BROTHERS IN ARMS

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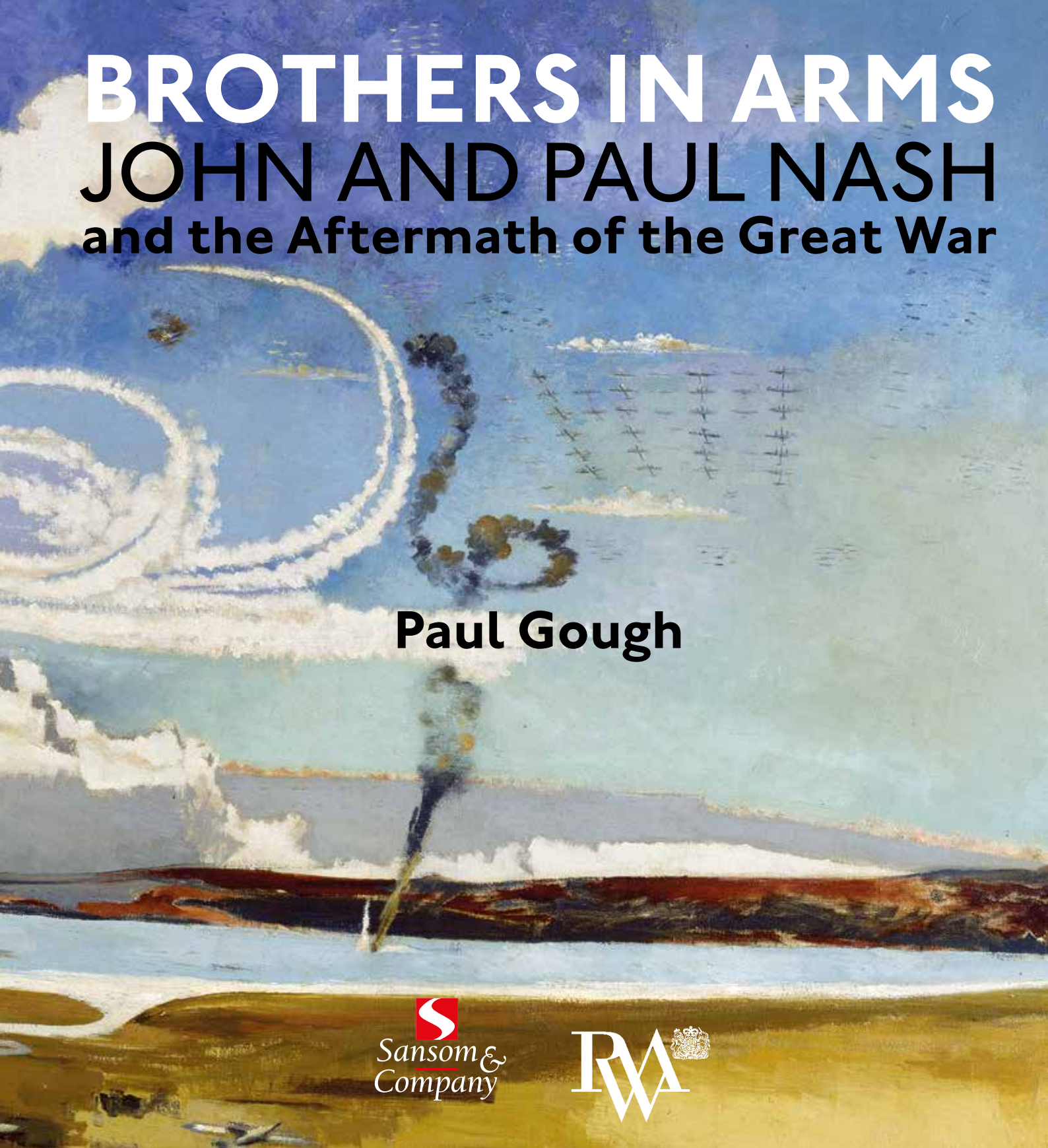
JOHN AND PAUL NASH

and the Aftermath of the Great War



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Sansom & Company

First published in 2014 by Sansom & Co Ltd.,
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ISBN 978-1-906593-52-2

Published in conjunction with the exhibition 'Brothers in Art:
John and Paul Nash', 19 July–14 September 2014, as part of
Back From the Front: Art Memory and the Aftermath of War;
a programme of exhibitions and events organised by the Royal West
of England Academy commemorating the start of the Great War.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Design and typesetting by E&P Design
Printed in the Czech Republic via Akcent Media

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FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION

'In the same way that if two artists marry', observes one of our most trenchant commentators on British art, 'the reputation of one is bound to suffer, so with brothers.'[1] Such was certainly the case with the painter-brothers Stanley and Gilbert Spencer, the latter largely marginalised, while his slightly older brother has been afforded international recognition, steadily gaining affection, accolade and acclaim, even though by Stanley's own admission Gilbert was a better landscape painter than he. Equally so, Paul Nash has almost totally eclipsed his younger brother John, who is rarely mentioned in even the most discursive histories of British painting. A cursory glance at the 'Further Reading' in any of the recent catalogues of their exhibitions underlines this disparity in their comparative reputations. No fewer than 37 books about Paul are listed in the bibliography for the show of his work at Tate Liverpool in 2003, *Paul Nash, Modern Artist: Ancient Landscapes*. By contrast, books about John Nash can be counted on a single hand: John Rothenstein's fine biography of 1983, and more recently Allen Freer's sensitive work on the painter and his immediate circle are the principle texts. Of course, there are other shorter works – catalogues and essays on his wood designs, private memoirs and compilations on British landscape painting – that offer penetrating, if rather modest, insights into his work.

Recently, there have been lone voices who argue, very convincingly, that it is time to look closer at the whole of John's contribution as an artist. Indeed there are those – like Andrew Lambirth – who suggest that it was John who may have solved the problem of 'being modern' yet remaining English, a problem that so preoccupied brother Paul. Given these claims, John's obscurity is puzzling. After all, there are 65 of John's paintings on the BBC *Your Paintings* website; his paintings of the southern English countryside adorn some of the best selling greetings cards in the Tate Gallery, and when the BBC launched its highly popular television series 'Picture of Britain' in 2005 the brand image they chose was none other than his idyllic oil painting from 1918, *The Cornfield*.[2] Why, asks Lambirth, given all this exposure is so little known or written about John Northcote Nash, to give this half-known, half-unknown painter his full name.

In part, this book attempts to answer this question, but primarily it examines the relationship between the brothers, especially during times of national

1. Andrew Lambirth, article for Public Catalogue Foundation (http://www.thepcf.org.uk/what_we_do/48/filter_reference/413/offset/5/reference/640/).
2. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/the-flooded-meadow-28923

JOHN AND PAUL NASH
1937 • by Lancelot de Giberne ('Lance') Sieveking

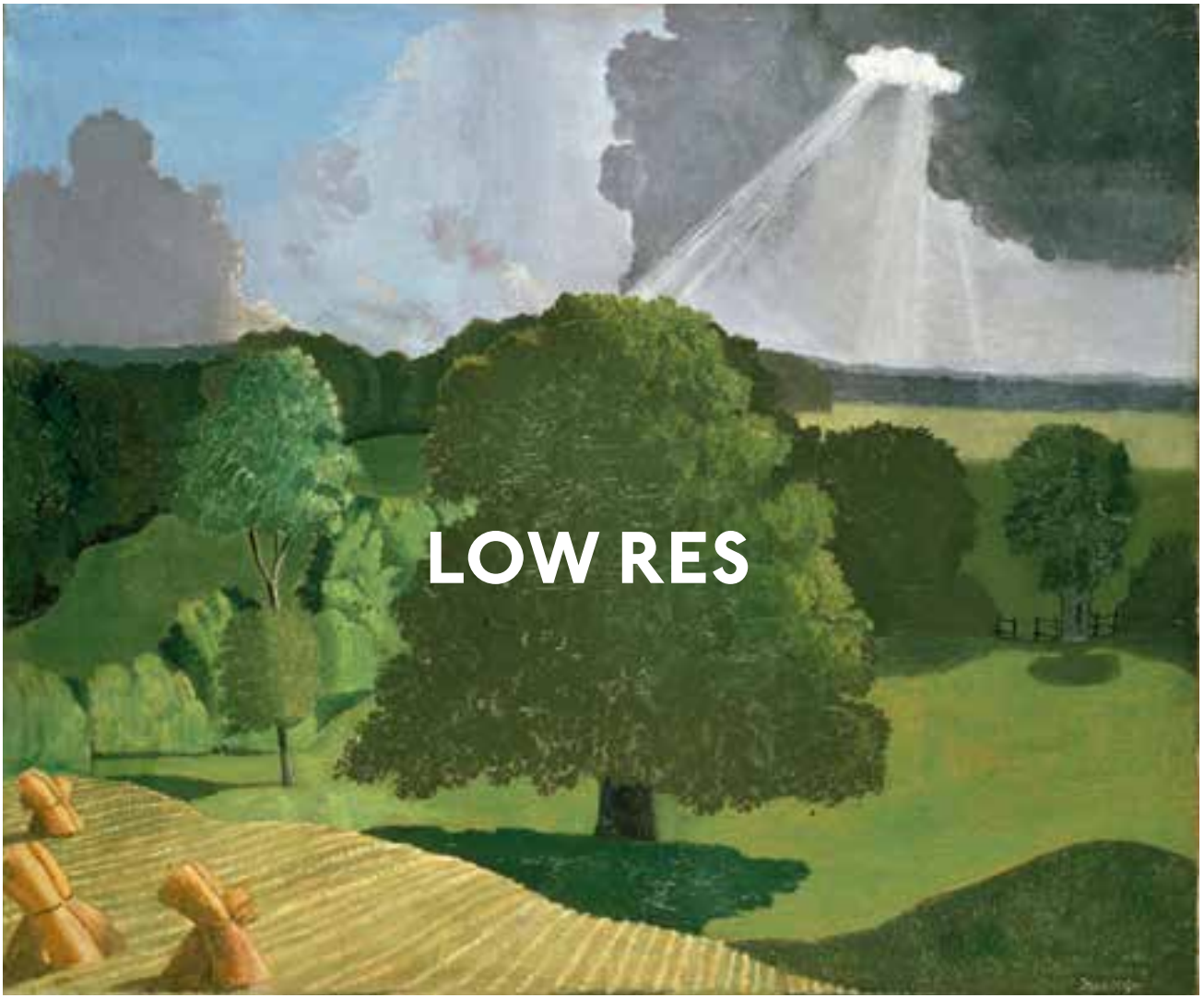
Given by Ronald George Blythe, 2004

crisis when they both turned their hand to being war artists. It was an unequal, even uneasy, relationship, John struggling to assert himself from the junior position, Paul more self-assured, more outgoing, even provocative and certainly more modern. But it was not always so. As the opening chapters suggest, when they exhibited together they were regarded as twin and equal talents, known familiarly and collectively as 'the Nash Brothers'. The First World War changed all that, as did Paul's restless searching for style and status in the Twenties which distanced him from the reticent and retiring John, happily ensconced in rural Buckinghamshire. While Paul courted the continental avant-garde and created headlines, John carried on painting quietly, selling his work to an appreciative audience, and pursuing parallel interests in botany, angling and music. Despite their occasional differences (for they were both at times headstrong, beleaguered and troubled individuals) their intertwined stories make for a fascinating narrative, imbued on occasion with competitiveness and collaboration, but more often with compassion and care for one another, and for the art that they each seemed so effortlessly to create.

In writing this book I have enjoyed access to a significant body of published work, as well as papers and correspondence in private and public collections. I am indebted to the insightful writing of Ronald Blythe, Allen Freer, Sir John Rothenstein, James Russell, and John Widdowson, as well as the few others who have written with tenderness about John. Of Paul Nash's impressive

bibliography I draw attention to the writings of Anthony Bertram, David Boyd Haycock, Andrew Causey, Roger Cardinal, Margot Eates, James King, and Jemima Montagu, as well as a myriad collection of essayists and commentators (including those anonymous authors on the Tate Gallery website) who are listed in the endnotes and who made drafting this book (and working with Gemma Brace in curating the exhibition) such a pleasurable task. I would encourage those who wish to know more about the Nash brothers and their art to seek, read and savour the books listed in my bibliography in their local bookshops and public libraries. As ever, the staff at the Imperial War Museum, and colleagues at national and regional British galleries and museums have been unstinting in their professional support for both the book and the exhibition, as has the University of the West of England, Bristol which has generously supported my research and practice over many years. Finally, I would like to thank John Sansom and Clara Hudson for their dedication to bringing this book to fruition, and to the Director, Alison Bevan, and staff at the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol for helping stage the major show of the brothers' work in 2014. In her essay (page 130), Gemma Brace offers an essential and insightful introduction to the exhibition; this book picks up the many strands of that story.

One such strand started in May 1918 when John Nash and Christine Kuhlenthal were married. Best man at their wedding was Gilbert Spencer, younger brother of Stanley and himself a veteran of the war. Twelve years later John was best man at Gilbert's marriage to Ursula Bradshaw. It was a standing joke between John and Gilbert that they should appear to live so fully in the shadow of their elder brothers. Outwardly, neither seemed overly concerned by their perpetual eclipse. This book looks more closely into those shadows.



JOHN NASH

A GLOUCESTERSHIRE LANDSCAPE
1914 • oil on canvas • 51.2 x 61.5 cm

WA1978.67 © The Estate of John Nash
image courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

1 ‘WE ARE QUITE THE RISING YOUNG MEN’

There were three Nash children: Paul, born 11 May 1889; John – known to his family as ‘Jack’ – on 11 April 1893, and their sister Barbara, born in 1895. They grew up in Earls Court, west London, in the oddly-named Ghuznee Lodge. It was, recalled the eldest child, ‘not an attractive house … but there was an odd character about it’, despite its ‘outlandish name and pretentious conservatory where nothing, *ever*, would grow’.[1] Their father William Harry Nash was a barrister who had been called to the Bar in 1873. He rose quickly to become Revising Barrister for the Tewkesbury Division of Gloucestershire and later Recorder of Abingdon; his wife Caroline Maude was the daughter of a Royal Navy Captain named Milbourne Jackson.

As boys, the brothers had sketched together for as long as each could remember. It was, said Paul, ‘a recognised part of our games, being, on the whole, a quiet recreation involving no overseers.’ They used pencils, waxy coloured chalks, and ‘bouts of smearing and daubing with cheap water-colours’[2] but their father would not allow them to paint on Sunday. They might draw, but painting was considered a breach of social etiquette: Sunday had to be regarded as *different* from other days, and for years after William Nash deplored either of his sons working on the day of rest.

Their father’s appointment as a barrister yielded one unusual advantage for the boys’ artistic activity. Their house filled with large volumes of the county polling registers, each page printed on one side only with endless lists of names and addresses of those eligible to vote. For young boys keen to draw they offered an unlimited supply of paper. Soon the blank pages were festooned in sketches.

Kensington Gardens was the children’s favourite playground. ‘Here,’ wrote Paul, ‘I became aware of trees, felt the grass for the first time, saw an expanse of water, listened to a new kind of silence.’[3] It was here that both boys later spoke of having experienced their first authentic sense of the natural world and a profound sense of *place*. Paul later wrote, with characteristic eloquence, of their initiation into the idea of *genius loci*, which would become essential to their mature practice as landscape painters:

1. Paul Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography*, p. 25.
2. *Ibid*., p. 31.
3. *Ibid*., p. 34.

> There are places, just as there are people and objects and works of art, whose relationship of parts creates a mystery, an enchantment, which cannot be analysed. This place of mine was not remarkable for any unusual features which stood out. Yet there was a peculiar spacing in the disposal of the trees, or it was their height in relation to these intervals, which suggested some inner design of very subtle purpose … Simply, it was not the same as the rest. In addition, it was strangely beautiful and excitingly unsafe![4]

In their rich imaginations, it was a place where Indians lurked, where an ogre might appear, and where imagined terrors took on a human shape. Outwardly a model elder brother, Paul was at times a 'tense and fearful child'[5] but he was capable of a keen sensitivity, and for years after he recalled how the 'garden-jungle' infiltrated his very nervous system, arousing a visceral sensation charged with a 'sweetness beyond physical experience, the promise of a joy utterly unreal.'[6] Night-time though was very different. As an adult Paul recalled rather traumatic childhood nights haunted by nightmares that he described in powerful pictorial terms. In one dream, he found himself trapped, 'hemmed in by vast perpendiculars of changing dimensions', the buildings, walls, pillars all shifting around him in a scarily animated slow-motion, 'encroaching, towering and massive' until the dreamer found himself enveloped and overwhelmed.[7]

In another, he was traumatised by the sudden ghostly appearance of a large black dog, 'silent and still', that would appear without warning in the dark corners near the nursery landing. Disturbingly, the dog would appear in other settings – at parties, family gatherings, social occasions – invisible to others, but dominating the boy's 'anguished vision'. On other occasions, the boy would be joined by his brother and sister playing together in one of the nursery rooms when abruptly 'the black dog would appear, though visible only to me.'[8] Such visions of latent foreboding would pervade Paul's painterly visions. John by comparison appears to have had untroubled sleep, although with characteristic reserve he was rarely inclined to comment upon any inner voices.

At the age of eight, while John was cared for at home by a governess, Paul went to Colet Court, the preparatory school for St Paul's. After the security of his comfortable middle-class upbringing, formal schooling heralded a decade of unhappiness: 'In all the years that followed, until I left school at seventeen, I was never free … I suffered greater misery, humiliation and fear than in all the rest of my life.' Although possessed of a good average intelligence, he was extremely deficient in mathematical calculation; his scores in arithmetic, algebra and geometry were very poor indeed. 'I have seen mathematical teachers reduced to a sort of awe by my imbecility.'[9] Paul's stumbling performance at school aggravated his sense of acute

4. *Outline*, p. 35.
5. James King, *Interior Landscapes: A Life of Paul Nash* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), p. 7.
6. *Outline*, p. 35.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

apprehension and exacerbated an underlying anxiety that would recur throughout his life. Faced with any specific challenge he suffered advance agonies of suspense and fearfulness, though nearly always acquitted himself in the fullness of time.

Three years later, in 1900, when Paul was eleven years old and John seven, their grandfather died leaving the family a small inheritance. It came at a crucial moment for the family. For some time their mother had been showing signs of mental illness, 'something was haunting our home,' recalled Paul, their mother would not eat, she began to look thin and constrained, sitting for hours without moving, staring vacantly into space. There were occasional flashes of temper culminating in one occasion when she attacked John with a kitchen knife.[10] Then suddenly there was a new plan: the family was to move, to a house specially built for them in the country. For the children it was a cause of great excitement. They decided eventually on Iver Heath, not far from Langley, yet only fifteen miles from London and in easy reach of their father's travel to and fro the Temple every day. 'Although we found ourselves suddenly among the novel delights and excitements of the country', remembered John, 'we were not strangers to rural pursuits, as for many years we had accompanied my father when he went partridge-shooting at my uncle's farm near Wallingford'. Such occasions 'remained long in my memory'.[11]

Always better at describing places than people or faces, Paul's first sight of the acre and a half of land purchased for their new six-bedroom home is memorable for its detailed account of the surrounding habitat. As he and his father tried to imagine their new home he noted:

> A line of pollarded elms ran at right-angles to the road forming our eastern boundary; beyond that there was a stretch of arable land belonging to the distant farmhouse. The road-hedge was thickly grown with holly, elm, hawthorn and briar. The dog-roses were just opening. In the ditch the red berries of the arums had thrust through their sheaths. There were birds everywhere. It was just the real country, only fifteen miles from London.[12]

His formal education was, though, still a challenge. He had only just stepped up to the 'big' school at St Paul's when without warning he was shipped off to a Naval crammer, the famous 'Planes' at Greenwich – 'a place where they stuffed you with knowledge against time', where if you didn't absorb the lessons fast enough or full enough it was, quite literally, beaten into your head. In graphic detail he wrote of the different styles of being hit by the teachers: the Latin and History masters preferring a 'cool judicious' slanting slap across the side of the cheek; the Commander opting more brutally with a clenched fist, applied recklessly 'in a blind, growling rage.'[13]

10. Ruth Clark in conversation with King, 1 June 1981, in King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 9.
11. John Nash, *The Artist's Plantsman*, 1976.
12. *Outline*, p. 58.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Rather surprisingly, Paul's saving grace was his brilliance on the soccer pitch. It saved him from the very worst of the incessant bullying but little else. The regime was heartless, spiteful and designed only to produce the perfect midshipman, who in time would grow into a perfect Naval lieutenant. It failed Paul utterly and totally. The annual entry examinations, held in a lecture theatre in (of all places) the Royal Academy of Arts in London were equally catastrophic. His education lay in tatters and he was returned ignominiously to St Paul's where he was passed around from House to House, an unwanted embarrassment.

By comparison, John's schooling was relatively painless. After home tuition by a succession of governesses, one of whom he remembered stimulating his knowledge and interest in plants and country matters, he attended Langley Place School from the age of twelve to sixteen and then, with the financial aid of a benevolent uncle, had gone on to Wellington College for a further two years. Although a military school in custom and appearance, it was at Wellington that John firmly laid down his mark as a future 'plantsman'. Many years later he related how he had entered a college botany competition, largely as a way of avoiding having to play cricket. With typical humility he neglected to add that he had indeed won that same prize. Thereafter he had spent two agreeable summer terms given 'freedom to ramble and collect specimens'.

