of the lake. When Gordon painted this scene the new boat house was not yet built.





Return to the board walk and continue on around the lake to the Shell House; so named as it is rendered with shells. If the Shell House is open you will find inside a folder with a collection of images of Gordon's drawings and paintings from the Forest. There is also a café just around the corner providing refreshments and seating. And adjacent to the National Trust shop are loos. From here you can return the same route back to the entrance car park. Or, (moderate walk) there is a small lake to the left side of the Shell House which Gordon has beautifully painted here. However, this is not suitable for disabled access nor wheelchairs as the path is too uneven.









At the large lake there are seats at the café or, if you are lucky, a space on the bench overlooking the lake as depicted in this atmospheric painting by Gordon.



Those wanting a longer walk can search for these scenes of the large lake. You will have to trek off around the lake from the visitor shop and café to find them. And you can circumnavigate the lake back to the car park at the entrance to the Forest. Alternatively, you can park in Elgins car park to be closer to these views. However, this location would not be suitable for disabled access nor wheelchairs due to the uneven ground.



For the more adventurous, these are scenes further into the Forest.





Near Elgins car park



Deeper into the forest



Chapter 6

Love of the Great Outdoors

This chapter provides examples of Gordon's work in the UK and overseas.

Hatfield Forest

Gordon loves to paint in situ; and as Hatfield Forest, Essex, is so close to where he lives it is ideal. For Gordon the forest brings amazing memories of happy family time – the children loved it; all 'lumps and bumps' they would say! For Gordon the forest evokes wildness, with amazing rotten trees in which faces and animal forms can be seen. To some visitors the fallen branches and debris just appear as rubbish but to Gordon they inspire and help with painting composition.

Wonderful wildlife is all around from sheep to bulls, old and new trees, water and reflections, darkness and light, the changing colours each season. As Gordon has been such a prolific painter in the forest there is a small collection of his images in a portfolio in the Shell House adjacent to the large lake. The History of Hatfield Forest now includes images painted by Gordon; and when a National Trust warden is retiring Gordon has been commissioned to provide a painting as a present.







Suffolk Coast

For Gordon the Suffolk Coast also evokes numerous pleasant memories. This is the first coast Gordon saw when on holiday camping with the children. Gordon would get up early to go and find subjects to paint. On one occasion he set up his easel for a perfect composition but did not realise that the ferry would bring crowds of onlookers into the frame. Each ferry load of passengers would bring a new audience such that the ferry man said he could have sold Gordon's painting several times over. The actor Christopher Timothy (of James Herriot fame) saw Gordon painting and commissioned him to paint another, ultimately becoming great friends, and Gordon's wife Jo becoming godmother to the Timothy children.

On another occasion Gordon stumbled upon a hut in the dunes that had been erected for a film set. Not long after Gordon had painted it, the hut was removed but remains a permanent and evocative image in his painting.







Seascapes

For seascapes Gordon would spend hours on the coast capturing the serene beauty of the waves and sky.



House Portraits

Occasionally Gordon has been asked to paint portraits of houses. Whilst these are not his ideal commissions, Gordon preferring the natural landscape to the man-made, they can be challenging. These paintings required good draughtsmanship skills; and although many artists work from photographs Gordon would spend days or weeks outside to ensure accuracy. Commissions have included the current homes of local rock stars (e.g. Rod Stewart) and business people. Below is one example, of Easton Lodge, near Dunmow, now a tea room and beautiful gardens.



This painting is from Audley End, a magnificent historic mansion and gardens at Saffron Walden, Essex, now in the care of English Heritage.



More Recently

Gordon is still experimenting and learning. On 'fireworks night' he decided to see if he could paint smoke from a bonfire; and this led to a new technique. By painting on 'board' a coat of four times acrylic primer, then using a roller, Gordon found that this caused little dots of paint to be applied which can then be uncovered with sandpaper to provide texture. This process allows the feeling of movement of smoke through the branches.

Bonfires have been a fascination as Gordon likes to make a mess look beautiful. For this composition Gordon sat in the author's summerhouse below right and drew the scene in rough; and then went back to his studio to paint a small study first followed by a much larger canvas, adding fireworks and the moon in the background.



Church

Gordon's church was hosting a vicar on mission; and as Gordon was church warden he was invited to stay at Gordon's house. The vicar challenged Gordon to express in a painting what Easter meant to him. The resulting picture was completed in three days. On the top left are the three crucifixion crosses struck by light on the event of their deaths; bringing light and colour into everybody's palm cross.

Displayed at the end of the vicar's mission, the vicar based his entire sermon on the painting and the meaning behind it; especially as Gordon felt he had been led by the Holy Spirit to compose and paint the picture in the form it appears - and it being so utterly different from all his other paintings.

The painting now hangs permanently in the church with a magnifying glass underneath to encourage closer views and to read about the painting from some small print.





North East Coast

Robin Hood Bay was an inspiration to Gordon when he holidayed there with Jo. You can see how this picture was composed in the next chapter where there is a preliminary sketch to be seen alongside.



Skies

As an art student Gordon decided to study skies. For example he would draw and paint the same sky in the morning and again in the afternoon. There was a fascination with the movement and shape of the clouds. Often Gordon still paints a sky from his studio window then adds scenery from another location later. According to Gordon the movement of the sky is reflected in the landscape. However, he is always more interested in the shapes and colour and how the light is affected rather than the precise detail. In this painting of the sky from his studio the foreground rooftops were added later for perspective only.





France and Mont Blanc

Gordon's son Matthew purchased a half-share in a chalet in France and the family have been venturing there ever since. One early visit by Gordon, possibly his first visit, the view from the balcony inspired Gordon's first paintings of mountains. Over the years there would be numerous scenes captured of St. Gervais and environs, Mont Blanc, the café and shops in the valley, and winter scenes from the window.





*View of Mont Blanc
from Le Prarion*



For Gordon these views reminded him of one of his last paintings of the area. On his last visit there Jo had been very ill and was resting in bed; so Gordon decided to paint just outside of her window so he could hear if she needed him. This would be his last painting in France as Jo passed away shortly after. There were poppies in the field at the time.