Despite these occasional highlights home life had become increasingly strained. The move to 'leafy Bucks' served not only as a retreat from the city, but as a refuge for Caroline Nash whose nervous condition had worsened; it beset her with moodiness, depressions and bouts of incapacity that rendered her an invalid in a very short time. She spent extended periods in rest homes and mental institutions at growing expense to the family. Although relatives rallied to their support the burden proved too great, the children were thrown back to cope for themselves, the father became increasingly dependent on Paul; while John and his sister, being only two years apart, formed 'a conspiratorial relationship' against their older brother, whom they caustically referred to as the 'old man'.[14]

Inevitably, their new home had to be let out to tenants to pay for the mother's crushingly expensive treatment. The family were split up: father and elder son in lodgings; the younger children in boarding school. In 1910, on Valentine's Day, eight years after moving to Buckinghamshire, and aged only forty-nine Caroline Nash – their 'dark dark beautiful but delicate mother' – died. Her death cast a long shadow over the family just as her erratic and impenetrable illnesses had at times benighted the children's upbringing. Throughout these difficult last years Paul had helped support his father, shielding his brother and sister from the worst, and the family remained

14. Cited in King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 10.

close ever after, although Paul gained little succour from his emotionally distant and inhibited father. Denied many of the joys of family, Paul, in particular, invested his emotions in places. As many biographers have observed of the brothers, their craving for a mother's affection – which she had been so unable to fulfill – generated a sense of alienation and resentment which played its course throughout their lives. 'Distrust of women was an inheritance' for both brothers, for Paul in particular who often associated the feminine with the sinister; 'his fascination with death also stems from a conviction that it would help him to recover the maternal tenderness of which he had been deprived.'[15]

Despite their enthusiasm for sketching, there was little exceptional in either boy's education or their early upbringing that predicted their future career and achievements as artists. There was no artistic tradition in the family, and they showed little prowess, no early inkling as creative prodigies; indeed Paul had been awe-struck when he chanced upon the brilliantly talented Eric Kennington, a fellow pupil at St Paul's, who was effortlessly 'knocking off likenesses of the plaster casts' in one of the school's corridors. At Wellington John had been encouraged in his appreciation of the arts by a master of the college, a Mr Tallboys, and Edward Lear has been a friend of the family. Both boys remembered visits to the house of their aunt, the Honorable Augusta Bethell – 'Aunt Gussie' – who owned a large portfolio of works by the Victorian illustrator and poet. Both recalled being spellbound by Lear's comic drawings and the coloured sketches that illustrated his Nonsense Verses.[16]

From these shallow foundations, seventeen-year old Paul – still at a loss with what to do with his life – showed some enthusiasm for an artistic career and in December 1906 began classes at Chelsea Polytechnic, followed a year later by evening courses at the grandly-titled 'London County Council's School of Photo-engraving and Lithography' in Bolt Court, a lane off Fleet Street, in the heart of the newspaper industry. It was ideal: '… given over to easels, 'donkeys', naked models and eager students … The whole purpose of the school,' recalled Paul, 'was avowedly practical. You were there to equip yourself for making a living. It suited me.' He was though a late starter, and he knew it: 'Had I been able to begin studying at a proper age I might have made another thing of life, but to begin at eighteen with no apparent *natural* talent beyond an ability to compose out of my imagination was not encouraging, especially as I realised that, somehow, within the next few years a living must be quarried from this dubious field.' And he concluded light-heartedly that 'Such prospects might well have depressed me, had I not been of a rather careless and sanguine temperament'.[17]

However, Paul took solace in knowing that despite the strictures of the Bolt Lane course of commercial illustration he felt very much his 'own master,

15. The family home was reclaimed soon after. Rupert Lee has left a wonderful account of the 1911 Christmas spent with the Nash family at Iver Heath, dazzling both brothers with his piano and cello recitals of Bach and Beethoven, awakening the whole family to music and triggering a life-long passion in John. '[Rupert] was practically allowed off the music stool only for meals.' Paul Nash quoted in Denys J Wilcox, *Rupert Lee: Painter, Sculptor and Printmaker* (Bristol: Sansom and Company, 2010) p. 19. See also James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 15; and in an essay on the brothers by James Russell (http://jamesrussellontheweb.blogspot.com.au/p/dear-old-thomas-and-lucky-paul-james.html).
16. Causey writes insightfully about Lear's unrequited love for the Honorable Augusta Bethell, in Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
17. *Outline*, p. 74.

free to make my own way as I chose …'. His choice was indeed life-changing: almost overnight he embraced the Pre-Raphaelites and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, becoming enflamed by a burning desire for their work, impassioned by its other-worldliness. 'Henceforth, my world became inhabited by images of a face encircled with blue-black hair, with eyes wide-set and luminous, and a mouth, like an immature flower, about to unfold.'[18] This infatuation led to William Blake, to his rich nether-world of fantasy, fairies and enigmatic female faces, 'a love of the monstrous and magical [that] led me beyond the confines of natural appearances into unreal worlds or states of the known world that were unknown.'[19] It was hardly the standard fare for a nascent commercial illustrator, but in the highly imaginative poetic mind of the eighteen-year-old Paul it brought a radical transformation:

> I believed that by a process of what I can only describe as inward dilation of the eyes I could increase my actual vision. I seemed to develop a power of interpenetration which disclosed strange phenomena. I persuaded myself I was seeing visions. These generally took the form of faces and figures in the night sky. The first occurred to me in the western sky one night as I turned into Wood Lane from the junction of the five cross roads on the heath. When I reached home I drew an immense figure of a woman whose head and body were partly articulated by the stars, but whose feet were composed of the reflection of stars in a pool, so that the effect was of a being established in three elements, water, earth and air. After that I began to imagine or to see all my drawings.[20]

Such an intense and powerful personal vision was perhaps destined to attract attention. At the monthly Bolt Court sketch-club, Paul's work was singled out for praise by the venerable Selwyn Image, soon to be Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University, and awarded top marks by William Rothenstein, the highly influential painter and teacher. Of perhaps greater long-term significance he started a correspondence with the poet and playwright Gordon Bottomley who offered a stream of wise advice on the young Paul's progress:

> I do think you have true imagination in a degree which you can develop to a very fine insight and vision if you will. Art needs steadfastness and endurance just as much as tropical exploration or football do. Many weaklings can be brilliant at a spurt; but it needs much concentration of nature to do even as much steady glowing as a glow-worm does. And I don't think you are a weakling, or your drawings would not contain so many rugged and (if you will forgive me for saying so) sincerely uncouth places. Perhaps you have more natural ability than you think; but if you have not it does not greatly matter. If you *live* your idea ardently enough it will help you to its own proper utterance …[21]

Paul delighted in such mentoring and gained greatly from Bottomley's generous and trenchant observations, though for three years they never met

18. *Outline*, p. 78.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.
21. C.C. Abbot, and Anthony Bertram (eds.), *Poet and Painter: Being the Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910–1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 42. Republished with a new introduction by Andrew Causey (Bristol: Redcliffe Books, 1990), p. xi.

face-to-face, knowing each other only through their dense letters. However, despite warming to Paul's 'already powerful imagination' and his 'interesting originality of technique'[22] Bottomley recognized that his draughtsmanship needed to be sharpened and new technical skills acquired. He offered Paul shrewd advice about where to study:

> The ordinary art school … is of little use to you; that kind of school teaches people to draw with a smooth steady sweet nerveless line which enables them to avoid making a positive and personal statement about anything …[23]

William Rothenstein held a similar view and Paul was swayed by his admonition that 'You should go to the Slade, and learn to draw'. He saved diligently for a year, paid his fees and enrolled at the art school in the autumn of 1910. This, of course, was no 'ordinary art school'. It was, as Paul recognized, in one of its 'periodical triumphal flows'.[24] He joined a remarkable cohort of students which included 'Richard' Nevinson, Stanley Spencer, Mark Gertler, William Roberts, Ben Nicholson, and Edward Wadsworth, painters who would dominate the British art scene for decades. Like each of these he had to withstand the withering tuition of the venerable Henry Tonks, the dominating personality of the school, who had a particular distaste of 'self-satisfied young men'. Few students forgot their first encounter with him:

> His surgical eye raked my immature designs. With hooded stare and sardonic mouth, he hung in the air above me, like a tall question mark, backwards and bent over from the neck, a question mark, moreover, of a derisive, rather than an inquisitive order. In cold discouraging tones he welcomed me to the Slade. It was evident he considered that neither the Slade, nor I, was likely to derive much benefit.[25]

It was a canny prediction. Yet, as a student Paul cut a dashing, if a rather imperious figure, his imposing physical presence augmented by an exacting attention to his bearing and a fastidious dress sense. Memorably, he appeared at his first exhibition opening in 'silk hat, snuff-coloured trousers, a black jacket and white spats' sporting a silver-headed Malacca cane. He made such a memorable appearance in the Slade studios one day that Nevinson – as barbed and charged with sarcasm as always – asked him loudly if he were 'an engineer', a jibe that caused Paul some discomfort. 'It got a laugh', he reflected, 'and I felt a pariah.'[26] His sharp appearance, like his fine sense of poise, may have been an act but he performed it with great aplomb. Friends recalled his impeccable manners, his formality and a studied carefulness. In every gesture, whether it be knotting a coloured scarf, spreading a sheet of drawing paper, drinking a glass of wine, or expressing an opinion, Paul was precise and measured, 'very correct and formal' recalled Nevinson, and attractive to many women. Everyone who met him became immediately aware of the penetrating power of his blue eyes which conveyed a sense of

22. *Poet and Painter*, p.xi.
23. Gordon Bottomley to Paul Nash, cited in *Outline*, p. 85, and in *Poet and Painter*, p. xi.
24. Paul's account of his time at the Slade School of Art is recounted at length in *Outline*, pp. 88–94. See also David Boyd Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War,* 2009.
25. *Outline*, p. 89.
26. *Ibid*., p. 90. These observations are taken from Nash's obituary by Archibald Russell in *The Times,* 23 July 1946.

conviction, unerring clarity of vision and integrity of purpose. One of his many lovers wrote years later of this 'raven-haired man with an aquiline nose, distinctive allure, and a triangular look about him.'[27]

In the end, Paul gained little from the autocratic tuition at the Slade. He felt unable to enter the spirit of earnest concentration required in the life room or in the studios crammed with plaster casts. 'Painfully I drew on. But the human figure as represented by the models at the Slade did not interest me, I could make nothing of it.' To make it worse, Tonks had also lost interest and 'deplored my lack of science gloomily, but without sarcasm.'

Not all of it was so grim. Paul's artistic circle grew, he made lasting friendships – with Ben Nicholson and others – and he was exposed to diverse styles and practices, even if the Slade professors warned them against 'the virus of the new art' then circulating around London. He recalled the day when Tonks made a speech beseeching them not to risk contamination by visiting the Grafton Galleries where Fry was staging his exhibitions of Post-impressionist art from the Continent. Paul felt singularly untouched by both the entreaties and the art, 'I remained at the point I had reached and continued to make my monochrome drawings of 'visions', some of which were supplemented by 'poems'.[28] In fact he probably learnt more from private lessons with Sir William Blake Richmond, a bearded old patriarch who was the godson of William Blake, than he did from the Slade staff. Sir William advised him to abandon his imaginative visions and work more closely from nature. Back in Iver Heath Paul heeded his advice, making drawings of the Bird Garden from the morning-room where he and his father often sat. It became another of Paul's inspirational 'places':

> Like the territory at Kensington Gardens which I found as a child, its magic lay within itself, implicated in its own design and its relationship to its surroundings. In addition, it seemed to respond in a dramatic way to the influence of light. There were moments when, through this agency, the place took on a startling beauty, a beauty to my eyes wholly unreal. It was this 'unreality', or rather this reality of another aspect of the accepted world, this mystery of clarity which was at once so elusive and so positive, that I now began to pursue and which from that moment drew me into itself and absorbed my life.[29]

As Paul's artistic career began to take root, John was fast approaching the last months of his formal schooling. His elders brother's profound identification with Rossetti and his circle had rubbed off on the fourteen-year old younger brother, who described his last year at Wellington as being 'saturated' in the work of the pre-Raphaelites. The two brothers were often seen together; John used to visit the Slade and Paul depicted them together in an ink drawing, 'wearing identical black suits, broad-brimmed black hats and carrying silver-

27. Eileen Agar, *A Look at my Life* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 109.
28. *Outline*, p.93. Not all Paul's friends were convinced by the direction of his art. Rupert Lee, one of his closest allies at the Slade, recalled visiting Paul's studio in Paulton Square and feeling a 'little worried by what I felt to be an over sentimental quality', adding 'I wish I could say I saw in Paul a great artistic personality but I was not wise before the event.' Lee's handwritten notes, quoted in Denys J Wilcox, *Rupert Lee: Painter, Sculptor and Printmaker* (Bristol: Sansom and Company, 2010), p. 18.
29. *Poet and Painter*, pp. 106–107. 'It was undoubtedly the first place which expressed for me,' he wrote many years later, 'something more than its natural features seemed to contain, something which the ancients spoke of as *genius loci* – the spirit of a place.' James Russell has left an insightful tale of his quest to visit Paul's garden on his blog: http://jamesrussellontheweb.blogspot.com.au/p/dear-old-thomas-and-lucky-paul-james.html

handled canes'.[30] But of a career for John beyond Wellington there was no clear plan. 'My brother and sister' opined Paul,

> … were now beginning to emerge from the chrysalis stage of school careers into an equality of companionship with the elder members of the family. We seemed to take each other for granted in a slightly different way. Barbara was still very young and undeveloped, but Jack was within a year of leaving Wellington and seemed suddenly to have matured. No one knew what he would do.[31]

The 'wildest schemes' were considered, amongst them 'the Church, a diplomatic career, journalism', but it was considered most likely that he would go to Oxford to study, as he had 'the mentality of a scholar, but as yet it was no more than an attitude.' In fact it remained little more than that, albeit an attitude augmented by a 'scholarly slightly elaborate manner of talking'. It made little difference during the entrance exam and John failed to secure a place at Oxford or any other university. The family's impoverishment prevented his father financing his entry into the legal profession, so John took the necessary practical steps to becoming a writer.

In 1912, aged nineteen, he worked for a few months as cub reporter for the *Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Advertiser*. There was though not much time for writing or reporting, as he spent much of his time on his bicycle riding 'all over the county at all hours of the day and night' in search of copy. In what spare time he had he started to make small drawings – comics and cartoons to augment his stories, and the occasional landscape sketched while out on his cycle trips. The editor of the newspaper reproduced one of them, the first in a long line of illustrations that John would publish over the next six decades. Perhaps his nascent career would have stalled then had it not been for three influential figures who gave him encouragement, self-belief and timely advice. One of these was, of course, Paul – advisor and supportive older brother; the other was Gordon Bottomley who recognized in both Paul and John a unique pair of talents that might benefit from his mentoring. The third influential figure was a friend of Paul's from the Slade, Claughton Pellew-Harvey.

Bottomley's importance to both Paul and John's early development as artists must not be under-estimated. Paul would regularly send him packages of small drawings and paintings for an opinion; in return Bottomley was always fulsome – and usually insightful – in his critique. In late spring 1912 Paul ventured to send him some of John's drawings, not least to test his own feelings that he had unearthed a quite distinctive talent, even if he prefaced the request with comic irony:

> … I venture to try and amuse you by sending some of the drawings of John N. Nash brother of Paul. These start for the North tomorrow (if Jack will let them)

30. Sir John Rothenstein, *John Nash* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1983), p. 21.
31. *Outline*, pp. 117–18.
32. *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 37, end of May 1912, pp. 36–37.

> with the hope you will see the fun of them. To me they're great & like no-one else's.[32]

Bottomley's response was characteristically generous, but also rather perceptive:

> We enjoyed your brother's drawings greatly (being particularly impressed by his profound belief that the human countenance fundamentally resembles a bird's), and we were constantly finding touches and passages to admire. We think he shows real promise – considerable promise. I don't know how the instinct of draughtsmanship entered your family, but it is there and it would be useless to try to chill it. He has not only a good sense of decorative disposition of his masses, but his blacks have a beautiful quality, and his pen-touch is crisp and clear and delicate and exquisitely balanced.[33]

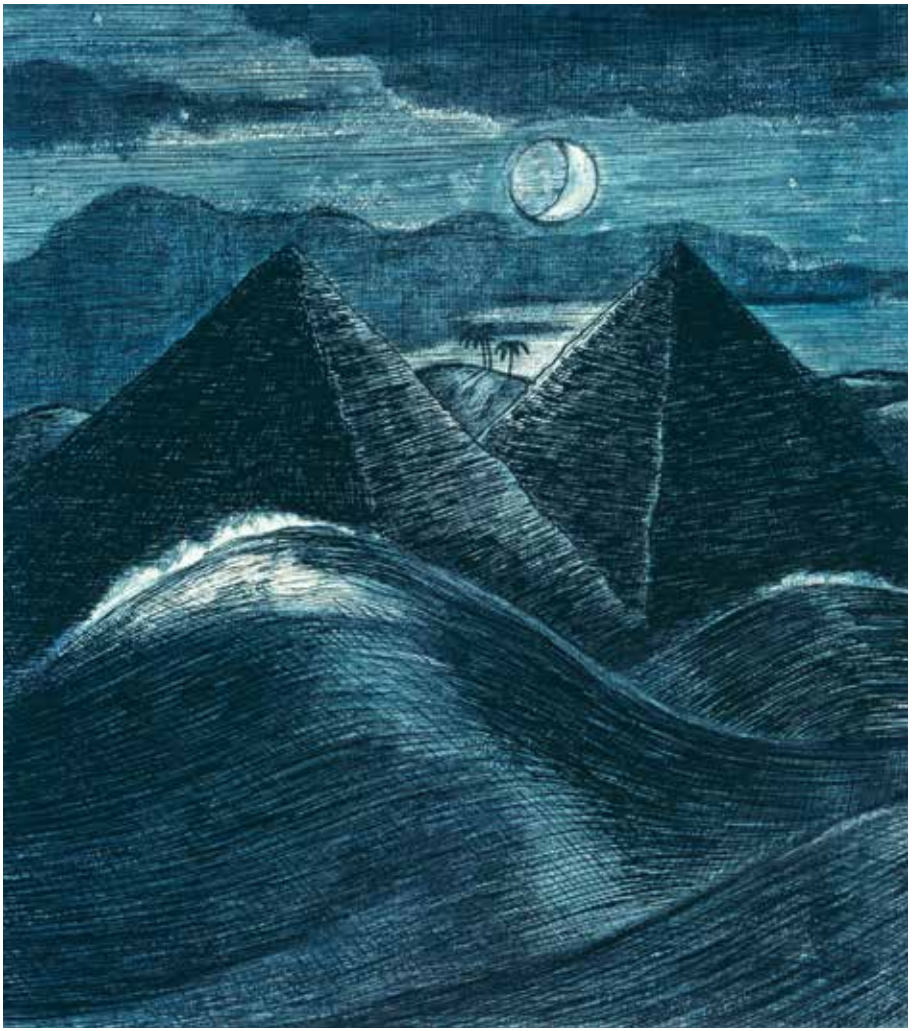
'In facility and lucidity and directness of expression,' Bottomley added, 'and in his faculty of keeping his material untroubled' he felt John's work had advantages over Paul's, 'but of course it remains to be seen if he can pursue these qualities when he has as much to say as you have.'[34]

According to Paul, John was both touched and nonplussed by such praise, expressing 'a mild surprise at any appreciation upon his drawings', but he maintained the steady stream of sketches on odd bits of paper which Paul rescued from the desk, the corners of his room, or even the wastepaper basket, selecting the best, cutting them into 'a decent shape', and mounting them:

> At first Jack used to be so delighted at the good appearance of his drawings when mounted that he fully believed it was entirely owing to the way I set them up & drew lines round them; gradually it has dawned upon him tho' that it must be that he has done a good drawing – this is a pity because he now becomes a little too conscious & careful, with the result his designs are not so naïve & simple.[35]

Like Bottomley, Paul often tried to identify the qualities that defined John's emerging style. It was a curious mixture: an innocent eye, a naïve manner of drawing in line, a special untutored quality, which both men sensed would have been eradicated by the deadening hand of the plaster room or the life class. Even a century later, it is the most awkward task to describe these early drawings; they are simultaneously naïve and sophisticated; technically astute and unashamedly direct; they capture the idiosyncrasies of a definite space as well as an all-pervading sense of a particular place. In his very first watercolours such as *Trees by the Sea, Norfolk*, made in 1913, the angularity of the tree limbs is both acutely observed and yet broad in its treatment, the corrugated lines of the ploughed field exacting in their rigid geometry while still being highly sensitized to the peculiarities of the Norfolk soil.[36] Perhaps only

32. *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 37, end of May 1912, pp. 36–37.
33. *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 39, 7 July 1912, p. 37.
34. Bottomley finished by asking Paul to thank John for sharing the drawings, and told Paul to 'urge him to go on'. In *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 39, 7 July 1912, p. 38.
35. *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 40, *c.* 12 July 1912, p. 39.
36. *Trees by the Sea, Norfolk*, watercolour and ink, *c.* 1913, Anthony D'Offay Gallery.