GTC

Essex Coast

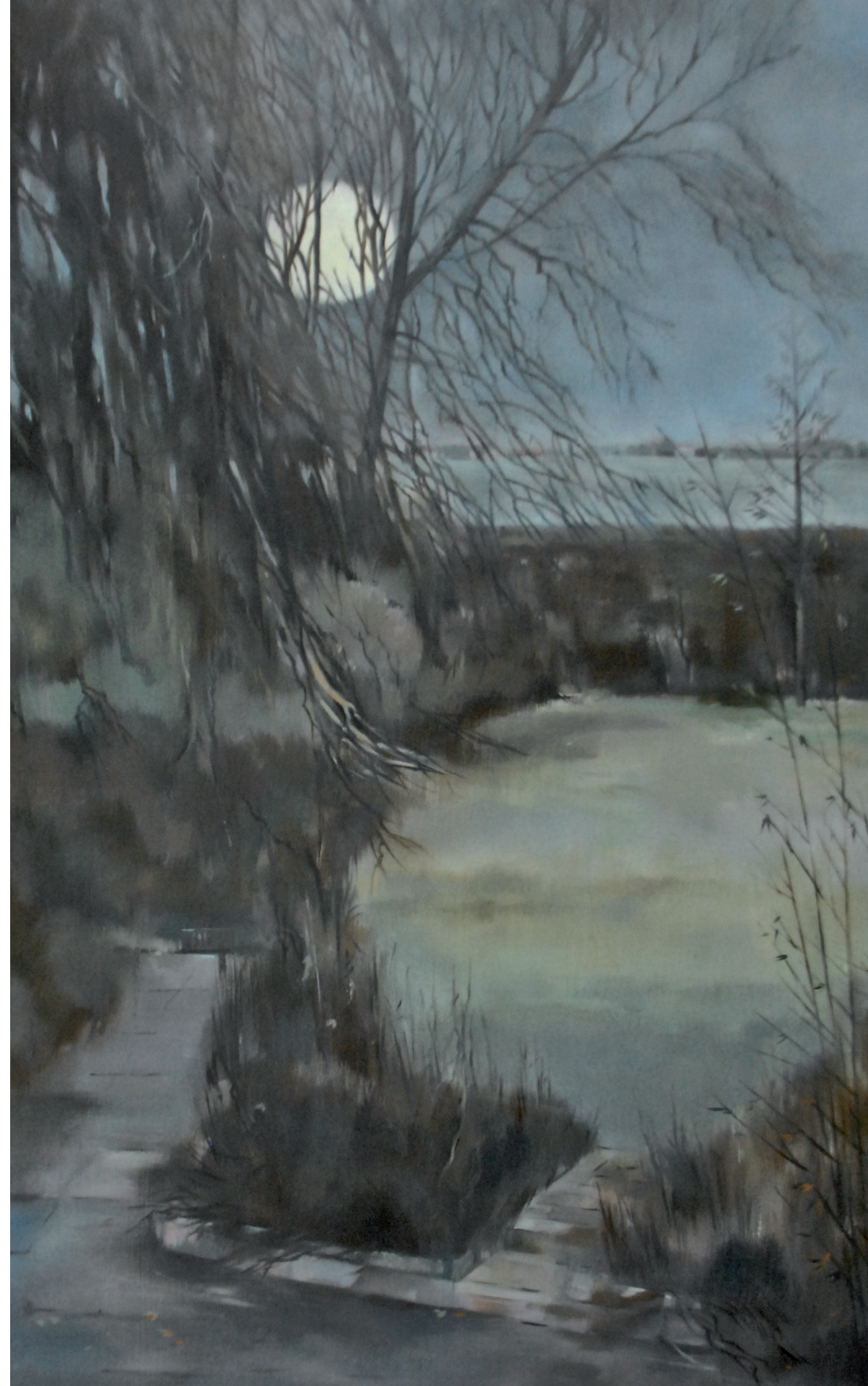
The pathway to the old sea wall at Walton on the Naze has been painted here with rags and fingers. It was a cold November and Gordon remembers the interesting wreck of a boat in the sand to the right.





Home

At home, this painting is from the studio window at 6pm. Other scenes captured from the studio window include the blue cedar tree planted when Tamsin was a baby; and the neighbour's seemingly eternal bonfire.





Local

The fields and hedgerows around Sheering provide year round subjects to Gordon. The painting on the bottom right was selected for the 'NOT The Turner' prize in 2003.



Sussex

The nature reserve at Warnham, near daughter Tamsin's house, inspired lovely paintings of the mere and the mist. The local council paid for an exhibition of Gordon's paintings as a result. The peaceful scenes with reflections in the water captivated Gordon.





Chapter 7

Art Lessons

Gordon loves to teach others how to draw and paint. Skies, trees, movement, dark and light days, tones, all inspire Gordon. He teaches budding artists to ask what they want to say with the painting, what do they want to communicate? This is difficult to achieve with landscapes, especially with skies that are constantly moving. Hence this chapter takes the reader through a series of lessons intended to inspire readers to take up a pencil or brush perhaps for the first time; and for others to improve their technique.

First Lesson

The first lesson is to learn to draw in situ. Above right is a scene from Hatfield Forest that can be easily found on the art trail depicted in the prior chapter. By using pencil one can ‘have a go’ at capturing some of the unique features of a scene. However, Gordon would consider this just a study and the oil painting on the right has a much improved composition to incorporate the distant sky and trees providing depth and perspective to the original pencil sketch.



Second Lesson

Skies are always moving and clouds shifting from their position. Thus, Gordon would often paint a wonderful sky and add the actual subject of the painting later. Thus the sky could be from another day or scene. This means that one can take a canvas into the field to paint without worrying about capturing an exact copy of the moving image before them. This does not mean that artists should not try to paint a complete scene including the sky in one go. However, if there is an extremely detailed scene to paint this technique does provide more time to work on the detail – and sketches can even be taken back to the studio if the weather or conditions change. And the best tip for achieving one of Gordon’s skies? Use rags and fingers to provide the swirls and blend paint together.



Third Lesson

Colour to Gordon is incredibly important. As with many artists, scenes are seen in terms of colours. And of particular significance for Gordon is that colours in the foreground are different to colours in the background. Amateur artists often use the same colours from their palette in both foreground and background. For Gordon this is a simple error to rectify through careful observation of a scene. Colours can then be more accurately matched and appear in a scene in order to highlight the perspective seen. Look at these paintings below. The greens and browns in the foreground are not the same greens and browns in the background. Overall, the colours need to be in harmony. Gordon never uses black paint; and often uses 'Paynes Grey' to mix colours and provide different tones e.g. darker. White can be used to lighten a colour but rarely on its own. Subtle changes of colour are used to take the viewer into the painting and around the scene in the order you want their eyes to go.



Fourth Lesson

This painting by Gordon of the Horseshoe Nebula in a distant galaxy proves that painting can be inspired from many and varied sources. Gordon's daughter, Anna, asked him to teach her how to use colour to capture this photographic image on canvas. And Gordon relished the challenge producing this magnificent and atmospheric picture that beautifully evokes the mystery and awe of God's creation. Painting is communication, expressing a feeling, a mood, a moment. Even though it is impossible to visit this galaxy the photograph served as an excellent tool to teach colour mixing.



Fifth Lesson

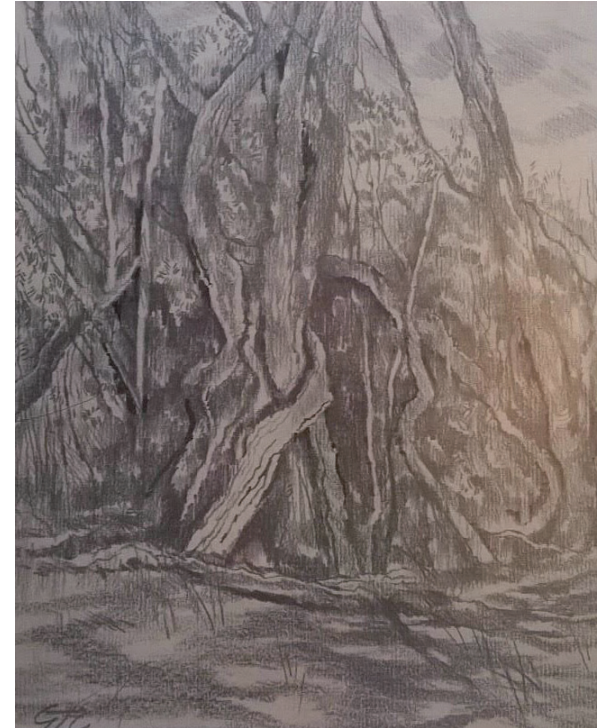
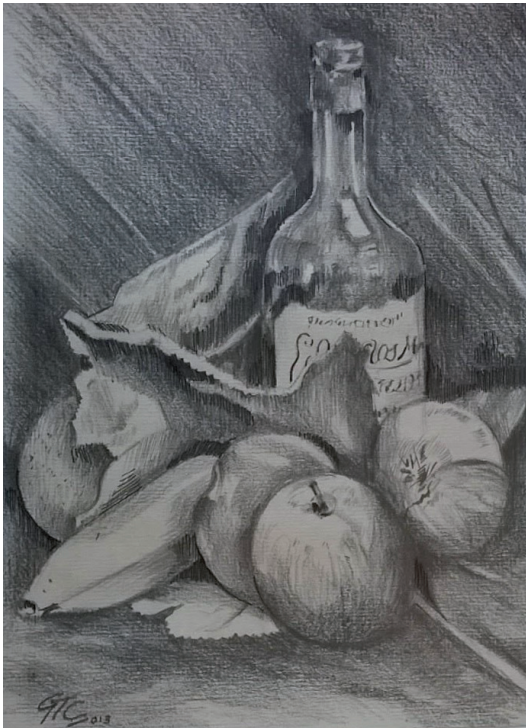
This scene from the author's summerhouse created a fascinating composition for Gordon. The challenge was how to paint the window frame which, according to Gordon, was at a funny angle. In fact, when the painting was initially finished Gordon's son and builder commented that he did not think the window would close. Fortunately, Gordon accepted the 'crit' and was able to re-work the painting to appease his son. The lesson here is that it is good to have constructive criticism and it is acceptable to alter a painting if the final result looks a bit odd. The technique that Gordon finds most useful for this is to 'fix' any initial drawing with a pastel fixative (a spray) which can then be painted over; and with turpentine can be revealed later if the painter needs a reminder of the original drawing or composition.