PAUL NASH

THE PYRAMIDS IN THE SEA

1912 • ink and watercolour on paper • 33.6 x 29.8 cm

JOHN NASH

HAYMAKING

1913 • tempera on paper • 48 x 39.3 cm

The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

an artist truly grounded in the habits of the natural world could so effectively balance these opposites. Marveling at John's rapid development as an artist in the years between 1912 and 1915, Allen Freer eloquently describes his creative gift as being 'rather like a state of grace which certain people are endowed with. It could not be had by wishing or working for it and, like innocence, could easily be corrupted or even destroyed.'[37]

The third influential figure in John's emergence as an artist was one of Paul's contemporaries at the Slade, Claughton Pellew-Harvey, a painter now forgotten. A 'slight dark man', said Paul, 'with a strange voice which was oddly attractive and his profound magnetic eyes, capable of laughing'. He was a truly memorable individual 'difficult to define but hard to forget.'[38] Claughton befriended both brothers, going on a walking holiday in Norfolk with Paul and then another with John. From the first jaunt came one of Paul's most striking early drawings *Cliff to the North*, and from the second came John's firm resolution to become an artist. Despite high ambitions for both sons, his father seemed prepared, perhaps even a little resigned at his younger son's declaration: 'Then you had better do it here,' he is said to have responded, clearing a wide space on the dining room table at Iver Heath. 'In the beginning of my so-called career', recalled John fifty years later,

> I derived so much help and inspiration from [Claughton] that I can never forget it and I am always grateful. He must have greatly influenced my brother when they first met at the Slade. Alas he seemed fated to work for and help others and denied himself the full exercise of his own talents. Poor dear man he was the most unselfish of beings.[39]

Absorbing the very essence of nature into himself, Pellew brought an intensity of feeling that was a revelation to both Paul and John: '… he had a deep love for the country, particularly for certain of its features, such as ricks and stooks of corn. At first I was unable to understand an almost devotional approach to a haystack and listened doubtfully to a rhapsody on the beauty of its form … Slowly, however, the individual beauty of certain things, trees particularly, began to dawn on me.'[40] John's transformation was total; through Pellew he learned to read the landscape in a quite unique way, to understand and transcribe its contours by feeling his way intuitively across the undulations of the Buckinghamshire landscape, and to place its defining motifs – hedges, trees, copses, and ponds – with a sensitivity that is at once memorable and instantly recognizable as John's own work. His emergence as an artist was guaranteed.

As both brothers grew in confidence they recognized the advantage of showing together in London. Paul had already made his mark, exhibiting twenty drawings at the Carfax Gallery in October 1912, attracting attention

37. Alan Freer, *John Nash: 'The Delighted Eye'* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), p. 20.
38. *Outline*, pp. 93–94.
39. John Nash cited in Freer, *'The Delighted Eye'*, p. 7.
40. *Outline*, p. 94.

and achieving sales. Just over a year later the brothers staged a joint show at the Dorien Leigh Gallery – actually little more than a lampshade design shop in London – which cost £2/10 shillings to rent for a week. Twenty-five paintings were hung, seven of John's were sold, five of Paul's, many of them to collectors who would continue to support both artists in the years ahead. 'We are quite the rising young men,' wrote a jubilant Paul to Gordon Bottomley, 'The show is a success beyond our highest hopes.' Successful for sales, successful for arousing critical interest, but successful chiefly because 'here were two young English artists who were actually Post-Impressionists, innovators by instinct, whose work was above the usual rut of English landscape painting.'[41]

For two brothers stepping confidently forward side by side, the months before the onset of war were months of tangible progress. They were invited to show with the Camden Town Group, asked to join the Friday Club whose company included Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, and Vanessa Bell, and both became members of the London Group. They were thus recognized by their contemporaries and courted by influential patrons. Formally too their style and approach to picture-making began to mature. Paul quickly outgrew his Pre-Raphaelite pastiches. John was taken under the wing of Harold Gilman, then President of the London Group, who offered advice on how to paint in oils. He advocated using paint unmixed with linseed oil, laid on in a singular opaque manner rather than in layers of transparent colours.[42] The approach is used strikingly in one of John's first oils *Gloucestershire Landscape* of 1913, with its stolid and fulsome tree in full thick foliage placed dead-centre of the composition. Rendered in wedges of unmodulated paint the foliage, the bent stooks of corn, and the piles of cumulus cloud seem to be sculpted in space. It is a truly exciting painting for a painter of just twenty years old. This use of opaque painting, both dry in texture but saturated in colour, and the adoption of long-cast shadows would become a hallmark of John's oil painting in the coming decade, though his natural inclination would lead him back eventually to the looser linearity and transparency afforded by watercolour. Thus, on the eve of war John – untutored, unschooled and four years less experienced – clearly outstripped his customarily confident older brother in the handling and articulation of painting in oils. It heralded great things to come.

41. *'The Delighted Eye'*, p. 8.
42. According to John Rothenstein (1983, p. 23) Gilman at that time considered John an artist of greater promise than Paul.

2 ON THE EVE OF WAR

In France the war was being waged by professional armies, fighting in countryside and towns that were not much travelled by British citizens. For both brothers, as with many people, the outbreak of war was a distant, even abstract event. By mid-1914 Paul and John had been drawn into the circle of young avant-garde artists who were gathering around the patronage of the influential collector Edward Marsh, editor of the much-celebrated book *Georgian Poetry*.[1] A companion volume – *Georgian Art* – was under discussion and Paul was greatly exercised about being included. He was invited to Marsh's art-filled flat in Raymond's Buildings in Gray's Inn, and soon became a near-resident, one of many who enjoyed the benefits of 'Eddie's' philanthropic support:

> Eddie, as I found, was the most generous and hospitable person. Later I was to know in how unusual a degree he would use his influence not only on behalf of his friends, but of his friends' friends in distress. Where so many men would promise, Eddie would fulfil.[2]

John meanwhile had invested his earnings from sales at the Dorien Leigh Gallery on a return ticket to Italy. It was an uncharacteristic venture for the home-loving John and he found the January ambience of a Tuscany winter rather discouraging. 'I find it difficult to do landscapes here,' he wrote, 'owing to the lack of open country. The mountains are very fine but never appear unless it is very clear.'[3] A year later he distilled what he saw – and felt – of his Italian sojourn into a fine, crisp watercolour and ink *Tuscan landscape*.[4] Like so much of his best work it is full of finely observed detail, but wrapped in his customary ability to convey the texture, pattern and 'fetch' of the rolling countryside. Intuitively, John was never too afraid to attempt bold asymmetry in his work, whether it be the looming cypress tree that dominates the left-hand side of the Tuscan landscape, or the pole-like trunk of the tree in *Slough Pools*[5] with its diminished colouration and rather haunting ambience. Almost fearless in his direct treatment of any given subject, John drew with a self-discipline that is at times unnerving. There is so little guesswork in his drawings, no hesitation or change of mind; once fixed on a motif or a view he constructs the image logically and without a second thought. The secret of his work, if there can be such an idea of a secret, is in the very choice of the view selected, and then in the decisive rigour of

1. Comfortably off, but not wealthy, Edward Marsh's money derived from payments made to him as a descendant of Spencer Perceval, the Prime Minister shot in the House of Commons in 1812. It was supplemented from 1913 by a legacy from an aunt. Marsh referred to the government grant as 'murder money'.
2. *Outline*, p. 137.
3. John Nash to Dora Carrington, writing from the Villa le Pergole at Careggi outside Florence, quoted in John Rothenstein 1983, p.36.
4. *Tuscan Landscape*, 1915, painted after his return from Italy, in the Collection Victor Batte-Laye Trust, The Minories, Colchester.
5. *Slough Pools*, 1915, private collection, reproduced in *'The Delighted Eye'*, p. 51.

the pictorial design. Look for example at *The Viaduct* – painted in the first years of the Great War – as an image that coalesces this fusion of the 'traditional' with the 'modern'.[6] The large canvas is both a dense and surprisingly tense painting; dense in its saturated tonal palette; tense in the way the swelling and sensual hills and woods are locked into one another, then are abruptly sliced in two by the diagonal line of the viaduct. Tense also for the ironic juxtaposition of a train spouting a long plume of white smoke that is fixed in the design, locked forever in the here and now, while all around the hills and fields roll across the picture space.

Unlike Paul, who borrowed ceaselessly from fellow-artists, John seemed much more circumspect about confessing his external artistic influences. Indeed, it was well known that John cared little to visit exhibitions, owned few books on art – but many on flowers, gardening, fishing, and music – and although he was familiar amongst the galaxy of talented artists that gathered around London on the eve of the war he avoided becoming too 'embroiled' in their world, and steered well clear of their theories and manifestos.[7] The Machine Age, which so fuelled and fired up the excitable crowd of Vorticists, was manifest in John's work only by the occasional appearance of a smoke-puffing threshing machine. Rather more medieval than modern in appearance, these cumbersome contraptions seem at one with the landscape: the spokes of the gigantic wheels echoed poetically in the tracery of branches in the hedgerow trees.

On the day war was declared the brothers were travelling back from a short holiday in the Lake District where they had stayed with Gordon and Emily Bottomley. On one of the few occasions when John mixed openly with art collectors, they also called in on Sir Michael Sadler in Leeds and Charles Rutherston in Bradford. During the autumn, as the opposing armies fought for strategic advantage over each other in the Battles of the Marne and Ypres, the brothers worked as agricultural labourers in Dorset. On 14th October John was sworn in as a Special Constable for Buckingham, and in early 1915 he moved to the Russell Square area in London to take up work making canvas army tents at Mappin & Webb in White City. His evenings were spent – alongside Paul – in a circle of painters and friends at the Café Royal in Regent Street. For John these were months of both disquiet and celebration; disquiet, not least because the war was having an impact on the art market and spreading general unease, but also because his prolonged, yet frustratingly unconsummated, liaison with Dora Carrington had finally dwindled to little more than a copious pile of sexually-charged correspondence – most of it written by John. Many have written of the captivating charm and allure of Carrington, a talented painter amongst that brilliant Slade School cohort. Like many others John was drawn in, dangled, and eventually dropped by the enigmatic Dora, who discarded a bevy of suitors – including brother

6. *The Viaduct*, 1915–16, Leeds City Art Gallery.
7. Rothenstein mentions that John missed Fry's 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' at the Grafton Galleries Nov 1910–Jan 1911, and in his words 'did not dream of visiting the second, which was held while I was constantly in London.' (Written between October 1912 to January 1913.) John did visit the Uffizi in Florence on his Italian visit and was clearly moved by the work her saw, but according to Rothenstein the visit proved of no deep significance as far as his own art was concerned.

Paul (who achieved greater intimacies with her than John could ever have dreamed) – for the inimitable Lytton Strachey.[8] Recognising all was lost – at least for that moment – John wrote to her in 1915:

> … I like you better than anyone else I know (of womankind & wd gladly go to Timbuctoo with you but as that can't be I must be patient & wait for someone else to like me. It seems foolish but these times make one need someone close to one in affection & acquaintance & yet I shd almost fear to have another 'affair' so called in case I bungled again.[9]

Despite this personal failing, 1915 was a time for small celebrations too; one of John's paintings entered a major national public collection when Sir Michael Sadler donated a watercolour – *Trees in a Flood* – to Leeds City Art Gallery. Described by John as 'a frightfully good man', Sadler had long valued the younger brother's work, buying four from the Dorien Leigh Gallery show and two of Paul's.[10] Sadler had been encouraged to visit the show by William Rothenstein, an early supporter of the brothers:

> I sent you a card last night for a show that the brothers Nash are having on Friday for a week. If by any chance you are in town, do contrive to go to it. They are both very young & extremely interesting & talented & nobody save myself & one or two equally helpless people take any interest in them. They are badly in need of both help & encouragement & Paul's work is quite first rate. The other brother is younger & still not quite developed.[11]

As the war ground to a mud-sodden standstill in Flanders and John's unrequited love for Carrington fizzled out, he took a clerical post in February 1916 with the Ministry of Munitions in Northumberland Avenue. He still spent time with his fellow-artists and occasionally stayed with Edward Marsh, then serving as Private Secretary to Winston Churchill and someone capable of influencing the selection of war artists commissioned by the British government. By 1916 John had met his wife-to-be Christine, though his one-sided interest in Carrington lingered long and hard.

Paul had also met his future wife. In February 1913, at the Chelsea studio of his close friend Rupert Lee, he had encountered the 'dream-girl' he had longed for. Margaret Odeh – known as 'Bunty' – was 'small and extremely slender with small feet [and] a cumulus of dark hair, grape-black in colour.' With a degree from St Hilda's, Oxford, she was a young woman of firmly held views, especially on Women's Suffrage. In her voluntary role as private secretary to the organiser of the Tax Resistance League, she worked tirelessly to help women who refused to pay their taxes and also those seeking to escape prostitution. Through 'Bunty' Paul became exposed to a world of radical, occasionally violent, protest that both appalled and rather stimulated him.

8. James King argues that it was Paul who was Carrington's first love; she once wrote to John asking him to 'thank Paul for his wonderful letter. I felt, do not tell him, bad pangs of jealousy, that Bunty must have stacks of such letters, whilst I have but a few!' Even after his marriage to Margaret, Paul continued to confess his infatuation with her.

A full, and often candid, account of the complicated marital and extra-marital activities of the Nash brothers and their wives and would-be lovers is to be had in Ronald Blythe's *First Friends: Paul and Bunty, John and Christine – and Carrington* (London: Viking, 1997).

The complicated love affairs of Carrington, Mark Gertler, Nevinson, et al are related in fine detail in John Woodeson, *Mark Gertler: Biography of a Painter, 1891–1939* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972) pp. 85 *et passim*, and in a number of more recent books, including David Boyd Haycock's *A Crisis of Brilliance*.

9. John Nash to Carrington, 1915, quoted in Rothenstein, 1983, p. 39.

10. John wrote to Carrington: 'Prof. Sadler has bought 3 more of mine and one of Paul's isn't he a frightfully good man. I long to tell you all about it, it is so exciting.'

11. William Rothenstein to Sir Michael Sadler, 10 November 1913; see also Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, mid-November 1913, in *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 81, *c.*mid November 1913.

Besides the petitions and protests, there were raucous incidents and the occasional scuffle. The suffragettes were often victims of some wicked and vengeful male behaviour. Yet 'Bunty' gave as good as she got. 'Margaret Odeh', observes one recent commentator, 'was a woman to be reckoned with.'[12]

Indeed, they must have presented a striking couple. Lance Sieveking, a future pilot officer who befriended Paul during the war years was immediately struck by the twenty-three year old's air of quiet assurance, his neatness and composure. The young artist was 'spruce and neat down to the last detail. His black hair was brushed back off his forehead in a thick gleaming mass, and he wore short, neat side-whiskers. His jacket was … beautifully cut. His collar was very low and he wore an enormous tie neatly knotted.'[13] Rupert Lee drew what is probably the most telling portrait of Paul at this time, a classic example of the Slade style; with its 'sweeping line and fluid shading'[14] it depicts 'a superlatively elegant dandy…with a slight air of the man-about-town.'

There are though few informal images of Paul, no casual 'snaps' of him off guard or at rest. He guarded – and carefully managed – his public *persona*. At times this self-regard might seem to result in self-parody. He was known to parade at times in a brown tweed cloak and red silk scarf, smoking a cherry-wood pipe and carry an ebony shepherd's crook. One close friend, Anthony Bertram, excused this apparent eccentricity as the behaviour of an individual of deep integrity, 'the power of a whole personality ceaselessly occupied with choosing the best, even in the most trivial matters'.[15] Photographs taken at periods throughout his relatively short life depict him frozen in a pose of calculated formality, invariably bearing his striking profile, and the thick wave of swept-back hair, his eyes locked in the far distance as if pondering something of impenetrable meaning. It is not hard to see what attracted so many women to Paul.[16]

As the European war raged in Belgium Paul decided to join up. Much later he liked to suggest that he had been a reluctant volunteer who did not much relish the prospect of overseas service. Nor did he rate his martial instinct very highly, confessing to Mercia Oakley that 'I shall never like soldiering or get anywhere near to being a soldier', though he lived in hope of making 'myself something like an officer before the end'.[17]

Margaret, whom he had married in December 1914, later recalled quite differently: 'He had a very clear and simple conception of his duty towards his country, which he passionately loved, and although he was the last human being in the world to tolerate the horror and cruelty of war, he had an immediate and firm conviction that he must fight for England.'[18] On 10th September 1914 Paul joined the 28th Battalion London Regiment (Artists' Rifles) for home service only. At first it was all rather meaningless,

12. David Boyd Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance*, p. 156. Rupert Lee left a full account of Paul's first meeting with Margaret, which illustrates how nervous he was in introducing Bunty – exotic, noble, charming and of half-Arab descent – to Paul, whose 'people considered themselves as 'County', and felt their position keenly.' Rupert Lee, *The First Forty Years*, unpublished typescript, p.84.
13. James Russell, essay (see: http://jamesrussellontheweb.blogspot.com.au/p/dear-old-thomas-and-lucky-paul-james.html).
14. Denys Wilcox, *Rupert Lee: Painter, Sculptor & Printmaker* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2010), p. 21.
15. Anthony Bertram, *Paul Nash, the Portrait of an Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), pp. 47–49.
16. See for example the carefully posed photographs of Nash in *Outline*. In the first of these, Nash is as erect, posed and unyielding as the measuring instrument he holds in his hand.
17. Paul Nash to Margaret Odeh, *c.* 16 August 1916. Margaret and Paul were married on 17th December 1914 at St Martin-in-the Fields, London.
18. Margaret Nash, *Memoir* – typescript now on deposit in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, p. 8.

indeed rather a lark. He wrote to Bottomley in a jocular tone that he was 'now an Artist in a wider sense!

> … having joined the 'Artist's London Regiment of Territorials the old Corps which started with Rossetti [,] Leighton & Millais as members in 1860. Every man must do his bit in this horrible business so I have given up painting and bid it adieux for – who knows how long, to take up the queer business of soldiering … and I enjoy the burst of exercise – marching, drilling all day in the open air about the pleasant parts of Regents Park and Hampstead Heath.[19]

Historically an officer-training unit, the Artists' Rifles had a distinguished past which attracted painters, poets, architects, writers, and many others with artistic aspirations – if *not* always the talent. Every few months in the first year of the war, *The Studio* arts magazine ran a page of those who had volunteered. Paul is mentioned in the 'Second List' of British artists serving with the forces published in *The Studio* in April 1915 – as 'Nash, P., 28th Batt; London Regt. (Artists' Rifles)'.

Much of 1916 was spent in officer training, which included a stint as a map-reading instructor at Romford, Essex, where he met and befriended the poet Edward Thomas. Sharing a similar 'mystical conception of life' their bond was closely valued by each man. Paul later confessed to Bottomley that he knew 'no poet who has sprung since quite so good as dear old Thomas. He seems to give us something peculiar and rare, something perfectly distinguished and necessary to English poetry.'[20]

Paul's long induction period was invariably dull, although he became adept at working things to his advantage, wangling his fair share of sleeping-out passes, and learning how to make himself comfortable. As Margaret notes in her introduction to his war letters, Paul continued to draw and paint in what spare time he could find, 'in fact the irksomeness of his duties as a soldier only increased his integrity as an artist.' It was during his war service, she claimed, that he developed 'that astonishing industry which afterwards enabled him to work under almost any circumstances, however ugly, noisy or inhibiting.' All that still lay ahead. For the time being his company in barracks at Gosport, near Portsmouth, was a mixture of 'old crusted B.E.F. warriors with wound stripes … and the rest, boys'. His job, he wrote to Margaret, was 'generally to superintend, criticize and make suggestions – rather in my line.'[21]

Eventually he signed for overseas service and was gazetted Second Lieutenant, the lowest rank in the officer class. Initially assigned to the Third Battalion, a regular unit of the Hampshire Regiment, he was then posted to the 15th (Service) Battalion of the Hampshires, one of the many hundreds of infantry units created specifically for the duration of the war.

19. Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, letter no. 94, *c.* 27th September 1914, in *Poet and Painter*, p. 74.
20. Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, letter no. 127, 1st December 1919, in *Poet and Painter*, p. 114.
21. *Outline*, p. 179.

A studio photograph shows Paul as well groomed and dapper as ever in his officer's tunic and Sam Browne leather belt and one-cross strap. Despite their financial stringencies, Paul had been fastidious about the cut of his uniform, indeed extraordinarily 'finicky' about acquiring the 'right' one.[22]

In late February 1917 after the inevitable rigmarole of orders and counter-orders, unexplained delays, and even a bout of measles, Paul eventually embarked for France, having narrowly missed being sent to Salonika with an earlier draft. Wandering around the crowded troopship he noted with rather characteristic aloofness:

> The men are odd creatures. They are very ill-housed here, huddled like beasts at night in hard angular places below decks, in an atmosphere foetid and sickly – they must be terribly bored, yet doing nothing is better to them than doing anything. They cheered when we sailed at last, they cheered louder when we stopped.[23]

This rather bemused view of his charges was complemented in his letters by rich visions of the benighted world he was now entering. Sensitive to the unusual and the unnatural, and always able to detect the 'sinister beneath the innocent',[24] Paul's writing at this time is richly flavoured by darkness and mystery, albeit laced with a youthful, chivalric idealism:

> The ship, blacker than anything, surged along, the bell clanging from time to time, the hooter uttering all kinds of different noises of warning, occasionally an electric bell would ring and be answered below by another. On the bridge strode the Captain peering into the fog. Stark against the night. Seeming to strain upwards but having an extraordinarily proud steady look, was the fore-mast bearing the light at its heads. The thing fascinated me and I gazed and gazed up at it. To me it seemed a kind of guide and spirit of the ship, piercing the dark, greeting the unknown ahead.[25]

Disembarking at Le Havre, Paul reached the Ypres Sector a short while later. The Salient was unusually subdued. 'There is not much danger', he wrote to his wife, 'Raids are not very feasible and the line is seldom badly shelled.'[26] His wife was not so easily assured and throughout his short sojourn at the front she prayed that he would be protected by a 'merciful providence'.[27] Having never before been abroad, Paul was much taken by the scenery of the French landscape and he revelled in its novel charm. His letters brim with picturesque detail and local colour, particularly his rendition of a small cemetery he liked to visit:

> It was a wonderful sight, little wooden shrines over each grave filled inside with some sort of wire wreaths and small flowering trees, a little bower pale

22. Lance Sieveking, a fellow soldier in the Artists' Rifles relates in *The Eye of the Beholder* (p. 56) an occasion when, fitting for a new uniform jacket in Holborn, Nash became infuriated that the tailor had 'absolutely ballsed it up'. Neither Margaret Nash nor Sieveking could detect any fault in the cut. Nash, however, was extraordinarily finnicky, exclaiming: 'Why, damn it all! Just look at the left shoulder.' Sieveking, relates James King, failed to see how the uniform fell short of perfection (Lance Sieveking, *The Eye of the Beholder*, London: Hulton, 1957).
23. *Outline*, p. 181.
24. From John Ferguson, *The Arts in Britain in World War One* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1980), p. 104.
25. *Outline,* p. 182.
26. This letter is dated 4 April 1917, in *Outline*.
27. Margaret Nash, *Memoir*, p. 32.

> blue and green in colour and always there was a little cherub doll upon a thread. Wind and weather had washed white shrines to a moist delicate grey – had faded the bowers to a mysterious pale blue. The wind passing through the place set the cherubs flying gently over the wire trees and the flowers … Never have I seen such curious beauty connected with graves and burials …[28]

However, his contentment changed to astonishment as he spent more time in the battle zone. Although war had wreaked its havoc, nature was proving extraordinarily resilient. Paul wrote of walking through a wood, or at least what remained of it after heavy shelling, when it had been reduced to little more than 'a place with an evil name, pitted and pocked with shells, the trees torn to shreds, often reeking with poison gas'. A short while later, to his great surprise, this 'most desolate ruinous place' was drastically changed. It was now 'a vivid green':

> the most broken trees even had sprouted somewhere and in the midst, from the depth of the wood's bruised heart poured out the throbbing song of a nightingale. Ridiculous mad incongruity! One can't think which is the more absurd, the War or Nature …[29]

Paul became both bemused and maddened by the strange absurdities all around him, unsure whether to aim his eloquent anger at the war, at nature's incorrigible determination, or at 'we poor beings [who] are double enthralled'. The war lent an edge to his eloquence: gone were the Pre-Raphaelite visions, gone the interpenetrations disclosing 'strange phenomena', to be supplanted by a tougher language that matched the grim conditions all around him. Never before had he been subject to places that were so 'pitiless, cruel and malignant'. For possibly the first time Nash was seeing for *himself*, not applying the tired conventions of an art-practice or imposing the vision of others. As Anthony Bertram so vividly remarks: 'He saw it'.[30] He had now to internalize the experience, and capture what he saw on paper, and above all, he had to do so in the most debilitating of conditions.

By early March 1917, despite the strictures of military duty and the noisome conditions of his temporary billet, Paul had produced his first batch of drawings, which he dispatched to England, accompanied by a note from his commanding officer which confirmed (rather fortunately) that they were of 'no military importance'.[31] The drawings captured his fascination with the Flanders landscape in one of its temporary phases of recovery, the spouting green shoots cruelly juxtaposed with scarred hills and 'stick-like trees'. Paul is probably best known for the nocturnal sensibility which later haunted his visions of the war, but these early drawings – like many of his letters – are often saturated with light and colour:

28. *Outline*, p. 186.
29. *Ibid*., p. 187.
30. Nash's accelerated transition from the poetic to the pragmatic is well recounted in Bertram, who is especially insightful on this topic (1955) p. 91.
31. Margaret Nash writes about her husband's working habits in the Introduction to the war correspondence in *Outline*, p. 177.

> Here in the back garden of the trenches it is amazingly beautiful – the mud is dried to a pinky colour and upon the parapet, and through sandbags even, the green grass pushes up and waves in the breeze, while clots of bright dandelions, clover, thistles and twenty other plants flourish luxuriantly, brilliant growths of bright green against the pink earth. Nearly all the better trees have come out, and the birds sing all day in spite of shells and shrapnel. I have made three more drawings of all these wonderful ruinous forms which excite me so much here.[32]

As Paul Fussell has so brilliantly observed of the 'English' passion for the rural and the bucolic: 'if the opposite of war is peace, the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of pastoral'.[33] But to Paul this was more than nature as an antidote to the brutalization of war. He appears to have been genuinely revitalized by his duties at the front-line: 'I feel very happy these days', he wrote in March, 'in fact, I believe I am happier in the trenches than anywhere out here… life has a greater meaning here and a new zest.'[34] Here, perhaps is the tipping-point in Nash's slow purging of all that he once held true as a painter.

There is a fine tract of writing in a letter dated Good Friday, 6th April 1917, which is worth transcribing in full, as it offers such an insight into the terrible beauty that Paul saw all around him:

> The last week has been one so full that I have literally been unable to write. My inner excitement and exultation was so great that I have lived in a cloud of thought these last days. This combined with a certain physical strain has hindered and chained me from quiet continuous writing. Oh, these wonderful trenches at night, at dawn, at sundown! Shall I ever lose the picture they have in my mind. Imagine a wide landscape flat and scantily wooded and what trees remain blasted and torn, naked and scarred and riddled. The ground for miles around furrowed into trenches, pitted with yawning holes in which the water lies still and cold or heaped with mounds of earth, tangles of rusty wire, tin plates, stakes, sandbags. I think it is the only significant landmark left… I feel very happy these days, in fact, I believe I am happier in the trenches than anywhere out here. It sounds absurd but life has a greater meaning here and a new zest, and beauty is more poignant.[35]

Of course, Paul was serving at an unusually quiet time on the Salient but he was constantly exposed to the daily rigours and dangers of trench life. Nowhere could be considered safe or 'quiet'. Sensing this, he repeatedly reassured his wife, family, and friends that raids were few and the shelling sporadic, though he confessed to disliking machine-gun fire 'especially when I go the lavatory; I don't mind being shot during my duty, but not that sort of duty!' Like every other subaltern in a line regiment his work was repetitive and unrelenting. After dark he would patrol the benighted trenches, treading

32. *Outline*, p. 188.
33. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 231.
34. *Outline*, p. 189.
35. This and the others extracts are taken from *Outline*, pp. 193–197.

cautiously along slimy duckboards with his sergeant, 'inciting a listless sniper to fire or the Lewis gunners to play a burst, just to show the Huns we are really awake.' Yet all the time his artistic sensibilities were alert to the 'weird beauty' of the St Eloi front:

> Twilight quivers above, shrinking into night, and a perfect crescent moon sits uncannily below pale stars. As the dark gathers, the horizon brightens and again vanished as the Very lights rise and fall, shedding their weird greenish glare over the land … So night falls gradually … At intervals we send up Very lights, and the ghastly face of No Man's Land leaps up in the garish light, then, as the rocket falls, the great shadows flow back shutting it into darkness again … Maybe you can feel something of the weird beauty from this little letter.

As his time at the front dragged into weeks so Paul's attitude changed; he began to question the motives behind the war and to worry about the slump in morale that was beginning to infect the Home Front. He aimed his ire at the profiteers and 'the damned almighty Press' for peddling 'humbug and drivel' and grew intensely angry at the intolerable greed and inequities on the Home Front. Increasingly aligned with Margaret's political sensibilities, he wrote in mid-April about the urgent need for 'a spirit to stamp out cant and lies from England, a race of men and women in England to supersede a brood of efts and leeches.'[36] In these intense and angry tirades, we can detect the seeds of his subsequent outcries against the prolonged madness of the war, tirades that would pour out of his work in less than a year. Yet, all the while, Paul – like so many artists, writers and poets on the Western Front – wrestled with the cruel irony that the destruction and depravity all around him was actually feeding his imagination. It was a conundrum brilliantly caught in one letter:

> We are all sent out here to glean – painter, poet, musician, sculptor – 'He that hath eyes to see let him see, he that hath ears to hear, let him hear' – no one will return empty-handed but bringing his sheaves with him.[37]

By this time he had a further twenty drawings, most of them made in a few snatched moments between routine jobs, parades, lectures and the other duties that 'imprisoned' him. There were, of course, lighter moments. During a training course Paul dimly remembered a midnight obstacle race over poles, wires, ditches, and sandbags that had been convened by the Commanding Officer, umpired by the sergeant-major, and performed by some twenty 'entirely blotto' officers; a race which remarkably, given his inebriated condition, Paul appears to have won 'by a foot, and found myself hugging one part of the sergeant-major, while an East Surrey man hugged the other, each yelling out we had won.' As Paul triumphantly noted, the verdict went the way of the Hampshires. 'I remember clearly', he reminisced,

36. *Outline*, p. 197.
37. *Ibid*., p. 198.

'the C.O. dancing a waltz with me, and of dancing a sort of typhoon tango with a boy in the Queen's'.[38]

Paul found camaraderie not only with his fellow mess-mates: he had developed a profound appreciation for his men. Watching them on a three-day march in May 1917 he admired their 'quiet confident strength, an easy carriage and rough beauty'. 'I could not want a better-disciplined crew', he wrote that month, 'and I believe when the time comes, they will follow me over the top to a man.' Yet at times, their palpable vulnerability almost reduced him to tears. This sense of belonging and unity is apparent in his lithograph of a column of troops marching at night: the powerful momentum of the troops echoed in the plunging perspective of the endless avenue. Although he would not serve long at the Front, Paul knew death and was aware that his colleagues and contemporaries were dying elsewhere. Contemplating the loss of his friend, the poet Edward Thomas, he tried hard not to become morbid, but it is clear from his letters that he was brooding on it 'dully'. The prevailing air of war-weariness cannot have helped. Those rambling Edwardian nature walks, the intense camaraderie of the Café Royal, and the long shadows of a balmy English summer must have seemed so very remote.

By mid-May, although the work was not difficult, the weather temperate, and the surroundings pleasant enough to make him 'dreamy and satisfied', he was 'sick with longing for the end of this awful unending madness'. He knew also that a Spring Offensive was not far off and that his unit, the 15th Hampshires, were ear-marked to take a lead in the attack on the German strongholds on the Messines Ridge. His brooding reflections, however, had the effect of making him realise how much he had changed as an individual, whilst also confirming his passion for nature and for the sites of his cherished Hampshire. When all other emotions seemed to have turned bitter and dead, and the cause of war to be futile and mean, Paul realised that the effects on him would be profound and huge. 'No terrors will ever frighten me into regret', he wrote, and asked 'What are the closing lines of Tennyson's "Maud"? – "I have felt I am one with my native land."'[39]

In fact, Paul was to find himself back in his native land sooner than he could have ever predicted. On the night of Friday 25th May, only eight weeks after he first set foot in France, he was beckoned from his dug-out to watch a short bombardment over the enemy line. For someone so familiar with the night sky and the luminous powers of the stars and moon, Paul failed to register the intensity of the dark and stumbled:

> The earth opened suddenly and I disappeared amid a roar of laughter. I suppose all very sudden disappearances are funny, but from my point of view it was not

38. *Outline*, p. 201.

39. Hill 60 was formed in the 1860s as a consequence of the building of the railway between Ypres and Comines. A cutting was dug to ease the gradient at the northern end of the Messines Ridge and the resulting spoil was dumped in three piles at the top of the climb, forming three small mounds. The biggest of these was marked on the British maps as 'Hill' – its height above sea level indicated in metres – so that it appeared as 'Hill 60' and this became its name on military maps.

Hill 60 is today owned by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and is little changed since 1918. A plaque at the site records that it was taken from the French by the German forces on 10th December 1914, recaptured by the British on 17th April 1915, retaken by the Germans on 5th May 1916, ceded back to the British on 7th June 1917 (the first day of the Messines offensive), taken once again by the Germans in April 1918 (during the great Spring push) and its final capture by the British on 28 September 1918. The actions on and around 7th June 1917 would have involved Nash's unit. Nash's reflections on Tennyson are in *Outline,* p. 203.

> humorous at all, because I was jammed in a narrow trench and had a sharp pain in my side … I limped back into the dug-out feeling rather as if I had broken in the middle like a doll.[40]

In fact, he had fractured a rib and was sent down the line to the dressing station and thence onto the No. 14 General Hospital, 'the last place before England'. Convalescing back home Paul later learned the terrible news that most of his fellow-officers had been killed in an attack on Hill 60 that presaged the huge assault on the Messines Ridge.[41]

40. The War Office records give the date of the incident as 30th May, but Nash's letter in *Outline* (to Margaret p. 205) suggests it occurred on the night of 25th May 1917. By this date the artillery barrage on the Wyschaete Ridge was building in intensity. Nash probably owed his prompt return to England to the need to clear beds in France and Belgian in readiness for the anticipated casualties from the coming offensive. He remained at the Swedish Hospital in London until 21st June.

According to Margaret Nash he suffered a broken, floating rib and not as the Base Hospital Report stated a misplaced cartilage (in *Memoir,* p. 43). Ronald Blythe states that Nash fell while making a drawing (Blythe, *First Friends*, p.107) but this is not mentioned in any other account.

41. See *Outline*, p. 139. After his discharge from hospital in August 1917, Nash was attached to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment at Gosport. For a full study of this battle see Ian Passingham, *Pillars of Fire: the Battle of Messines Ridge, June 1917* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1998).

JOHN NASH
1918

PAUL NASH
29 April 1918 • by Bassano Ltd

3 OFFICIAL WAR ARTIST PAUL: JOHN AT THE FRONT

Recovering in England gave Paul the opportunity to work up some of the sketches he had made at the Front. From being a draughtsman of dreamy twilit landscapes his work took the first of several radical turns. Before the war, he had been worried by his confines as an artist: 'My method of expression', he wrote, 'was still very limited and consisted almost entirely of drawings made in pencil and tinted with washes of bistre and blue, which were reinforced by over-drawing in diluted ink with a steel pen, sometimes with the addition of a little hard chalk'.[1] He feared, too, that his subject-matter had become rather confined, even predictable:

> Groups of trees in an 'upright' view seemed to be my sole interest. I very seldom worked on a horizontal plan or attempted landscapes involving receding planes or scenes wherein the forms were not those of trees with some surrounding undergrowth. In short I had got into my first rut.[2]

His brief service in the front-line trenches blasted him out of that rut. In July 1917 he mounted a show of eighteen small drawings at the Goupil Gallery in London which marked a distinct shift in his style. Gone were the numinous landscapes and ethereal figures, instead there were splintered woods and panoramic views of the hollowed Salient. Although he knew of the Vorticists, and had recently purchased a copy of one of Nevinson's dry-points of Ypres, his drawing did not yet display the technical modernity of his contemporaries, nor did it display the scream of tragedy that would fill his later works, but it was instantly memorable. As one observer noted with refreshed admiration, the work had 'an actuality, an immediacy, that brought to life everything about the front which people had read and heard, but had found themselves quite unable to visualize.'[3]

There is one rather sensitive drawing, tellingly entitled *Chaos Decoratif*[4] which suggests in its very title that Paul was still enamoured of the graceful curves and decorative arcs produced by the fallen boughs of once-elegant trees. In some of these early drawings warfare is implied rather than

1. See *Outline*, p. 139. After his discharge from hospital in August 1917, Paul was attached to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment.
2. *Ibid*., p. 139.
3. Quoted in Margot Eates, p. 22. The exhibition held at Goupil Gallery in July 1917 was entitled 'Drawings made in the Ypres Salient by Paul Nash'. Much to Paul's delight, the exhibition was given a supportive review by John Cournos in *Land and Water*, 28 July 1917. The painter was much taken with Cournos's evocation of 'accurate mystery' that he divined in the work, 'not thro' vanity', explained Paul, 'but because he seems to have explained things so well, & to be intelligently explained is a pleasure to any artist' (see Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, *c*. 23 August 1917, letter no. 104 in *Poet and Painter*, pp. 85–86). The painter was aggrieved, however, that in spite of enthusiastic reviews and good sales he was in pocket by only £5 (see Ronald Blythe, *First Friends*, p. 115).

With regard to Nevinson: in March 1917 Paul had asked his wife to obtain a copy of Nevinson's 1916 drypoint, *Ypres after the First Bombardment*, as it was now 'a part of the world I'm interested in' (*Outline*, p. 192). Although temperamentally the two artists had little in common Nevinson had helped Paul learn lithography and later purchased his drawing *Obstacle* from his Leicester Galleries show in May 1918. For an account on Paul's interest in Nevinson's work see Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 73.
4. *Chaos Decoratif*, 1917, Manchester City Art Galleries.

impressed upon the viewer; the sombre tones, scored surfaces and dramatic diagonals that would manner his later war work have yet to emerge. He was clearly searching for a graphic language that mirrored his experiences as a soldier. His search took him in unusual directions: one particularly tense drawing made on leave in Gloucestershire depicts the serried ranks of bald orchard trees, separated from the viewer by ditches, sturdy fence posts and barbed wire, while overhead two birds appear to collide in a dispute over territorial dominance. Paul had rarely been attracted to sites of such strict land management and may have sought refuge in its reassuring symmetry. However, the war does not seem very far away from his thoughts, and in these first war pictures he had proved to himself, and to a growing crowd of admirers, that he could extend his earlier experiments with the southern English landscape into new surroundings and be equal to its peculiar demands.[5]

The show was popular, half the work was sold and it attracted favourable critical and popular attention, not least from the ever-reliable Edward Marsh. Paul cultivated their relationship, and began to canvas support from a coterie of friends and buyers. As always, he was very clear about what he would and would not do, telling Marsh:

> Let me say at once that I don't want one of those HQ jobs – driving about in a car and all that – merely a permit or special licence to draw in the line and facility for seeing all the different [sectors].

Ending with a frequent plea: 'as ever I turn to you.'[6] Marsh did not disappoint. He firmly believed that Paul was one of a small group of artists – 'les jeunes' as he called them – who were a force 'to be reckoned with', and he orchestrated the influence of William Rothenstein, Laurence Binyon, Frank Rutter, John Drinkwater, Henry Tonks, and Charles Holmes (amongst others) to support Paul's strident ambitions.[7] At the Department of Information, John Buchan rather grudgingly gave his backing: 'I think we will have to send Paul Nash as one of our artists to the Front,' he confided to Charles Masterman, 'There is a tremendous consensus of opinion about his work, with which MacLagan [another advocate in the Nash camp] agrees. I DO NOT, but he is a good fellow and understands the front line.'[8] And so, on 12th October 1917, Paul was seconded from the army and became an Official War Artist.

John had also been impressed by Paul's war drawings. In a pencilled letter he wrote rather candidly: 'We have always liked or not liked each other's work and it has always appeared quite simply either good or bad. They are good and I like them.'[9] After two years of desultory war-related work John was eventually able to enlist in the Artists' Rifles in September 1916. Unlike Paul's long period of preparation in the Home Counties, John found himself serving in France only two months later, in response to the steady flow of

5. *The Cherry Orchard* was made at John Drinkwater's home, Winston's Cottage, Far Oakridge, Gloucestershire, where Paul went to convalesce after his fall in France and to prepare for his one-man show at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

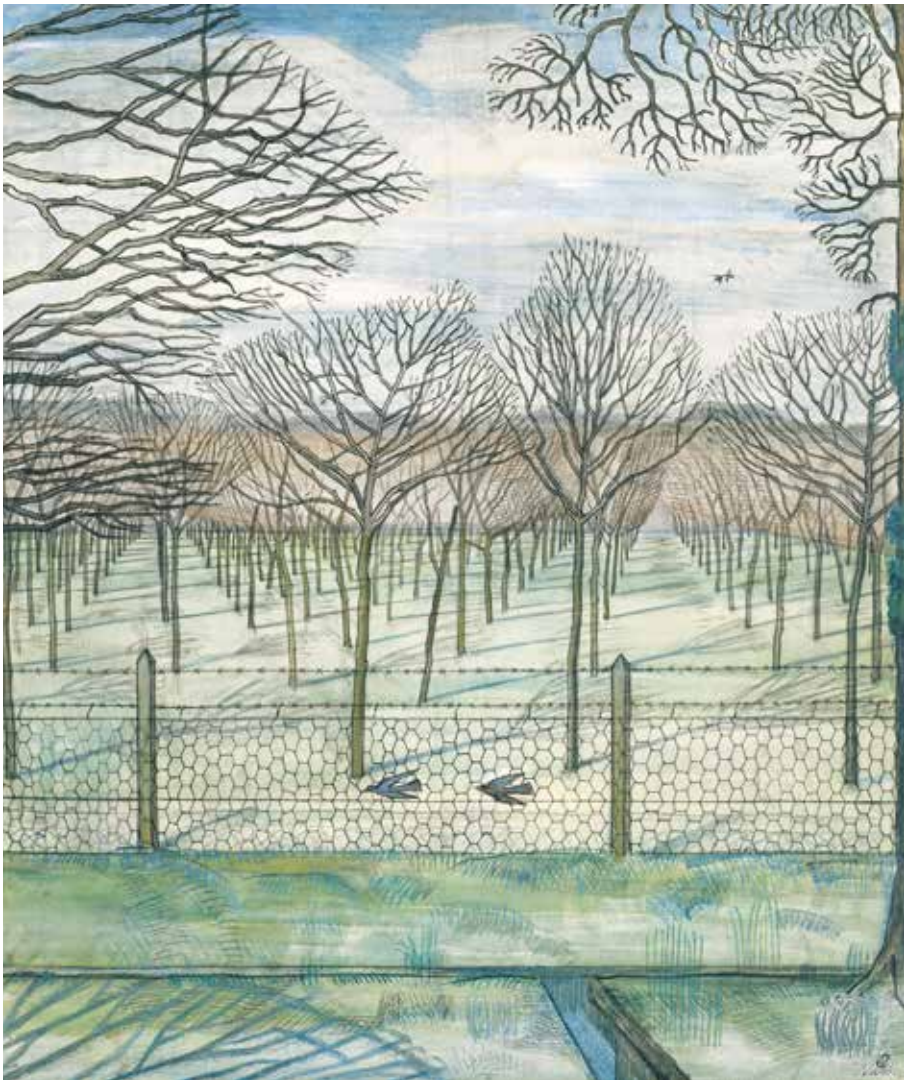
6. Marsh to John Buchan, 17 August 1917 (Paul Nash file, Imperial War Museum). Marsh also added that he considered Paul 'a man of brains, humour and character which will support his specific gift – I mean, not one of the promising wasters whose little talents so often run to seed.' An appreciation of the part played by Eddie Marsh in the Nash brothers' lives at this time is told in Ronald Blythe's *First Friends* (London: Viking, 1997), pp. 91–92.