For Gordon a painting is all about shape and composition; this is all worked out so that the painting makes sense. Over time this becomes automatic. For those learning though, Gordon recommends taking the viewer on a journey into the painting using colour and shape. Thus, the viewer here is not presented with a window that is closed and square but open and wonky; the angles encourage the reader's eye to look out through the open window to the scene beyond. The inside of the summer house is painted dark here; though in reality it is white. The colours and shapes on the outside catch the eye and draw the viewer beyond.



Sixth Lesson

The sixth lesson is to learn to draw properly. Whether it is mocked up still life or a natural scene, time is needed to sketch with pencil and learn how to capture shapes, light and shade, with different pencil shadings. Here Gordon beautifully uses these graphical skills to show the transparency yet reflective nature of glass, the texture of fruit, the lightness of a wooded scene, and the detailed and twisted form of a tree. 'Learn to draw before you paint,' Gordon would say! The still life is composed to take the viewer from the tip of the banana towards the bottle, then away and back up to the bottle top. The same principles apply to the wooded scene and the twisted tree.



Similarly this pencil sketch from Robin Hood Bay is juxtaposed against its final painting to show that changes can be made later to compose the best overall picture. Here, an extra boat has been added in the final painting along with a number of other changes. Can you spot them all?



Seventh Lesson

Rest. Take time out to just appreciate, observe, listen, serve, consider, respond, find, imagine, re-think, live, love.

Chapter 8

Final Word

My life as an artist has been full of love. Of course, I love art but it is the love of family and friends that has allowed my love of art to come to the fore in my life.

God clearly called me to be an artist; and this has been my passion to this day. Despite being dyslexic I have had a wonderful career in advertising; and again in teaching. However, it is my love for art that has been a constant in my life.

Artists can be criticised for just expressing their own self-interest. Yet, many artists deliberately draw or paint or otherwise communicate in a way that is designed to provoke feelings and emotions. And this is important as art is not without purpose. I have simply sought to reveal the beauty of God's creation in my work. Yes, I see the world in terms of colour and light; but it is in the twisted form of a branch or the intricate pattern and colour of a leaf that my imagination runs riot and allows a composition to develop. The result is never a photographic copy of a scene but my own interpretation.

This book is true to life and nature and I commend it to you. I hope you are inspired to 'have a go' at drawing and or painting; and find your own way of expressing the beauty of the world around us.

Gordon Crossley, artist, August 2016



Appendix

Exhibitions

Gordon has exhibited at numerous galleries throughout his artistic career. This includes 16 times at the Royal Academy, and other London galleries, but also in Essex, Suffolk and Hertfordshire. There have been one man shows and group exhibitions; and Gordon's art is held in private collections in the UK and overseas. This appendix lists the main galleries with some images of his early work. And a few recollections from Gordon added.