7. Amongst Paul's advocates were: Rothenstein, Eric Maclagan (at the V&A); Laurence Binyon, Claude Phillips, Frank Rutter, A.Clutton Brock, John Drinkwater, Roger Fry, Henry Tonks, Michael Sadler, Charles Holmes.

Paul was delighted with the support he received from supporters such as Gordon Bottomley, thanking him in September 1917 for the commendation sent to Buchan, 'I think he cannot but be impressed.' (Paul Nash to Bottomley, letter no. 107, *Poet and Painter*, p. 88).

8. Buchan to Charles Masterman, 14 December 1917 (Paul Nash file, Imperial War Museum). Another of Nash's advocates, Francis Stopford, wrote to Buchan in August 1917 stressing the propaganda to be gained, arguing that Nash's images of the Ypres Salient provided 'a much better understanding of German brutality and of the needless havoc and destruction which German armies are committing under orders in occupied territories.' (Francis Stopford to John Buchan, 16 August 1917, Paul Nash file, Imperial War Museum.)

9. Anthony Bertram, *Paul Nash, the Portrait of an Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955) p. 93.



PAUL NASH

THE ORCHARD

1914 • watercolour, ink and pencil on paper • 57.5 x 48.2 cm

casualties from the battles of the Somme that had begun so catastrophically in July. Also unlike Paul, John underwent a lengthy period on active service, some of it rather grim. He was attached temporarily to the 7th Royal Fusiliers at Oppy Wood, near Arras in France until April 1917, whereupon he returned to the 2nd battalion of the Artists' as a Lance-Corporal. Often in the front-line, John soon showed a talent for leading bombing parties of nine trained men. He quickly became a full Corporal and eventually a Sergeant.

But all that lay in the future. In the first few months and by any comparison John Nash was soon having a tough war: rooted at the foot of the rank structure, stuck in the 'poor bloody infantry', and constantly frustrated by his inability to secure an artistic commission as an official artist. Much of his work in the first months in France was little but heavy labour. He recalled a typical day of 'fatigues' spent unloading three trucks full of 80lb sacks of oats. Others were spent on wearingly repetitive domestic tasks:

> Got up the grub at 7 oc, cleaned the dixies, cleared out 3 messrooms & washed the tables, drew coal for the Company, emptied all the rubbish bins, drew day rations, got up lunch, cleaned dixies, emptied messroom 'trash boxes', drew tea, cleaned up messroom again, cleaned dixies – exhaustion – cleaned myself – coma …[10]

Ever the botanist, John found some comfort in long solitary walks in the French countryside. His letters to Christine are full of vivid descriptions of nature, of the lie of the land, its colour, lines and mass, its potential for painting. His quick eye 'never missed a flower on the walls of a trench or in the splintered woodland' as he sought out life and growth amidst the dereliction.[11] On the odd occasion he was even able to sketch such sights, and record his thoughts about the 'yearly miracle' of spring:

> I saw a wonderful, almost awe inspiring sight today on the railway – a landscape. In the foreground was the glittering line coloured w[ith] red brick dust which we had just been throwing down – so a strip of red then a line of poplars in the shade, then the shaded merged into a sunny green field covered w[ith] pale bright reeds, then 3 rows in succession of poplars in the sun like bright bleached skeletons then the wood or forest above them on the hill in shade, a frowning red simple black; above all layers of fearful clouds … Today the fatigue ended at 10 oc & to our amazement we have been free all the rest of the day. So I slipped away alone & did some drawing & roamed in the woods & on the hill & saw many fine effects. I can't connect the spring w[ith] this continual struggle & could wish all our surroundings were bleak & bare till the war was over & so everything could then burst forth.[12]

Front-line duty came soon enough. Their sector was meant to be a quiet one, but this was rarely the case: shells fell often and one 'landed on a trench and

10. Letter IV, in *Love Letters from the Front*, p.13. For security reasons, or in some cases because they have been censored, none of the letters are dated, though it is just possible to guess an approximate date.
11. Allan Freer writes eloquently of John Nash's appreciation of nature, his long walks in France where 'like John Tradescant in the seventeenth century, botanizing amid the carnage of the battlefields of the Civil War, John Nash never missed a flower on the walls of a trench or in the splintered woodland … they afforded a link in the country world he had left behind and the English landscapes he had already painted'. *Love Letters from the Front*, introduction, p. xxi.
12. *Ibid*., Letter X, pp. 27–28.

there was a terrible mess'. In a taped conversation with the Keeper of the Imperial War Museum sixty years later he described sandbags full of the remains of bombed men. 'One became callous and hardened to these sights', he remembered, 'eating one's bully beef among dead men without bothering.'[13] In June 1917 he was in the front-line, often in advance posts strung out in No-Man's-Land, accompanied by two men, tasked with observing the enemy line, reporting any unusual activity, and returning to their own trenches just before daybreak. It was taxing work, harrowing on the nerves and calling for a robust physical response. On one memorable occasion when the forward party was rather larger than was usual, the officer in charge confessed to a premonition of his own death. He was killed on 30 December 1917.[14]

John adapted to the regime of the front-line quickly and showed such an aptitude for soldiering that he was given more responsibilities. He was sent on a succession of courses in machine-gunnery and trench mortar firing, where he became an expert in mortars and grenades, even composing his own hand-drawn instruction manual 'all carefully drawn out of all the English bombs and the German bombs.'[15] Planning for the new Summer Offensive against the Germans was gaining pace and John's unit was moved north to the Ypres Salient. Near the village of Houdkerk, the Artists' Rifles began training in preparation for the Battle of Passchendaele. John late made an ink and watercolour painting of the rather idyllic rural scenery that surrounded them. In a scene reminiscent of his pre-war Buckinghamshire life he describes a foreground lined with a row of upright poles, brown vegetation at their bases; in the background, haystacks and more interlaced poles, their tracery set against a backdrop of poplars and other trees; overhead a striking skyscape of clouds and swirling skeins of white. War is distant, and distanced.[16]

In July 1917, on the eve of the battle, John was ordered to remain behind as part of the cadre of those marked as Left-out-of-Battle. He was indignant, but the rationale was simple – this cadre of experienced officers, NCOs and men would serve as the core of a new unit in the event the existing one suffered severe casualties. 'I was very agitated at first', he wrote to Christine, 'but ascertained from my CO that there was no stigma attached to this position, only in case of accidents someone must be here to train reinforcements.' But he could not conceal his disappointment:

> Since I have been writing this I have been dispatched w.[ith] others to a reinforcement camp – all the rest are going up to do great things I hope [in the Battle of Passchendaele, late summer and autumn 1917]. I am chosen to stay behind. This always happens & you must see the reason, but why me? I dare say you will be relieved but I feel depressed nevertheless – I am here & my friends are or will be elsewhere, all among it.[17]

13. Interview with Joseph Darracott of the Imperial War Museum and David Brown of the Tate Gallery, Imperial War Museum, 4 March 1974.
14. Related in John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 43.
15. 'Artists in an Age of Conflict', Imperial War Museum, Department of Sound Records, reel 014 (accession no.000323/05).
16. Imperial War Museum, Department of Art (IWM: ART 2702).
17. Letter XXXVI, in *Love Letters from the Front*, p. 89.

Inevitably, there were very severe casualties and, having been sent off on mortar and bombing courses, John found himself training replacements and passing on his expert knowledge.

Few other front-line painters managed to capture the unique sensibilities of the Western Front trenches as John did; the way the men had to huddle together for warmth, the apparent snugness of a dug-out but also its vulnerability, the thin coverings of corrugated iron sheeting and the oppressive weight of the turgid mud. In his later oil painting *An Advance Post, Day*, the figures are folded into the earth and into one another as though rooted in the Flanders soil, only the very tip of the sixteen-inch bayonet piercing the horizon line just inches above their vulnerable heads.[18] The drabness of the dingy dug-outs and saps was often compensated by brilliant skies and stunning night-time light shows. John was thrilled at such sights. He described one such near-sublime experience:

> On Sat night at 10 oc I wonder what you were doing. I was standing on the fire step w[ith] my gun & fixed bayonet by my side peering over 800 yds of tangled wire & grass trying to see if 'Fritz' was a-coming across to pay us a visit, while around about fell, flew & whistled respectively 5.9" shells, whiz-bangs, pineapples so called, & machine gun bullets, so that I never knew when I was not going to be blown to bits, but I do assure you, & I thought it curious myself, that my feelings were not of fear – what was unpleasant was the wet, it poured all night, sleepiness & continual looking into darkness & cramp. We were told that we experienced one of the worst nights for some time. A wonderful & awe inspiring experience. I was also so interested by the Boche's beautiful lights & star shells & the general amazement of it all kept me from being afraid. Here I do think the educated mind gains upon the common soldier, who is like a child, until by time and usage he becomes a don't care – a philosopher – or so nervy that he is of more trouble than use. Then dawn broke behind a shattered wood & the larks began to sing. Another wonderful incident.[19]

John's fascination and astute observation combined in his larger oil paintings to produce work of great singularity. With his countryman's sensibility, he proved extraordinarily adept at conjuring up the specific meteorological conditions of the skies directly above the trenches in northern France. Nowhere is this more brilliantly executed than in the large canvas *Oppy Wood, 1917 Evening* painted after his long service at the front.[20] John had been sent to the zig-zag trenches in the wood as his first induction to the front-line and to test his reactions. It was, he recalled some sixty years later, 'an eerie place … a very ingenious trench system which had been dug by the Norfolks, who were there before us, by skilfully tunnelling under these vast trees which had fallen', a place where explosions of any kind resounded eerily around the remnants of the beeches.[21] In this almost magical painting, there

18. John Nash, *An Advance Post, Day*, 1918, IWM: ART 1157. See also: John Nash, *An Advance Post: Night*, n/d. IWM: ART 1158.
19. Letter XXX, in *Love Letters from the Front*, p. 69.
20. John Nash, *Oppy Wood, 1917 Evening*, 1918, oil on canvas, 182.8 x 213.3 cm, IWM: ART 2243.
21. John Nash, 'Artists in an Age of Conflict', Imperial War Museum, Department of Sound Records, accession no. 000323/05. John was interviewed by Joseph Darracott of the Imperial War Museum and David Brown of the Tate Gallery.

is something almost transcendental about his representation of the sky, with its near-symmetrical clouds and radiant luminosity. Ten years later in Germany, Otto Dix would create a similar sky-scape high above the blighted and ancient battlefield in his painting called *Flanders*, though in place of Nash's crystalline light, Dix has wrought a scene of apocalyptic magnitude, replete with fossilized foot-soldiers and clouds trailing like shredded pennants.

John's art was never so grimly gothic. Yet, in a subsequent letter he wrote with awe of the sight of:

> our aeroplanes, firing w.[ith] their guns on the trenches late in the evening, the machine is silhouetted against the bright afterglow while from it proceed a straight chain of golden flashes like a fine chain pulled taut. Then all round it are bursts of black shrapnel which on explosion assume certain shapes in the smoke like a ball of wool pulled out. One's artistic or aesthetic pleasure is often enough shattered by a terrific 'crump' coming over a long diminuendo whine then bang & showers of earth like a fountain are tossed in the air. I think I c[oul]d do some drawing of it all – but not here.[22]

In the months leading up to the terrible battles of Passchendaele John had been considering an officer's commission; yet it was to prove elusive. Here was a soldier 'of education and courage, who had moreover applied himself with enthusiasm to an important aspect of trench warfare'[23] but who seemed to make no progress with the Selection Board. In May he made his first bid for a commission in the Royal Engineers where many British artists found highly skilled employment – and refuge – in designing camouflage, surveying, and military sketching. He solicited the help of his uncle, Hugh Jackson, telling Christine:

> He is C.O. of the 2nd Labour Battn out there. I don't really know if there is the slightest hope of it. You see, my love, time draws upon us when I must be thinking about a commission, though as yet no one has asked me and I have said I am not in a hurry for one. If this fails there is a chance of getting into the machine-gun section. Anything but Infantry seems the general cry here now. However I must wait and look after myself when the time comes …[24]

Nothing came of it. Unlike Paul, he lacked the confidence needed to advance his cause. On the eve of the battle, however, John's frustration boiled over: he ranted to Christine: 'Why sh[ou]ld shop walkers and grocers get commissions and I, at any rate a public school man – a silly social fact that counts much in the army – have to live in dug-outs, eating crudely, living scarcely more decently than a beast …'[25] Clearly the strains of rough living and recurrent trench duty were taking its toll on him.

22. Letter XXXIII, in *Love Letters from the Front*, p. 79.
23. John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 44.
24. John Nash to Christine Kühlenthal, 3 May 1917.
25. John Nash to Christine Kühlenthal, 28 July 1917.

JOHN NASH

OPPY WOOD, 1917 EVENING

1918 • oil on canvas • 182.8 x 213.3 cm

With justifiable reason Paul feared greatly for his brother's safety on the front. After weeks of trying to track him down in late autumn 1917, Paul – now an Official War Artist with officer's rank, his own car and chauffeur – finally met up with his Corporal brother who was on a trench mortar course far behind the lines. It was an emotional reunion. 'I found the dear old fellow at last after a day's search', wrote Paul:

> Looking very well – a bronzed and tattered soldier, with incredible hands all rough and overgrown with cuticle – his eyes I thought less shy, very blue and bright, thin in the face but not worn or strained; voice rather tired, but giving out the same wit and humour as of old. He was very happy and though I listened with horror and wonder to all he had seen and felt, he seemed to have been only tremendously interested in enjoying the hundreds of humorous things that happened. He confessed the sight of wounded and dying men unnerved him.[26]

It being a Sunday when they met, Paul and John spent the day motoring through the 'pleasant lands of France' driven by Paul's 'excellent driver who does the most amazing things.' Given what both brothers knew of the ferocity of the fighting and the scale of the casualties, Paul was quite amazed that John had been 'miraculously spared' thus far, suspecting that this was 'because he is a very useful man'. Indeed, this may have been the reason why a commission could not be secured:

> Paul had a talk w. my C.O. who led [him] to suppose that there were still some people before me to go & said I shd be far better as an instructor in a specialist job – P said he was very decent in speaking of me & offered to recommend me highly if anyone asked for me …[27]

Others had also been talking of John's potential as an official war artist. Dora Carrington referred to it in a letter to her brother Noel, book designer and author, who had met Paul in Rouen earlier in 1917:

> Jack Nash has been home on leave. I stayed on my way up to London at that curious house of theirs at Iver Heath. Jack seemed rather nervy. He has been having a very bad time of it and nearly all his company was killed. Paul Nash talked a great deal about you. Evidently you made a very good impression! But I like Jack Nash much better. I think he may get one of those artist's jobs and so get transferred home. I hope so. He deserves it more than Nevinson or Paul Nash.[28]

But it would be a further three months before these efforts were fruitful. For John, there were more testing times ahead, not least a hard winter of front-line duty and his part in a disastrous attack on Marcoing in December 1917. That Christmas Eve he scribbled a note to his beloved Christine, which lay bare the deprivations, and near despair, of the infantryman's lot:

26. Paul Nash, 5 November 1917 (written from Intelligence HQ France), in *Outline*, pp. 206–09.
27. John Nash to Christine Kühlenthal, started 20 November 1917, dated 27 November 1917.
28. Dora Carrington to Noel Carrington, 1917, quoted in John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 46.

> Such a queer position to write in, you can't see anything but my feet are d—d cold. This is Xmas Eve – I spent last night w.3 of my men in advanced post – a perfectly uncovered shell hole; it was strange to watch one's rifle freeze all over & one's coat get covered w. slime and my wasn't it cold! There is a chance of being in the front line tonight & for Xmas Day.I don't mind telling you I shall be glad to get out of this, we are 700 yards in advance of our Coy along an iron-bound (by frost) road. I am curled up in a little 'funk' hole covered w. a 'water' sheet & the shells which are bounding & bouncing somewhere none too far shake the earth like a thunder clap bringing bits of clay tumbling down my neck, a bit of shrapnel cut my coat this morning – aye & one of our own guns it was – nothing but bully beef & rum till your mouth feels like nothing on earth.[29]

He finished the letter on Christmas Day, having managed a decent sleep in a dug out, and feasted on a ration of pudding ('not unlike cold clay'), tinned turkey and rum, which gave him a terrible headache: 'A man gave me a cracker & we gravely pulled it while great shells bounced overhead to its tiny report. We then sang carols & I have to go out again to the beastly post tonight. A proper mockery of a Xmas day, there was also no post.[30]

This was in fact Nash's last letter from the front – sent in one of the precious Green Envelopes (the 'GE') that were so treasured by line soldiers, it also enclosed a letter for brother Paul 'about the War Artist job' that had thus far proved so elusive but was about to come to fruition. Having had no response from John's commanding officer, Paul had appealed directly to Eddie Marsh: 'Can you by any fair or foul means help Jack home for a commission?

> It is unnecessary to speak of Jack's worth and his real value as an English artist and it's a damned shame if nothing can be done to extricate him from a position in which he is in utmost danger.[31]

'All my own success and happiness,' Paul added in a further plea on 8th January 1918, 'turns bitter when I think of Jack in the trenches.'[32]

The plan worked. By the end of February John had been officially demobilised, and on 3rd May 1918 he was commissioned under the British War Memorial Committee's Scheme Two as an honorary Second Lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion, Artists' Rifles. This released him from active duty and paid an annual salary of £300 per annum (over and above his military pay). In return the scheme required him to make available his total artistic output for the agreed period of employment, which was initially six months. These were less than generous terms and were invariably offered to younger artists of modest standing in the British art world. However, given the nature of his daily work in France, the offer was irresistible.[33] 'Whatever powers work for good and mercy,' confessed Paul to Margaret, 'have indeed favoured our little family'.[34]

29. Letter XLIX, in *Love Letters from the Front*, p.111.
30. *Ibid*.
31. Paul Nash to Edward Marsh, early 1918, quoted in John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 46.
32. Anthony Bertram, *Paul Nash, the Portrait of an Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955) p. 95.
33. As happened with Stanley Spencer, John's papers releasing him from active duty arrived after he had taken up his post as an official war artist. And like Spencer, John was arrested as a deserter until the misunderstanding was sorted.
34. *Outline*, p. 208.