R.B.A. Galleries, Pall Mall East, London, 1948, 1952

The United Society of Artists Annual Exhibition: Paintings exhibited - The Orchestra, The Public Bar, The Bombed Cookhouse.

Young Contemporaries Exhibition, 1951

The Bombed Cookhouse.



Royal Academy, 1952

1952 first painting hung at the RA, whilst working in ad agency, father called up and said 'You've been hung! Congratulations'. Art Director gave him afternoon off, excited, never forget it, special days, varnishing day for all the artists, etc.

16 hung in total (14 prior to 1970, then 1975 and 1977). The first time Gordon stood out as he did not have evening dress. He walked up the stairs, to the gate and a fanfare of trumpets, said his name, Mr Gordon Crossley, and shook hands with the President. Sir Alfred Munnings gave Gordon a disgusting look. The press interviewed Gordon, who revealed he was a student and could not afford evening dress! Next year, Gordon bought old fashioned evening dress with scarlet lining, causing another stir, and, interviewed again by the press, he revealed he had bought the evening dress from a second hand shop! Gordon has not yet achieved RA status! Paintings hung:

1. 1952 A Grey Afternoon
2. 1953 Flood Water
3. 1958 Hayes Common, Kent
4. 1958 Farm near Epsom
5. 1959 View on the Dorking Road
6. 1960 Ruan Laninorne, South Cornwall
7. 1960 View of the Rookery, Westcot.
8. 1961 Landscape with Figure.
9. 1961 Handwell Lock
10. 1961 Long Grass in Surrey
11. 1963 Landscape near Weatherham
12. 1963 Landscape, 1962.
13. 1965 Towards Downham.

14. 1969 The Lock.
15. 1975 Twyford Lock
16. 1977 Welsh Cottages

The rather elaborate frames below were handmade and the scenes inspired by the Constable style.



Madden, 1966

Gordon was passing the Madden gallery in Grosvenor Square and walked in asking 'Can I show you my work?' The quick retort from the lady was 'Ours aren't English, Oh no, Mr. Madden wouldn't be interested!' Gordon went back anyway and showed her his work. 'Oh, Mr. Madden would love that,' came the reply this time. In fact, she later phoned up Gordon at work to say 'Yes, Mr. Madden would like to see you this lunch time.' Mr. Madden met Gordon and confirmed 'Yes, I like your work'. A letter was sent to confirm the exclusive arrangement for three years with all paintings to be sold through the gallery, for 33.3 % of sales, and signed Francis G Madden, 12th April 1966. For example, the gallery sold Gordon's painting of Chartwell (Sir Winston Churchill's house) to an American buyer.

The Pastel Society, 63rd Exhibition, 1969

Painting exhibited - Thorley Wood.

Playhouse Gallery Harlow, Essex, 1974

Paintings exhibited - Cornish Bay; Suffolk Marshes; Newmans End.

Chenil Galleries, Chelsea, London, 1976

Second Chance exhibition for RA Rejects, 200 artists selected from 800 RA rejects. RA shortlisted 2000 but only had space for 1500. Artists agree to donate 15 per cent commission to the Fund for the Blind.

Painting exhibited - Green Corn in Sheering.

National Society of Painters, Sculptors and Printmakers, 1983

Paintings exhibited - From Mill Farm, Great Malvern; Worcestershire Beacon, Great Malvern.

National Society of Painters, Sculptors and Printmakers, 1985

Elected Associate of NS even without exhibiting there. Work seen at another gallery, greatly admired, then became full member.

Paintings exhibited - Away onto the Beach, Walberswick; Green Corn Sheering; Walberswick; Twyford Lock.

Phoenix Gallery, Lavenham, Suffolk, 1983, 1987, 1988

The Phoenix Gallery, Lavenham. But already exhibiting at Maltings so had to stick to those prices. Therefore, Phoenix prices upped. Did sell, but more important to exhibit than not. Probably reason for listing in 'WHO'S WHO in ART.'

Paintings exhibited - Harvest Time, Sheering no.2; Essendon Manor; The Rookery Westcott; Long Grasses in Surrey; The Farm; Ruan Lanihorne, Cornwall; Downham, from Pennants Wood, Sky Study in Norfolk; Norfolk Poppies; Summer in Hatfield Forest; The Small Lake Hatfield Forest; Seascape Walberswick.

Artisans Gallery, Finchingfield & Braintree, Essex, 1988

Painting exhibited - Way down to the beach at Walberswick.

Trading Places Gallery, Ware, Herts, 1988

Paintings exhibited - Beach Walk to Dunwich; The Walk around Naze Walton; Fishing Huts; Early Spring in Hatfield Forest; Gold Hanger; Walberswick Boat Huts up river; Walberswick July; Norfolk Poppies.

Thompson's Gallery, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, 1998, 2005

Very important gallery, bought one of Gordon's paintings as an investment. Most paintings £35k plus. Work not exhibited as not expensive enough so Gordon left gallery.

Paintings exhibited - Suffolk Sky Study; Near Woodbridge; Looking Toward Dunwich; Looking Up River Walberswick; Man and his Dog; Sampzon, Le Rocher (Ardeche); Apple Boxes, Albertville.

Snape Maltings, Saxmundham, 2005

Snape Maltings is a unique shopping experience in the Suffolk countryside. Shops, galleries and restaurants occupy the attractive old buildings beside the River Alde, and painting and craft courses are run during the summer. Gordon was Artist of the Month.

Paintings exhibited - Study for Beach Walk to Dunwich; The Forest Lake in July; Looking Towards Dunwich; Chateau de la Chasse; Evening Light; Essex Sky Study; Farm at Sheering 1; Farm at Sheering 2.

Warnham Local Nature Reserve, Horsham, Sussex, 2010

Paintings exhibited - Rape Field, Great Hallingbury; Man Walking his Dog; Morning Light at Walberswick, Suffolk; Minsmere Nature Reserve; Reflections, from my Studio Window; Near Barns Green, West Sussex; Wait for Me; Upturned Boats, Walberswick; Hut on the Beach, Walberswick; Study of Bridge, Sheering; Study in Hatfield Forest; Study in Kent Garden; Lake 'Delta Marsh' looking south, Hatfield Forest; Chalk Cliffs, near Saffron Waldon; Warnham Nature Reserve x 4; Snow view from my Studio Window; The Blyth from Blythburgh; Hatfield Forest Small Lake; Lake at Stansted Hall.

Chelmsford & Essex Museum, 2011

Two paintings for the Public Catalogue Foundation, in partnership with the BBC, of 200,000 oil paintings in public ownership on The Your Paintings website free to access and launched in 2011. The PCF completed the digitisation programme by the London Olympics. The website provides the watching world with an extraordinary insight into British art and culture. The website's scale and comprehensive nature was considered by the PCF to be without parallel in the world.

Mall Galleries, London (NOT the Turner Prize), 2003

Painting exhibited - Rape Field, Sheering.

Mall Galleries, London (NOT the Turner Prize), 2004

Gordon shortlisted two years running for the Daily Mail's prestigious NOTThe Turner Prize, this competition 'championed what the Daily Mail called "real art, as against the unmade beds and pickled animals of the Turner Prize."

10,000 entries, Gordon shortlisted and exhibited at the Mall Galleries in London for a couple of weeks in June.

Finalist painting – Breezy Beach Walk.

The Aubrey Art Gallery, Dunmow, 2011, 2012

Gordon has exhibited numerous times here with both one man and group shows.

After a welcoming coffee, Gordon gave an introductory talk, followed by a demonstration of a painting in oils starting from a blank canvas. Gordon used brushes, rags and even fingers to demonstrate his individual style. With a short break for a ploughman's lunch with wine and dessert, and a cup of tea, this was a popular day for £35!