PAUL NASH

THE MULE TRACK

1918 • oil on canvas • 60.9 x 91.4 cm

4 ENCHANTED VISION: BITTER TRUTHS

PAUL BACK TO THE FRONT

New Year's Eve 1916 had found Paul in a reflective frame of mind, speculating about the year ahead and what might await him overseas:

> It is strange to stand on the edge of the year and look across and think of the extraordinary things that may happen during this new year – what does it hold for me I am wondering. A more crowded life than I have ever lived before, more anxiety, more pain, more excitement, more vivid impressions that I have ever felt before. Or just death. I feel most interested for I cannot say I have premonition of this or that, only I realise a rather dramatic moment, this, at the end of the other years, before the one that really matters, dawns. I wish things didn't matter so much, that I was answerable to none but myself.[1]

Ten months later, doubly armed with the status of an Official War Artist, and fortified by his front-line credentials, he embarked on his campaign to paint the war. Although the fighting around the pulverised village of Passchendaele, on the Ypres Salient, was in its last agonising phase, Paul found it nearly impossible to actually witness the front-line for himself. He complained to Charles Masterman – head of the British War Propaganda Bureau – that he was struggling to 'set the machinery of a somewhat reluctant headquarters to working on getting me put at least within gunshot. The truth is that it takes hours getting backwards and forwards through the traffic, which is very heavy and complicated about here.'[2] Luckily, he was still in the hands of his plucky Irish driver who drove him fearlessly across the exposed battlefield, but not for long. In one accident his 'chef' was 'precipitated into the windscreen and messed up his mouth. With true spirit and the nice feeling of a faithful servant he said "How fortunate it wasn't you, sir!"'[3] Despite nagging irritations over his accommodation, his meals and having to pay for his chauffeur's food, Paul did not dawdle. His work rate reached new levels of concentration. Often producing twelve to twenty drawings a day he had, by mid-November 1917, produced a core of new work, some of them he reckoned to be 'good ones'. They had, however, been hard-won. Paul had managed to position himself close enough to the fighting to be 'damned

1. Paul to Gordon Bottomley, letter no. 102, *Poet and Painter*, 1 January 1917.
2. Paul to Masterman, 4 November 1917; Nash file, Imperial War Museum. Paul summarised his frustrations thus: 'I was expected to operate from G.H.Q. I am determined to operate around the Front Line trenches. I begin my campaign. Difficulties of an infantry subaltern behaving like a Staff Captain. I evolve a technique. Eventually I get where I want to be.' (*Outline,* p. 216.)
3. Earning Paul's praise that he 'was most touched'.

near killed – the bosche seems to have got wind of my coming & shelled me most rudely every time I opened my book.'[4] He probably exposed himself to greater danger as an official artist than he ever had as an infantry officer. His notes record the intensity of his work at this time:

> I realise no one in England knows what the scene of the war is like. They cannot imagine the daily and nightly background of the fighter. If I can, I will show them … Visit to Brigade H.Q. Zillebeke. The chance I have been waiting for. Sanctuary Wood at dawn. Gheluvelt. The German pill-box. I escape from the Brigadier. Adventures in Passchendaele. I draw the German Front line. The mule track. Sunrise at Inverness Copse. About noon I get back to H.Q. I have made fourteen drawings. I fall asleep for hours.[5]

This snappy, staccato grammatical style found a graphic parallel in his drawings. Out of the horror of the hollowed hell of the Salient he began to distill a new poetry.[6] Compared to the benign and enchanted scenery of St Eloi and Messines, his observations were now raw, even brutal:

> See the beauty of these camps by the roadside, all the tents are painted in savage patterns of green, red, orange and black. The bright red rusted corrugated iron roofs have been skilfully mottled with a huge design of black tree shapes spreading over the scarlet rust … How interesting in form these once stiff houses look, a rhythmic ruin of tumbling forms. What wonderful things are ruins, I begin to believe in the Vorticist doctrine of destruction almost.[7]

Having been witness to camouflage and chaos, dereliction and danger Paul translated the trauma that he had experienced around Passchendaele into austere drawings and biting prose. Newly armed with a novel graphic language he realized he now had something to say. His message was unsparing and uncompromising; his writing amongst the most vivid to come out of the war:

> I have just returned, last night, from a visit to Brigade Headquarters up the line [he wrote to his wife in late 1917] and I shall not forget it as long as I live. I have seen the most frightful nightmare of a country more conceived by Dante or Poe than by nature, unspeakable, utterly indescribable. In the fifteen drawings I have made I may give you some idea of its horror, but only being in it and of it can ever make you sensible of its dreadful nature and of what our men in France have to face. We all have a vague notion of the terrors of a battle, and can conjure up with the aid of some of the more inspired war correspondents and the pictures in the Daily Mirror some vision of battlefield; but no pen or drawing can convey this country – the normal setting of the battles taking place, day and night, month after month. Evil and the incarnate fiend alone can be master of this war, no glimmer of God's hand is seen anywhere. Sunset and sunrise are blasphemous,

4. Paul to Masterman, 16 November 1917; Paul Nash file, Imperial War Museum.
5. *Outline*, p. 216.
6. John Rothenstein, quoted in Ferguson, *The Arts in Britain*, p. 106.
7. Paul to Margaret Nash, 21 March 1917.

> they are mockeries to man, only the black rain out of the bruised and swollen clouds all through the bitter black of night is fit atmosphere in such a land. The rain drives on, the stinking mud becomes more evilly yellow, the shell holes fill up with green-white water, the roads and tracks are covered in inches of slime, the black dying trees ooze and sweat and the shells never cease. They alone plunge overhead, tearing away the rotting tree stumps, breaking the plank roads, striking down horses and mules, annihilating, maiming, maddening, they plunge into the grave that is this land; one huge grave, and cast up on it the poor dead. It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless. I am no longer an artist interested and curious, I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever. Feeble, inarticulate, will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth, and may it burn their lousy souls.[8]

Paul's anger was converted into a suite of taut drawings, each one scooped out of the mud, the barren ridgelines, and filthy craters of the Salient. In such works as *Rain: Lake Zillebeke* or *After the Battle*[9] Paul created a new calligraphy of war; the drawings scored and scratched with uncompromising diagonals, the incessant rain engraved in stabbing lines across the surface, the ashen wastes of the battlefield dense with impenetrable strokes of his pen. Nothing daunted him: neither the weird sight of a tree-trunk adorned in barbed wire nor a close-up of driving raindrops falling heavily into the convulsed earth. Even where the textures are sensuous, the line is invariably stiff, with a caustic edginess that is quite chilling. Paul's interpretations of this toxic world, wrote Arnold Bennett, were without parallel or precedent:

> Lieutenant Nash has seen the Front simply and largely. He has found the essentials of it – that is to say, disfigurement, danger, desolation, ruin, chaos – the little figures of men creeping devotedly and tragically over the waste. The convention he uses is ruthlessly selective. The wave-like formations of shell-holes, the curve of shell-bursts, the straight lines and sharply defined angles of wooden causeways, decapitated trees, the fangs of obdurate masonry, the weight of heavy skies, the human pawns of battle.[10]

Fifty-six new pieces of work – five of these in oil, five lithographs, a significant portfolio of original drawings on brown paper – were exhibited in a powerful show at the Leicester Galleries in May 1918. By any standards, Paul had created a distinctive vision of war. Deeply moved by the gross violation of nature he devised a new syntax of despoliation, that mirrored the vast emptiness, the abraded surfaces, and the defiled hollows that were the essence of the Western Front.

Many others were struggling to evolve such a language. Not far from where Paul had hunched in concentration over his drawing board, the official

8. Letter, 13 November 1917, to Margaret, *Outline*, pp. 210–11.
9. Paul Nash, *Rain: Lake Zillebeke*, 1918, lithograph, 25.5 x 36.2 cm, IWM:ART 1603. Paul Nash, *After the Battle*, 1918, pen and water-colour, 47 x 60.1 cm, IWM:ART 2706. Paul Nash, *Wire*, 1918, ink, pastel and water-colour, 48.5 x 63.4 cm, IWM:ART 2705.
10. Arnold Bennett, foreword, *Void of War*, Leicester Galleries, May 1918.

Australian photographer Frank Hurley was adjusting the cumbersome paraphernalia of his plate-glass camera and tripod and staring nonplussed into the deserted waste of the Ypres Salient. A veteran of Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated second expedition to the Antarctic in 1914–16, he was trying to capture the sprawling mess of the battlefield in a single frame:

> Everything is on such a wide scale. Figures scattered, atmosphere dense with haze and smoke – shells that would simply not burst when required. All the elements of a picture were there, could they but be brought together and condensed.[11]

Having endured the barren vistas of the southern ice-fields Hurley was deeply frustrated by the diffuse character of the war in Flanders – the lack of focal points, its vastness, the sprawling anonymity. Other equally perplexed photographers – such as the Canadian Ivor Castle – fabricated their own battle compositions in the darkroom, combining negatives one on top of another to create a composite version of trench warfare. With a little judicious cropping an innocent image could be transformed into something more aggressive, and, like Hurley, he courted controversy by superimposing shrapnel clouds and bomb-bursts into the clear skies. Being flat for long distances, the Flanders landscape was a convenient and uncomplicated setting for these staged multi-layered 'combats'.[12]

But photography could not visualise emptiness; it could only allude to absences. Even words failed to convey the intensity of its emptiness. Faced with the phantasmagoric, lunar features of the Western Front, the imagination froze:

> It seemed quite unthinkable that there was another trench over there a few yards away just like our own …Not even the shells made that brooding watchfulness more easy to grasp; they only made it more grotesque. For everything was so paralysed in calm, so unnaturally innocent and bland and balmy. You simply could not take it in.[13]

Visiting the Western Front in 1916, the writer Reginald Farrer suggested that it was quite wrong to regard the 'huge, haunted solitude' of the modern battlefield as empty. 'It is more', he argued, 'full of emptiness … an emptiness that is not really empty at all.'[14] Paul Nash visualised this idea of a crowded and lethal vacuum, borrowing Farrer's phrase the 'Void of War' and populating its barrenness with latent violence.

He did so by adapting the pictorial innovations of Cubism and Futurism, developing its geometric shapes, staccato movement, and fractured planes to create a tense and busied surface which did away with the normal hierarchies between motif and background. From cubist painters he learned to present both negative and positive forms as equal, implying that objects in a landscape

11. Hurley's diary, quoted in Lennard Bickel, *In Search of Frank Hurley* (Australia: Macmillan, 1980) p. 61.
12. See Jane Carmichael, *First World War Photographers* (London: Routledge, 1989).
13. Reginald Farrer, *The Void of War: Letters from Three Fronts* (London: Constable, 1918) p. 113.
14. Reginald Farrer, *Void of War*, p. 55. Paul wrote to Gordon Bottomley from the Western Front over Easter, 1917: 'In the midst of the monstrous event stands Man; the thousands and the hundreds of thousands, the combatants and the non-combatants; who all have one wish and one goal; to cast aside the war; to render its effect invisible so far as they can be understood; to let a well-earned Peace grow its grass over the victims and to carry on as before.' In *Poet and Painter*, Easter 1917.

are not standing free but are locked in place by overwhelming invisible forces – sound waves, noxious gases, pervasive dangers, and, overhead, reconnaissance 'planes and sausage balloons – the ever-present 'eye in the air'. Ever since visiting the Front he had become aware of these inversions in nature of space. Once, trudging along a road leading to the Front he had become more and more aware of 'a humming in the air', a sound rising and falling:

> You look up and after a second's search you can see a gleaming shaft in the blue like a burnished silver dart, another then another. Then comes a new noise, two or three cracks from somewhere in the near farms, a second, and as you gaze the blue sky is charmingly speckled by little shining clouds of white.[15]

Paul knew from his time with the Hampshires that on the modern battlefield danger was omnidirectional, threat lay in every conceivable direction not merely from the fixed enemy line to one's front but from underneath, overhead, and from the rear. All along the Western Front tunnelling companies dug deep into the earth, burying huge piles of explosives underneath the enemy's line; overhead the skies were patrolled and fought over by squadrons of flimsy aeroplanes. Furthermore, the war stretched further afield than ever before: for the first time in history the Home Front was becoming as vulnerable as the fighting line: Zeppelin raids occurred in London; artillery fire in Flanders could be heard from the Home Counties.[16] The gap between fear and safety was narrowing. Indeed, both Paul and Margaret were in London in December 1915 when the first air raid occurred over London; they heard the bombs landing and rushed to the rooftops of Queen Alexandra Mansions where the vast cigar-shaped object passed menacingly overhead. To Margaret, the Zeppelin 'appeared like some terrible dream from Dante's inferno.'[17]

This novel spatial awareness helps explain the complex narratives of many of the paintings that Paul later showed at the Leicester Galleries. In *The Mule Track*[18] the sense of confusion and dislocation could not be more acute; it is as if we are watching a film with numerous incidents occurring simultaneously in every corner, explosions are rendered as strange animations; artillery barrages are represented as force-fields; sharp diagonal edges sit uncomfortably next to diffuse patches of paint; the pictorial impact is 'eccentric, fantastic and unreal'[19] but at the same time it is immediately convincing. In these seminal drawings and paintings Paul was beginning to clarify the mysteries of the battle landscape in concrete terms. Through exposure to the irradiated landscape of the Front, his use of colour had also become more ambitious and he no longer feared it as an expressive medium. 'Huge spouts of black, brown and orange mould burst into the air amid a volume of white smoke, flinging wide incredible debris, while the crack and roar of the explosion reverberates in the valley.'[20] In one of his most powerful renditions of the savage inferno,

15. *Outline*, 21 March 1917.
16. At the height of the great artillery barrages on the Western Front the firing was clearly heard on Beachy Head; the huge mine explosions on the Messines Ridge in 1917 were heard by the Prime Minister in Downing Street, and were said to have been audible as far as Dublin. It is argued that the combined sound of the simultaneous mine explosions comprised the loudest man-made explosion ever made.
17. Margaret Nash, *Memoir*, p. 10.
18. Paul Nash, *The Mule Track*, 1918, oil on canvas, 61 x 91.4 cm, IWM:ART 1153.
19. Bertram explores the eccentric, fantastic and unreal 'battlescapes' in Anthony Bertram (1955) p. 98; as does Herbert Read in his examination of the 'phantasmagoric' in Herbert Read, *Paul Nash* (London: Penguin, 1944), p. 8.
20. Paul to Margaret Nash, 6 June 1916.

PAUL NASH

WE ARE MAKING A NEW WORLD

1918 • oil on canvas • 71.1 x 91.4 cm

Void[21] the acidic colours are used sparingly but to great effect; specks of orange are trickled across the canvas like a trail of blood that links the abandoned lorry, a flattened corpse, the shattered duckboards, and a tank pitched headlong into the mire of the middle-distance. 'Barren, sightless, godless', this is pitiless tragedy on an epic scale.[22]

The factual titles of Paul's work in this, his second exhibition of war paintings, might have been lifted straight from a gazetteer of the Western Front; comprising as they did a litany of ominous place names – Ridge Wood, Hill 60, Gheluvelt, Lake Zillebeke, Vimy Ridge – that would become revered sites of memory after the war. Yet, possibly the most acclaimed of his work in the Leicester Galleries was the heavily-ironic *We are Making a New World*, a brazenly symbolic canvas developed from a drawing of a sunrise at Inverness Copse, a derelict woodland deep in the Ypres Salient.[23] In dispensing with any reference to a particular place Paul was signalling that this bold, rather economic, design summarised his feelings about the war. In both drawing and painting the sun is white against a pale blue sky, and the undulating earth a porridge of ochre, but Paul chose in the canvas to render the mass of cloud as a dull but potentially virulent red, not unlike the colour of dried blood. Precisely why he did this is difficult to gauge. Could he have been suggesting that the very 'source of life has spilt its blood' or that it may yet regenerate the waste which is so brilliantly illuminated by the rising sun?[24] As both brothers knew, sunrise and sunset were moments of heightened tension in the trenches of the Western Front, associated with the anxious minutes of 'stand to' when combatants peered into the greyness of No Man's Land in readiness for a twilight assault on their lines. Any lingering Romantic or poetic allusions associated with the rising or the setting of the sun were soon dashed in the actualities of the trenches. However, the emotions embedded in this canvas can seem a little forced, the heavily ironic title perhaps unnecessary. Unlike other work made on the Front the quality of observation in *We are Making a New World* has been ceded to rather easy lines and uncharacteristically casual arabesques, but this painting – with its ironic title and symbolic undertow – is a crucial bridge, a prophetic marker, between his war art and the dream-laden memoryscapes of the decades ahead.[25]

JOHN'S FINAL BATTLE

By early summer 1918, as Field Marshal Haig's massed forces pushed the German army back across northern France, the brothers having been separated for so long joined arms again in their cherished Buckinghamshire. Together they rented a large temporary space, previously used for herb-drying, at Chalfont St Peter, near Gerrard's Cross, a 'roomy place with large windows down both sides, an ample studio'. 'How difficult it is', Paul wrote to Gordon

21. Paul Nash, *Void,* 1918, oil on canvas, 71.4 x 91.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (transfer from the Canadian War Memorials, 1926).
22. Phrase taken from Paul Gough, *A Terrible Beauty* (Bristol: Sansom and Company, 2009).
23. Paul Nash, *We are Making a New World*, 1918, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm, IWM: ART 1146.
24. Alternatively, the pale disc might be taken for the moon, its pale whitish light more suited to Nash's preference for nocturnes. Given the title of the canvas this is unlikely, but the ambiguity remains and an ominous sense permeates the image. After all, he knew (as did all front-line soldiers) that it was not the sun that had to be feared on the front, but a clear moonlit night that illuminated No Man's Land and made patrols stand out in sharp relief – an easy target for the enemy. This complex tension and overlap between the power of the sun and the moon, 'the great luminaries' is explored elsewhere in this volume.
25. Paul Fussell writes about this in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, in section VII 'Arcadian Recourses' and John Ferguson, in *The Arts in Britain*, draws comparisons between this canvas and the painter's later works (Ferguson, p. 106).

Bottomley, 'folded as we are in the luxuriant green country, to put it aside and brood on those wastes in Flanders, the torments, the cruelty & terror of this war. Well it is on *these* I brood for it seems the only justification of what I do now – if I can help to rob war of the last shred of glory the last shine of glamour.'[26] As Official War Artists both brothers had been encouraged to revisit the battle front at the government's expense. But they had had enough of the war and declined the offer. Instead, they received from the War Office a truck-load of barbed wire, duckboards, gun-chains and corrugated iron as a means of jogging their memory and stimulating their imagination. Neither men needed the stimulus; their creativity was in full force. They had also the further incentive of major commissions for a proposed Hall of Remembrance. Paul had been invited to paint one of seventeen super-pictures, each one some six feet by eleven in homage to the huge dimensions of Uccello's sixteenth-century masterpiece *The Rout of San Romano*, which was hanging in the National Gallery, London, and had been chosen by the British War Memorials Committee (along with the smaller *Surrender at Breda* by Diego Velasquez) as a template for the paintings that were to line the walls of the proposed memorial building.[27] It was a memorable – and ultimately final – period of painterly brotherhood:

> Jack & I are both temporarily seconded & employed by the Ministry of Information to paint pictures for records & propaganda – actually what we like, so long as it is interesting enough under these somewhat vague headings. To start off with we have a large memorial painting to do and this is exercising our resources at the moment. My size is 10 ft by something so I am going to be busy. No I am not going to draw the Navy – yet! I must describe our present ménage down here. We have taken a large shed, formerly used for drying herbs. It is a roomy place with large windows down both sides, an ample studio – here we work. Jack is lately married – a charming girl whom we all adore … They live in rooms next to the shed & Bunty & I have a room in the old farm … We all lunch together in the studio where there is a piano so our wives enchant us with music at times thro' the day. A phantastic existance (sic) as all lives seem these days but good while it lasts & should produce something worthwhile I suppose. France and the trenches would be a mere dream if our minds were not perpetually bent on those scenes.[28]

Before long both brothers made it clear that they wanted the commission done. They were becoming fed up with trying to remember the Western Front, conspiring to work on their 'bloody war pictures' until six o'clock each evening so as to satisfy their contract, and then turn to their 'own' work, landscapes untouched by the ghastly war, landscapes that stretched tantalisingly before them at the back door of Tubb's Farm.

Yet, it was here in the barn that John created one of the most memorable

26. Paul to Gordon Bottomley, *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 117, 16 July 1918, p. 99.
27. See Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony and Remembrance* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2004).
28. Paul to Gordon Bottomley, *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 117, 16 July 1918, p. 99.

images of the Great War. While Paul was engaged with his *magnum opus* painting, *The Menin Road*, John was recreating on canvas a stark memory of a battle that had taken place in the snow just days after he sent his last Green Envelope to Christine.

Over the Top is one of the most frank, even brutal, depictions of war to emerge from the British art schemes, perhaps unique in its portrayal of a specific action as witnessed by one of the official artists.[29] It records an event on the morning of 30th December 1917 at 'Welsh Ridge' near Marcoing, a little town south-west of Cambrai in France. Having been withdrawn to the support trenches, the First Battalion of the Artists' Rifles was hastily recalled to the front-line to repel a German attack. John was amongst the unit as they made their way in the freezing cold through crowded trenches that had in places been flattened by artillery fire. Arriving at zero hour, in charge of fourteen men in the Bombing Section, he was cursorily shown a map but given only vague indications of his objectives, except to understand that the daylight attack was actually designed as a diversion to a bombing raid up a support trench on his left. With undue haste B Company was summarily dispatched over the parapet towards the enemy.

> There was not a shot for a while, suddenly the Germans opened up and that seemed to be every machine gun in Europe … We never got to grips with the enemy but were stopped in sight of them. We had to 'hole up' in craters and shell holes till nightfall and then get back to our original line. Casualties were very heavy.[30]

A disastrous and unnecessary attack, casualties were indeed heavy: 68 of the 80 officers and men were killed or wounded; only one sergeant, and the Quartermaster were left. Nash later described it as 'in fact, pure murder',

> … and I was lucky to escape untouched … It was bitterly cold and we were easy targets against the snow and in daylight … I think the vivid memory of the occasion helped me when I painted the picture and provoked whatever intensity of feeling may be found in it.[31]

'The picture 'Over the Top' has always been of particular interest to me,' wrote one veteran of that attack,' because the first time I saw it, some years after Nash painted it, immediately recalled in every detail the early morning scene at Welsh Ridge on December 30th 1917':

> Just before daybreak on December 30th the Germans – taking advantage of the mist – launched an attack, capturing most of the positions which had been held by the Regiment up till the previous night. As a result of this, the Regiment was called upon to deliver a counter attack and recapture the lost positions. The attacking Companies were 'A' and 'B' with 'D' in support and 'C' in reserve …

29. John Nash, *'Over the Top': 1st Artists' Rifles at Marcoing, 30th December 1917*, oil on canvas, 79.8 x 108 cm, IWM:ART 1656.
30. John Nash in a letter to David Brown, 15 January 1974, and conversation 4 March 1974, quoted in *We are Making a New World* (Edinburgh, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 1974), entry no. 32. Reprinted in Sir John Rothenstein, *John Nash* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1983), p. 48.
31. John Nash to David Brown.