High Trees Barn, High Roding, Dunmow, Essex, 2015

Paintings exhibited - View of Mont Blanc from Le Prarion; Warnham Nature Reserve; Lumps and Bumps at Hatfield Forest; The Tea House at Audley End; Sky and Coast Subject in Suffolk; Summer time in Sheering.

Gibberd Gardens, Harlow, Essex, 2016

Four paintings exhibited to inspire others to take up painting.

Further examples of Gordon's work online:

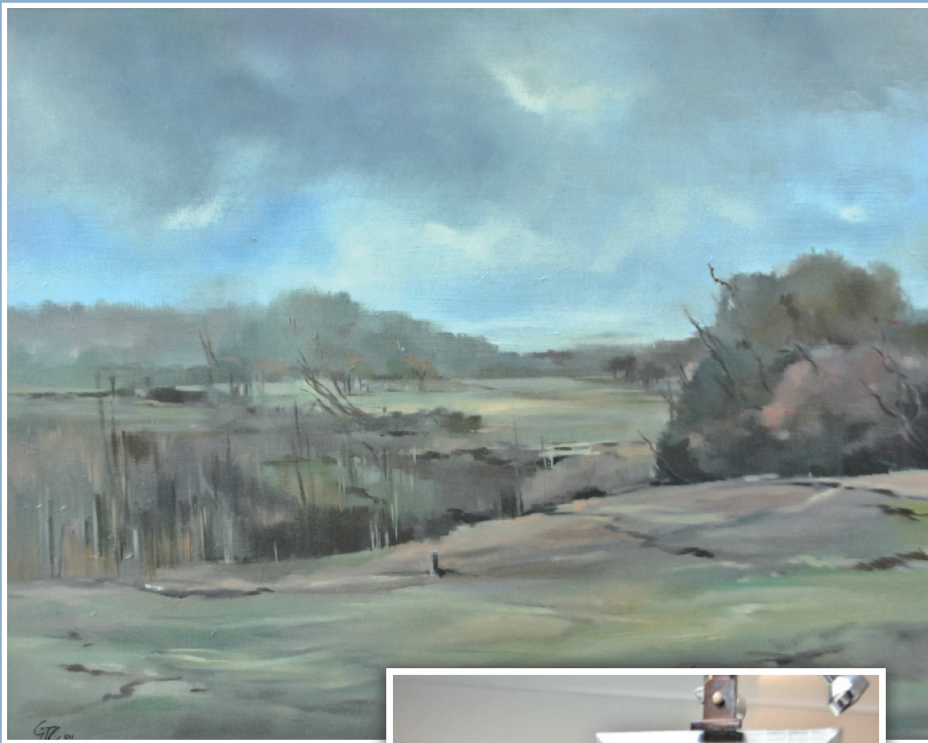
<https://www.facebook.com/gordoncrossleyart>

Further copies of this book or enquiries:

Dr Christopher Moon: 2015chrisjmoon@gmail.com



Handwell Lock, 1961



At the time of publishing this book Gordon Crossley is 86 years young and still painting the great outdoors; especially wonderful skies from his studio and incredible trees at his beloved Hatfield Forest.

Gordon studied at Wimbledon College of Art; exhibited 16 times at the Royal Academy; was employed as an artist in the RAF; worked as Group Art Director in the advertising industry and taught art and graphics at Barking College in Essex.

Two of his paintings are exhibited at the Chelmsford & Essex Museum; and this book contains over 60 examples of his works spanning some 60 plus years. Gordon has four children and eight grandchildren; but sadly his wife Jo and very recently his son Matthew both died prematurely; and this book is dedicated to their memory.

Gordon met the author of this biography at High Roding Tea Rooms and they have formed a dear friendship ever since. The book is written as a testimony to how one artist has spent his life revealing God's creation in his work; and his love for his family and friends, church and community.

All proceeds from the book will go to help a disadvantaged youngster, with promise, to attend art college; to 'learn how to draw properly' Gordon would say!

RRP £25.00



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