JOHN NASH

'OVER THE TOP'
1ST ARTISTS' RIFLES AT MARCOING,
30TH DECEMBER 1917
1918 • oil on canvas • 79.8 x 108 cm

> The Regiment moved up the front line, which may sound quite an easy operation today, but which was actually – owing to the fatigued condition of many of the troops, and the difficulty in making reasonable progress owing to the frozen state of the trenches and obstructions in the said trenches caused by casualties, also heavy shelling – a very tedious and trying movement. As a matter of fact the move was so slow that my own Company ('B') only arrived in the front line at zero hour and had to jump out 'Over the Top' immediately on arrival. This is what you actually see in Nash's picture! The snow and mist; men of 'B' Company characterised by the blue square on the upper arm of their greatcoats; the sergeant with a Lewis gun, already the sole survivor of his Lewis-gun section, and later a casualty himself …[32]

Compared to Paul's sophisticated painted surfaces, complex designs and rich tonalities, *Over the Top* is actually quite lumpen, its tonal range limited to dark silhouette against blinding white. The design is simple to the point of ordinariness: a gash-like trench, sloping snowfield, close horizon, and a pewter-grey sky; the oil paint is laid in thick, rather uncompromising strokes; other than the ripped brown earth and the heaving sky, there is little other colour. Yet, the material impact of the picture's construction conspires with the lacerating narrative to create an icon of quite overwhelming gravity. With its hunch-shouldered, ordinary men and its deadpan dead few other contemporary images carry the burden of grimness as completely as this raw, primitive picture. It withstands comparison with his brother's remarkable work, but gains by its unerring simplicity. John Rothenstein was one of many who were profoundly impressed by 'its dignity, energy and grim harmony' regarding it as one of the most memorable – and accessible – images of battle ever painted.[33]

Before the war John had been by far the more confident in oils of the two brothers. If 'Over the Top' shows John at his most direct and dramatic, 'Oppy Wood' – also painted in the herb-drying shed – shows him increasingly confident, even sophisticated in his handling of paint on a significant scale, some six feet by seven. By comparison Paul was untested in both the medium and in working on this scale, nor was he so accomplished in the rendering of the human form. 'Oils for me', wrote Paul from their shared studio in the Chilterns, 'were a complete experiment you know – a piece of towering audacity as I had never painted before.'[34] Paul knew he had to step up to the mark. In fact, he had little choice: the Hall of Remembrance scheme required large iconic paintings, and Paul knew that to be reckoned as an artist of worth alongside the other commissioned *grandees* – William Orpen, John Singer Sargent, D.Y. Cameron, Charles Sims – as well as his younger rivals, Richard Nevinson, Wyndham Lewis, William Roberts – he had to produce a 'signature' painting. He chose as his subject the main arterial road between Ypres and Menin, a road in name only as it had been torn up and severely damaged by accurate shellfire and was usually deserted by daylight. It was considered to be one of the most dangerous parts of the entire Western Front, with

32. *Artists' Rifles Gazette*, January 1935, p. 5.
33. Sir John Rothenstein, *John Nash* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1983), p. 50.
34. Paul to Gordon Bottomley, letter no. 117, *Poet and Painter*, 16 July 1918, p. 98. In 1912 Paul had confessed to Bottomley that he was rather slovenly in regard to his understanding of artist's materials: 'I have an unhappy thirst for bad paper I always do my best drawings on bad paper, I'm positively superstitious about it … As soon as I begin a design of pure white Whatman sheet I feel uneasy and invariably shave it & bathroom tap it to a state of emaciated collapse … But with regard to my mixed methods & muddled mediums I know I am rather a crawler … I feel tho' it all points to beginning oils I *want* to and I *ought* to, so I shall. (Nash to Bottomley, letter no. 48, *Poet and Painter*, 21 August 1912.)

PAUL NASH

THE MENIN ROAD
1919 • oil on canvas
182.8 x 317.5 cm

many notorious sites of battle strung out along the Menin Road as it headed east – Sanctuary Wood, Hooge Crater, Inverness Copse and the infamous Hellfire Corner, formed at the junction of two strategically important roads. Paul knew the place well. On one memorable sketching expedition along the Menin Road his Irish chauffeur had 'piloted the car so skilfully that he timed the constant shell bursts on the road, any of which might immediately have killed' both of them.[35]

At first sight, the painting appears to be the customary *leitmotif* of the Western Front – scattered shell-holes, tree stumps, an infinite vista of mud and mire – a wasteland inimical to human life.[36] But Paul knew that he had to design an image that was much more than an eleven feet panorama of uncoordinated chaos and despair. He had to compose the chaos. Drawing on his time in the front-line, he created a highly sophisticated image that encapsulates the spatial disjunctions of the empty battlefield. By subtly dividing the canvas into three broad bands – a deep foreground of water-filled craters, the lateral axis of the road, and the shattered landscape in the distance – he drew out the different directional properties in each of the three zones without losing either the phantasmagoric properties of the emptied landscape or is noisome ambience.[37] Through a masterly understanding of the peculiar properties of the so-called 'empty' battlefield, Paul condensed into one painting three types of pictorial movement: the awkward, obstructed path across the foreground; the delicately balanced lateral sweep of the road; and the unfulfilled progress into the distance where the 'Promised Land' of the horizon was unreachable, locked in some unimaginable future.[38]

Although dwarfed by the scale of desolation, the figures play a pivotal role in *The Menin Road*. The two larger soldiers are, after all, at the very symmetrical heart of the huge painting. For an artist most often associated with unpeopled nature, Paul's landscapes are heavily imbued with the presence of man. He knew how to populate emptiness: his work expresses 'an intense 'awareness' of man, not in his person but in his effects, in the presence of the absent'.[39] Bertram has calculated that some thirty of his war pictures (a total of eighty pieces) contain people. Ten of these have the figure as the main subject, though in a drawing such as *Leaving the Trenches*, all we see are their backs and tin helmets bobbing along the twisting trenches. Unlike his brother, Paul was at his least assured when rendering figures but he knew that they played a critical role in lending scale to his panoramas of devastation. There is a pitiable helplessness about the animals running amok in *The Mule Track*[40] or the tiny figures scattered across a duckboard track in *Void*, hunched diagonally as if marching doggedly into a howling gale, caught up in the 'black drama' of war's void.[41] Amidst the turbulence, however, there is also something still and muted; despite the painted shell

35. Paul quoted in James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 85.
36. Paul Nash, *The Menin Road*, 1919. oil on canvas. 182.8 x 317.5 cm, IWM:ART 2242. The painting was originally to be called *A Flanders Battlefield*, Paul remembering it as a scene near Gheluvelt in the 'Tower Hamlets District' of the Salient. It was commissioned by the museum in April 1918, and Nash worked on it between June and February 1919, completing it in a studio in London.
37. Richard Cork, 'Images of Extinction: Paul Nash at the Western Front', in Jane Howlett and Rod Mengham (eds.) *The Violent Muse: Violence and the artistic imagination in Europe, 1910–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 60.
38. This analysis was explored in Paul Gough, 'The Empty Battlefield: Painters and the First World War', *Imperial War Museum Review*, no. 8 (London: Imperial War Museum, and Leo Cooper, 1993) pp. 38–47.
39. From Anthony Bertram (1955), p. 99.
40. Paul Nash, *The Mule Track*, 1918, oil on canvas, 61 x 91.4 cm, IWM:ART 1153. On the occasion of Nash's work being included in a show in the USA, Bottomley was animated by 'the Mule Track' painting, writing to Nash that he was glad to have it in reproduction 'as eight Nevinsons, and 'Spring in the trenches' as thirty-two Orpens', adding 'I am happy to see you making such a brave and vital and convincing show in the new world'. Bottomley to Paul Nash, letter no. 124, *Poet and Painter*, 11 June 1919, p. 108.
41. See: Paul Nash, *Men Marching at Night*, 1918, lithograph on paper, 51.5 x 42.1 cm, IWM:ART 1605. The phrase 'black drama' is used by Margot Eates, *The Master of the Image*, p. 24. The Menin Road is now the N8, the junction that once formed Hellfire Corner is now a roundabout shared with the N37.

bursts, the busied surfaces, and the tumbling figures this suite of paintings has the power to remain silent as eloquent witnesses often are. And equally, there is something sensuous about the paint itself, one can sense Paul's enjoyment at coming to terms with this new material, handling the wet and fluid paint with a maturity that belied his years, and so very different in temperament from the detached linear stricture of line, pen and wash.[42] Indeed, he confessed that his induction into large-scale oil painting had been 'a real adventure & I did enjoy it.'

Upon reflection Paul considered *The Menin Road* to be the best thing he had ever done. He was right. His subsequent commission for the Canadian government, the slightly smaller canvas of *A Night Bombardment*, is impressive for its sparseness and its taut design, but it lacks the authentic unity of vision that he captured so effortlessly in canvases produced only months earlier.[43] Perhaps, like many combatant-artists, Nash was exhausted by the war. The asthmatic condition that would bring about his premature death in 1946 had possibly been exacerbated by his weeks in the trenches. Making the paintings was equally frustrating:

> How it ever got painted I don't know for I have experienced every sort of interruption, disappointment & delay since the day I started to work. It has been painted in four different places being begun in the country in a large shed, then moved to a bungalow, then shipped to London where I painted most of it in a tiny room & could only step back a few yards from the canvas – finally I got it into a decent sized room where it was finished.[44]

Yet, these irritations aside, Paul – more so than John – had emerged from the war as one of the most important and original young British painters of the period.[45] Rather perversely, the war had accelerated his development as a painter, fusing his 'early pastoral vision with the forces of modernity', fuelling his painterly imagination, and launching him to a standing he could never have anticipated in his fallow year at the Slade. His name was known, his work was selling, his pictures were widely reproduced, and his network of supporters and admirers extended further than he could have imagined a few years earlier when, on New Year's Eve, he had stood on the edge of the year and wondered at the 'crowded life' that lay before him.[46] At the age of thirty he returned to the 'Old World' crammed with the vivid impressions of war and peace, his innocence and idealism strained, if not shattered, in the trenches of the Western Front. Ahead, he wrote ominously, lay the 'struggles of a war artist without a war'.[47]

42. My thanks to fellow painter David Haste for a number of the ideas raised in this section.
43. Paul Nash, *A Night Bombardment*, oil on canvas, 1918–1919, 182.9 x 214.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (transfer from the Canadian War Memorials, 1921). Nash spent five weeks in France as an Official War Artist; four for the British War Memorials Committee, and a further week – much to his joy at the brief extension – working for the Canadian War Memorials Committee in the Vimy Sector. He returned to England on 7 December 1917.
44. Nash to Gordon Bottomley, letter no. 121, *Poet and Painter*, letter received by Bottomley 25 April 1919, p. 103.
45. Paul complained that he had in fact made little financial gain from his period with the Ministry of Information. In addition to their wanting him to finance his own exhibition, they also required him to sell his paintings at a forty percent discount. King reckoned that Nash made only £10 from his Leicester Galleries exhibition (James King, p. 85).
46. Several of Nash's war pictures were reproduced in *Country Life*, and fifteen issued as volume III of the publication *British Artists at the Front*, sponsored by Wellington House. It included a pencil portrait by Rothenstein, an introduction by C.E. Montague and a biographical essay by Jan Gordon (under the pseudonym Jon Salis). Despite the prestige of the publication, Nash was dismissive of what he considered Montague's overripe prose: 'All that talk by Montague in the prevace [sic] is nonsense of course. Wire does and did grow as it is shown here [in the picture *Landscape* 1917], and I was neither mad nor drunk or trying to show an abnormal vision when I drew it.'
47. *Outline*, p. 218.

JOHN NASH

THE CORNFIELD

1918 • oil on canvas • 68.6 x 76.2 mm

5 JOHN NASH: BETWEEN THE WARS

As Paul worried about being a 'war artist without a war', so John settled back into civilian life, or as much of normality as he could muster after his intense period of active service. In May 1918, soon after his return from the front-line, he married Christine Kühlenthal, the daughter of a chemist from the Rhineland who had emigrated to England and married a Scottish girl in 1891. Best man at their wedding was the painter Gilbert Spencer, younger brother of Stanley and himself a veteran of the war. Twelve years later John was best man at Gilbert's marriage to Ursula Bradshaw. It was a standing joke between John and Gilbert that they should appear to live so fully in the shadow of their elder brothers. Neither seemed unnecessarily concerned by their perpetual eclipse.[1]

A dedicated and loving wife, Christine performed a wider range of familial, professional and secretarial duties than most other spouses. Although she had shown real promise as an artist, having taught painting at Roger Fry's Omega Workshops in central London, and regularly gave music lessons, she promptly abandoned these ambitions in the service of working for John. Soon after their engagement, while he was still serving in France, she oriented her life to him, assuming absolute control of his financial arrangements, taking on his secretarial and organisational needs, mended his clothes, cooked, cleaned and maintained all their domestic activities single-handedly. She created an aura of untroubled calm in which John could paint undisturbed by petty irritations or daily chores. The arrangements lasted for decades.

Rather more unusually, Christine became John's 'scout', undertaking lengthy trips around the British Isles to seek subjects that might interest her husband. His paintings show how widely she foraged. There were repeated journeys to Wales – primarily the Gower Peninsula – to Cornwall, the Malverns, Bristol and Bath, and north to Scotland, particularly the Isle of Skye, where they set out on a painting expedition every summer. Christine was tasked in addition to locate suitably charming and quiet hotels where they might rest after a day's walking and painting. For John, and one assumes for his wife, it was a perfect arrangement.[2]

1. After his brother's death in 1959 Gilbert was invited to write his own reflections of growing up with Stanley. It was published as Gilbert Spencer, *Stanley Spencer by his brother Gilbert* (London: Gollancz, 1961; reprinted, Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 1991).
2. Amongst the paintings done in Bristol are *The Dredgers, Bristol Docks*, 1925, now in Swindon Art Gallery; and the later *Nocturne: Bristol Docks*, 1938, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. In Bath John painted *Canal Bridge, Sydney Place*, c.1927, Victoria Art Gallery, Bath; and *Suspension Bridge, Bath*, *c*.1927, Victoria Art Gallery, Bath.

Perhaps the most significant 'peacetime' painting, produced in the immediate wake of the war, was *The Cornfield*.[3] Contrived from studies made on Chalfont Common, it is markedly different from his pre-war work, reflecting a sudden maturity in his approach to colour and paint; a step-change stimulated perhaps by Paul's overnight conversion into an oil painter on a grand scale.

John described *The Cornfield* as his response to surviving the war, amazed at finding himself 'in the English countryside again and still alive'.[4] With its long shadows cast by the evening sun, *The Cornfield* also set a benchmark for John's work after the war. The saturated colour and finely articulated clumps of foliage are held in a rigid design by the solid triangular motif at the heart of the canvas, arranged like a haystack of cast shadow. Like so much of John's post-war work it combines that winning *melange* of calm detachment, rigorous observation, and understated passion for the English landscape that he knew so well.

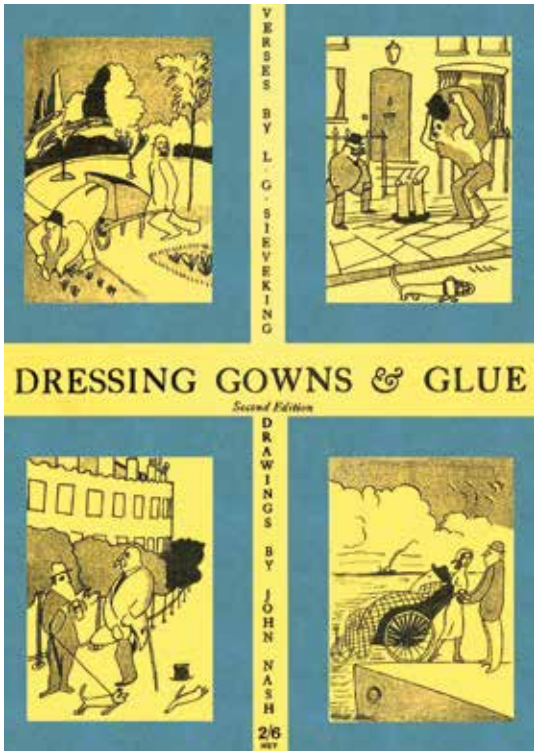
The Cornfield was bought by Sir Edward Marsh, who had developed a strong – and lasting – friendship with John. It had a place amongst dozens of contemporary paintings on the crowded walls of Marsh's rooms in Gray's Inn, London. 'Every available inch was occupied', observed one painter whose work also vied for pride of place, 'Pictures began in the hall, ran up the stairs, along passages and were only pulled up in the bathroom'. John later wrote a celebratory reflection of the collector:

> Eddie Marsh must have been one of my earliest patrons, as he was to so many young artists. I do not think his means were ample and he must have scraped his income to buy what his taste and enthusiasm drove him to acquire … His hospitality chiefly consisted in putting one up for the night or asking one to breakfast. I used to sleep in a narrow bed in one of the smaller rooms in his quarters at Raymond Buildings, and just above me and threatening, as I thought, to fall on me was Stanley Spencer's large painting *Apple Gatherers* …[5]

After their stay with Paul and Bunty in the 'barn' at Chalfont St Peter, John and Christine moved in autumn 1919 to a small flat above a chemist's shop in Gerrards Cross.[6] They spent long summers on painting expeditions not far away at Whiteleaf, Prince Risborough in Buckinghamshire, and the following year at Sapperton in Gloucestershire, a short distance west of Cirencester where many of the village buildings were built (or rebuilt) under the patronage of the Bathhurst family in the Cotswold Arts and Crafts style.

It was during their stay in Gerrards Cross that John began to illustrate books, an occupation that lasted throughout his artistic career and for which he is perhaps best known, more so possibly than for his canvases and watercolours. He certainly kept good company. In 1919 he provided the frontispiece, title

3. *The Cornfield*, 1918, Tate, London.
4. Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape: Places and Ideas in 20th Century English Painting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) p. 46.
5. An introduction by John in 'An Honest Patron: A Tribute to Sir Edward Marsh', sponsored by *The Liverpool Daily Post* and The Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool, 1976. In appearance, John noted, Marsh was neat and dapper, a monocle clenched 'under his up-twisted eyebrow gave him an added distinction. Scholar, Civil Servant, Patron of the Arts, his enthusiasm pervaded all branches'.
6. Their sudden departure from Chalfont St Peter is reputed to be due to Paul being pursued by a local man whose wife Paul is alleged to have seduced.



JOHN NASH

DRESSING GOWNS AND GLUE

1919 • illustrations for book cover

pages, vignettes, and fifteen exquisite line drawings for *Dressing Gowns and Glue* by Lance Sieveking, which had an introduction to the verse by G.K. Chesterton, a general introduction by Cecil Palmer, and a perceptive commentary on John's drawings by Max Beerbohm, who wrote:

> Let me fix my thoughts on John Nash. I wonder what he is like. I have never seen him. I know that he is a landscape painter, that he is young, that he is till lately a soldier in France, that he is Paul Nash's brother. An image of him begins to form itself in my mind. But this image dissolves itself when I look at these pen-and-ink drawings of his. It dissolves in laughter … Young John Nash may, for aught I know, be a perennial fount of gloom to his intimates. If so, he atones, assuredly to the utmost, when he takes pen in hand …
>
> We are shown an angry man who has just missed his stroke at golf; near him, a caddie grinning behind his hand; and view of the golf links. Admirable! The man's stockings and knickerbockers, his cap, his collar and tie, are so rendered that a tailor or hosier would not blush to sign them. The drawing of the caddie's fingers would satisfy and drawing-master in any municipal art school. The treatment of the golf-links is faithful, sensitive, reverent.[7]

The illustrator Douglas Percy Bliss, rather more pithily, felt that it was John's inimitable sense of humour, transcribed into finely judged line drawings which combined in him 'to make the best comic drawings of today' – quite an accolade from an artist, illustrator and educator in no lesser a publication than *A History of Wood Engraving*.[8]

John had honed his comic talent in dozens, probably hundreds of illustrated letters to Dora Carrington, to Paul, and to many correspondents who delighted in his energetic prose and matching line drawings. His ability to summarily capture gesture, posture and expression made him a popular cartoonist for *Punch*, which further liberated his anarchic side, never far beneath an outwardly ordered appearance. In 1928 he speculated in an article of 'what a relief it would be if one week *Punch* went mad and appeared upside down or, better still, no print at all, and if all their artists gave free rein to whatever absurdity possesses them that week'.[9] Line drawing lent itself to the print medium, especially block printing. In 1921 John became one of the founder members of the Society of Wood Engravers, going on to produce fine wood engravings for journal, periodicals, such as *Land and Water*, but also a great flow of illustrated books – Swift's *Directions to Servants*, Ovid's *Elegies*, *The Epigrams of John Davies,* and *Poisonous Plants* of 1927, which featured some of his finest cutting. The quality of drawing in the wood engraving *Thorn*

7. Max Beerbohm in *Dressing Gowns and Glue* by Lance Sieveking, pp. 13–15.
8. Douglas Percy Bliss, *A History of Wood Engraving* (London: Dent, 1928).
9. *The London Mercury*, November 1928.

Apple is perhaps unparalleled in the genre of British printing; here, John brings together a beautifully seen clarity of outline and weighted design, all enlivened by the subject's latent noxious danger.[10]

Like so many who knew the work of both Paul and John, Bliss was curious to compare John's engravings with his brother's. He assessed that John could 'be more sensitive and whimsical, more interested in natural objects for their own sakes.' Even in his more comic pieces, 'Podgy old men or languorous cats are not merely shapes or forms.'[11] Compared to Paul rather more angular designs, John Nash was the master of cool-handed precision, the logical but laborious craft of the graver, which resulted in these sharp, almost acidic renditions of fruit, flowers, vegetables bursting out of the pages of a book. For his part John liked to compare the constraints of wood engraving with the freedom afforded by oil painting:

> We hear so much about spontaneity, it is much to be desired in mediums which lend themselves to it. The brush or the pencil can be handled loosely … engraving demands a tight control and respectful deliberation…the engraver should know exactly what he is about to do within the limits of the block. Here chance and extempore decisions…are the last elements to be depended on.[12]

Yet, in 1935 John abandoned engraving altogether. His last illustrated book was *Flowers and Faces* by H.E. Bates, published by Golden Cockerel Press in that same year. These final engravings are powerful evocations of a blossoming, blooming fauna that throbs on the page with bountiful energy. John never gave a reason for laying down his engraving tool: perhaps the painstaking graft simply became too onerous. John Lewis, in his book on the artist as illustrator, suggested that having mastered the medium, John simply grew weary of it, bored by this most laborious and time-taking method of illustration. 'He could,' opined Lewis, 'do three or four line drawings in the time it took to do one wood engraving'. Others disagree. However, painting remained a constant, and despite the fear of genteel poverty it was the lure of oil on canvas that took him from the commercial production of prints and book illustration back to his attic studio.[13]

There was also the prospect of an occasional painting commission. While at Gerrards Cross John was invited, along with a number of the most talented young artists in the country at that time, to tender for a series of painted panels for Leeds Town Hall. The scheme, initiated by Sir John Sadler, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, was offered also to John's brother Paul, Jacob Kramer, Albert Rutherston, Stanley Spencer, Edward Wadsworth and H.S. Williamson. As is true of such decorative schemes it required a degree of co-operation between the artists and a shared commitment to the selection process. Rather predictably, Stanley Spencer would not co-operate, and

10. Clare Colvin, *John Nash: Book Designs* (The Minories, 1986).
11. John Rothenstein, 1983, p.67.
12. *The London Mercury*, November 1928.
13. John Lewis, *John Nash: The Painter as Illustrator,* with a foreword by Wilfred Blunt (London: The Pendomer Press, 1978).

firmly resisted any requirement that his designs ought to be inspected by a committee, however well intentioned. The project ground to a halt. John left it to his brother to vent their frustration:

> Now by his stupid action he has let us all down & hung up the scheme. This is certainly not what [Desmond] Coke w[ould] call in the Public School Tradition nor is it 'cricket' so called nor is it anything but bloody nonsensical arrogance on the part of a very young man who has become enlarged in the headpiece.

As spokesman for the small group of disappointed painters, the older Nash was adamant that Spencer 'be made to feel that we resent his actions as artists whom he has chosen to disregard as colleagues'.[14]

It was, however, little more than a temporary setback for John Nash. In 1921 he had his first one-person exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in London; his work sold, critics warmed to his depictions of the British countryside that he so cherished; patrons maintained their close support; Christine was busy spotting potential subjects and together they looked into a promising, though far from financially comfortable, future.

Leaving Gerrards Cross in 1922, John and Christine moved next to a large cottage in the village of Meadle, in Buckinghamshire. There they were to stay for the next highly productive twenty-two years. Here, at Lane End, in the shadow of the Chilterns, John created his first garden and it was here that he discovered his other abiding love and fascination – plants and gardening.

To understand and to most fully appreciate John Nash's landscapes is to recognise his love of gardening, not for its obvious pleasures of colour and brilliance but because it required a calm, durational commitment to the long-term. As Christopher Neve so brilliantly observes, gardening is concerned with 'imagination, patience, cunning and the element of surprise, with making something of beauty out of the dark, from almost nothing'.[15] Above all, gardening is a contemplative activity, a calm commitment to the future, in a pleasure necessarily deferred. It suited the pragmatist in John, an artist who remained unruffled and steady-handed whatever the subject. And where many artists have been drawn to their gardens as a means of enriching their palette, John was not overly excited by colour, nor necessarily with designing gardens, it was 'chiefly the architectural and structural qualities of plants that attracted him' and we can see this in the rigorously disciplined designs for his wood engravings.

If I could chose this life over again, John is once said to have remarked, I would be first a musician, a gardener second, and a painter a lowly third.[16] 'For years', he wrote to Edward Bawden, 'I have tried, not without some

14. Paul to John, quoted in John Rothenstein, 1983, pp. 58–9.
15. Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 48.
16. *Ibid*., p. 47.

success to be both a professional painter and an amateur gardener. One day I expect one of the roles will give way and I assure you it will be (regretfully) the gardener'.[17] And indeed, many of his richest collaborations were not with fellow artists, designers or editors but with nurserymen and fellow gardeners. As is often the case with creative people, the event that saw him aspire to become an 'artist plantsman' came about quite by chance:

> From this Six Hills nursery I ordered an Alpine Plant notoriously difficult to grow. The plant belied the name on the label and some miserable usurper appeared. I complained and received apologies with a replacement. Impressed by this courtesy, I sent the manager a small wood engraving of Bee Orchis. This was the beginning of a long friendship with the Nurseryman, Plant Collector or as he preferred it, 'Gardener' Clarence Elliot, and was an introduction to a vastly extended world of horticulture.[18]

John drew the plants gathered by Elliot on expedition in the Andes and the Falkland Islands, he wrote articles for *Gardening Illustrated*, drew new and rare species in the Chelsea Flower Show, and illustrated the Six Hills Nursery catalogue, of which a hundred copies were hand-coloured by him and Christine. Looking back in 1976 be recalled fondly how 'for nearly seventy years I have drawn plants for love or necessity and have never destroyed even slight sketches or notes in case they should be needed for reference … I feel a slight pencil flourish even of a part of a plant is more valuable than a photograph'.[19] John knew the need to combine accuracy with 'the spark of a live drawing', it needed a steady, calm delineation of essential form but also a feeling for the living subject:

> The open innocent countenance of a Daisy or Anemone may seem easy to draw, but they too can prove to be a snare, and sometimes I prefer the hooded Labiates, helmeted Monkshood and Balsma, or the leering countenance of Foxglove and Pentstemon.

Besides his botanical work, John's painting can be bracketed into two extensive groups of work: the great Buckingham series – the Hills of the Chilterns from Wendover to the Thames – which lasted the decade after the Armistice, and the East Anglia series which spanned a forty-year love affair with Suffolk. Woven throughout this vast *oeuvre* is an intensive litany of trees, woods, and forests. Few can match John's fascination with trees in all their infinite variety:

> Burnham Beeches are unlike any other beech woods in the country, for the trees have been pollarded and have grown to the most fantastic shapes and sizes with immense trunks, gnarled and decaying. They cover undulating ground which is crossed by several well kept gravel drives, which contrast strangely with the terrifying aspect of the trees.

17. John, an undated letter to Bawden in John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 97.
18. John Nash, *The Artist Plantsman* (Anthony D'Offay Gallery, October 1976).
19. *Ibid*.

John's understanding of the interior dimensions of the woods that rolled along the slopes of the Chiltern resulted in many fine paintings and a prose that easily rivalled his prolix brother:

> But it is to the beech-woods in mid-Bucks that the county owes its reputation. Winter is by no means the least beautiful of the seasons in the woods. The sun turns the carpet of the dead leaves to pale red and orange, over which the intricate shadows of the tree trunks and branches curve up and dip with every rise and fall of the ground. Or on a dull day, after rain a blue mist hangs in the woods, changing the leaves to a dark red through which the red soil shows in black rifts. The smooth green pillars of the beech trees streaked in black stand in endless quiet arcades. In Spring there is more movement, the trees wear sweeping dress, trail flounces, carry parasols of shrill acid green. The play of light on these com-plicated lacy masses of foliage is bewildering. Full summer seems heavy and quiet between the brilliance of Spring and Autumn: then the range of colours becomes extravagant, the woods are a conflagration of reds, browns and burning orange till the fire dies out and the skeleton of winter trees emerge again.[20]

Such a rich understanding of the Chilterns' woodland throughout the life cycle of a year is, as Allen Freer notes, quite marvellous, 'arising as it does from the precision of description, the accumulation of sensuous detail [expertly] controlled in a rhythmic and changing design.' John was at peace and at home with the rich undulating pasture, the innumerable streams and pools of Buckinghamshire; his paintings suffused by its hills and woods, the horizon pushed high up the picture plane, giving full vent to his ability to design its spatial topography. They are both panoramic and intimate, far-seeing but also firmly set in the earth, the complex motifs of nature understood visually with a gardener's eye to the practicalities of planting, but without losing the poetic possibilities inherent in picture-making. If paintings such as *The Moat, Grange Farm, Kimble*[21] have an air of brooding introspection, they are also images of quiet wonder, the more extraordinary for how much they reveal in the mundane, the casual appearance of a grassy verge or a patch of light spilling from a pond or moat. Self-trained to be a good, and appreciative, observer, John had that ability to open one's eyes to the 'wonder of the commonplace in landscape and flowers'. A walk with him was a series of slow revelations, to be sensitised to the innate patterns of nature, and to slowly appreciate the vital relationship between natural forms. It was though an intuitive gift, almost impossible to explain or to capture in prose, easily spoiled by verbal elaboration. Freer puts it most succinctly when he suggests that it is unmistakable in John's best pictures and it is what gives them 'their especial qualities of freshness, unity and unequivocal directness.' John understood, without needing to say it in words or letters, that when scrutinising a modest and undemonstrative landscape it is necessary to be alert to the smallest peculiarities, the most telling nuances of a general scene,

20. Quoted in Allen Freer, *'The Delighted Eye'*, pp. 19–20.
21. *The Moat, Grange Farm, Kimble*, Tate no. 5037.

and in his paintings he learned to describe the sense of a place through a patient appreciation of its subtleties.[22] John experienced the landscapes of the Chilterns and later of Suffolk slowly, almost ponderously, like a careful gardener studying the form of daisies and anemones, patiently drawing out their inner countenances. His sketches are often heavily annotated, with details of local colour, texture and the fall of light, though on occasion he left more poetic, even cryptic notes – 'rocks like whalemeat' – which suggest a rather different reading of the familiar places he visited again and again.

A measured spontaneity in his appreciation of nature was matched by a rigorously disciplined approach to actually making his art. Like many of his peers he had a very organised daily schedule: he drew outdoors throughout the year, making bulging portfolios of drawings that were essentially an annotated visual record of his daily strolls. He would take these drawings into his stuffy, dim and smoke-filled attic which served as his studio and there amidst a jumble of equipment, paints, tin lids and makeshift palettes – surrounded by plants, live, dead and dying ('his models' as he called them) – would transfer his drawings patiently and 'unruffled by temperament' onto canvas or watercolour painting. Applying his habitual firm – but light touch – he augmented them as need be with constant reference back to his notes and site sketches. After they had moved to Suffolk in the mid-1940s, their new home afforded an endless variety of motifs. Merely by gazing from his studio window or from the back door John had an inexhaustible supply; 'the track coming down to end of the domain in summer, and again in the snow: the ponds lost behind the bamboos and the gunneras in July and then stripped naked in the January frost. The black barn, the *Blenheim* weighed down with apples in September.'

John and Christine's sojourn in the Chilterns lasted throughout the 1920s and 30s, punctuated by their frequent expeditions across the British Isles in search of fresh subjects. Visiting the West Country in the mid-Twenties and again in 1937 John made memorable paintings, including some of the few urban views that he would ever paint, of the docks, the dredgers and paddle-steamers in Bristol, and in Bath he was drawn to the bridges that spanned the canal and river that ran through the Georgian city. Yet John's reputation during these decades was built on his Chiltern landscapes; over time his paintings achieved a greater tonal subtlety, a delicacy of touch that relied less on systematic cross-hatching and restrictive outlines, and instead on a more relaxed fluidity to the brushwork. Drawn ineluctably to watercolour, though never abandoning oils, John had to rely on others for his instruction; he observed Paul at work, and drew technical insight from their mutual artist friends. But, essentially, he was faithful to his own intuition, driven by an unswerving fidelity to his subject, to nature, and his beloved haunts.[23]

22. Neve writes of John's sensitivity in detecting the overlaps and coincidences within and between the seasons, that it 'requires practice to see the second spring hidden in fine weather towards the end of September; the many unnamed seasons that take their places in the intervals between those that are named.' *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 41.
23. For a deeply insightful appreciation of John's work in watercolour the extended essay by Allen Freer, in *'The Delighted Eye'* cannot be bettered. Several of the ideas promoted in this chapter are drawn from Freer's writing, and also from the astute work of Sir John Rothenstein, which are fully itemised in the bibliography.

JOHN NASH

THE MOAT, GRANGE FARM, KIMBLE
exhibited 1922 • oil on canvas • 76.2 x 50.8 cm

JOHN NASH

THE CANAL, SYDNEY GARDENS, BATH

c.1927 • oil on canvas • 38.2 x 54.6 cm

JOHN NASH

THE EDGE OF THE PLAIN

1926 • oil on canvas • 50.8 x 61 cm

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge/ The Bridgeman Art Library

During this period he also taught for five years at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford, under the insightful guidance of painter Richard Carline who readily shared his critical thinking about art with the untutored John, still conscious (perhaps a little sensitive) of his lack of formal art school training. John's painting flourished. However the last period of that decade was a period of transition and tragedy for the Nashes; tragedy came crushingly with the death of their five-year-old son, William, falling from a moving car driven by Christine. John found it hard to forgive or forget. Having already abandoned wood engraving he also complained of feeling 'played out', not quite creatively 'blocked' but lacking the zeal for his painting that had once sustained him. He needed a change, a rest, a fallow period that might give him chance to re-kindle the flame. The Second World War came at an opportune moment in his creative life.

6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BROTHERS

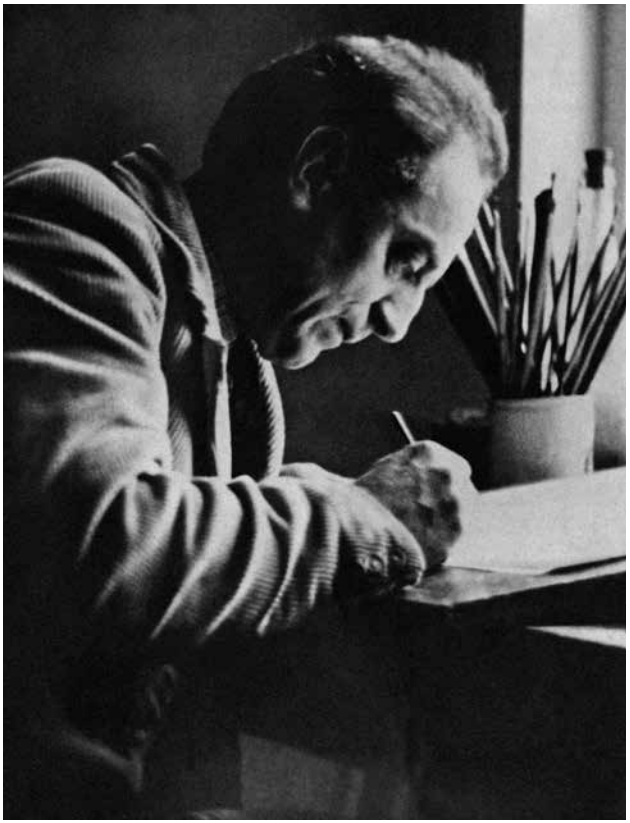
'The brothers Nash are always interesting', observed the ever perceptive Walter Sickert in 1915, 'Paul with his head, where a poet's should be, in the clouds, and John, like the child that a painter should be, putting his hand in his mouth to tell what he has seen in the field or on the farm that afternoon'.[1]

How had 'the two extraordinary brothers' fared in the twenty years between the wars? Had they lived up to the promise they showed in 1913? How were they each regarded by their peers, and by those who had seen their large oil paintings gracing the walls of Burlington House as the nation looked upon its Great War collection in 1919?

In 1913 the poster for the Dorien Leigh exhibition contains some thoughtful clues about the perceived differences in the brothers: Paul is dressed in bohemian garb, John in a conventional suit; behind Paul the talismanic Wittenham Clumps and a prancing White Hart offer unambiguous symbols of his ambition to create mystical readings of the British landscape; around John a backdrop of golden wheat sheaves is evidence of his grounding in the actualities of English agricultural scenery, his innate enthusiasm for 'energetic, colourful renditions of the scenes immediately before his eyes.'[2]

On the eve of war John had been the more confident in oils, finding an early approach to painting that would fortify him for decades to come. Paul had been the more tentative of the two, seduced by Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, susceptible to a wider variety of influences, and only just beginning to find his own voice. Gordon Bottomley had been untypically frank about John's strengths as a painter in comparison to Paul's evident weaknesses[3] and John's success in their first joint show had been magnanimously received by Paul. He confessed as much to Bottomley 'I am glad you see such promise in Jack: for my part I think he is going to do really fine work & he is so extraordinarily productive I stand by in amaze and envy.'[4] Yet, as the older brother he was innately more self-assured, more worldly perhaps, and soon drew on his

1. John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 20.
2. James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 62.
3. Gordon Bottomley to Paul Nash, *Poet and Painter*, letter no. 39, 7 July 1912, p. 37.
4. Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, *Poet and Painter*, p. 61.



JOHN NASH
c.1930

PAUL NASH
c.1932 • by Helen Muspratt

network of contacts to further his position during the war. Naturally authoritative, cannily strategic, with 'an acute and calculating intelligence',[5] Paul took to being an Officer with an innate sense of his own worth; John struggled to assert that same authority, although he knew it was due him by dint of his social class and upbringing. He was, however, an excellent NCO – efficient, grounded, reliable. There was little that was flighty or quixotic about John; he brought to his soldiering the same calm detachment and rigour that he brought to his art.

By 1919, as Paul and John and their wives quit the herb-drying barn to go their separate ways for the next twenty or so years, the roles had been reversed. Paul emerged from the war a national figure, esteemed by his peers, and ready to tackle testing questions about the direction of British art in the coming decades. Unlike John, who was happy to resume his gentle interests in music, angling and botany, Paul was ready to grapple with the pressing matter of what exactly it meant to be an English painter swimming with the tide of Continental modernism; he was ready to ask those awkward questions then facing British artists, most searchingly what did it mean to be both English and Modern? By contrast John was quite content to quietly resume his wanderings in the Chilterns.

How greatly did Paul really believe in John's qualities as a painter? It may sound an odd question to ask but it haunts the memoirs of those who knew both men. As the elder brother in a family blighted by their mother's chronic illness, Paul had long assumed a paternal interest in John, an interest that could stray into over-protective, possibly patronising, behaviour. It was subtle, apparently unrehearsed, very probably unintended. But it was noticed by others. Introducing John's work to Gordon Bottomley in 1912, Paul had mentioned his brother's preference for 'regular work & routine, unlike me', but feared that he was 'not constitutionally robust' and aired the view that he was still rather aimless. That element of reserve persisted over many years. It was shared very openly with John Rothenstein who had been commissioned to write an essay on John in 1937. Having read the essay Paul informed the author that he had totally misrepresented his younger brother, not 'got [him] right'. Indeed Paul actually doubted that his brother was 'a suitable person on which [sic] to hang a treatise of that nature':

> He read it very carefully (so John later related his understanding of the story to Rothenstein) and in detail and he is, as you know, very thorough on such matters. I find it difficult to write to you about this but I do assure you that the criticisms made were not done in any carping or ungrateful spirit. He said he would talk to you on the subject. He further declared that I was 'dumb' about myself, and very probably unhelpful and that he could tell you more about me in half an hour than any amount of interviews with me direct. I feel that

5. John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters*, vol. 2, p. 79.

it would be a tremendous help if you see him and I have warned him of your approach.

John's slightly ashamed admission ends with the sorry note: 'Personally I feel rather hopeless about the book altogether'.[6] In fact Paul compounded his reservations soon after, when lunching with Rothenstein, by stating very clearly, and in company, that 'It was I who encouraged Jack to be a painter; and I'm still not sure that I did it rightly. I don't know whether he has a painter's imagination.' Rothenstein was both astonished and rather affronted by these strange assertions. Knowing both men well, and having written with great insight on their work, he never once doubted that Paul was expressing his true feelings towards his brother as an artist, nor questioned his dedication and his powers of expression, but he recognised that Paul's feelings towards John as an artist 'however basically and continuously benevolent and admiring, also long remained complex and obsessional'. John learned to live with his elder brother's slightly domineering, even controlling, manner, just as Gilbert Spencer suffered the demanding brilliance and unblinking candour of his slightly older brother, Stanley. As Gemma Brace points out in her essay (page 130), if there was a rivalry between the two of them it is difficult to glean, hard to pin down, never expressed openly or in written form. It is impossible now to know whether Paul feared John's emergence as a painter, or merely wanted him to remain bracketed as a naïve artist 'as authentic as the Douanier Rousseau', a painter who remained untutored, underschooled and lacking the networks that Paul had quickly established in London. It was after all Paul's idea that John ought not to enrol at the Slade, for fear it diminish his authenticity and dent his innate originality.

As he grew older John expressed regret that he had not undergone the rigours of an art school training. Yet, his steady and assured progress as an artist, engraver and illustrator was not unduly held back by any lack of formal qualifications. After all, Paul had outwardly gained little from his own frustrating year at the Slade, but he had gained access to a network of influential peers that he would draw upon as he positioned himself in the London – and international – art scene.

Paul was ever mindful of what others wrote of him: John was largely indifferent. 'Do keep my letters, my love', he wrote to Christine, 'they are the only form of diary I keep and I express most of my thoughts to you if not all.'[7] In 1922 Frank Rutter, the influential art critic, had compiled a book about those British painters he most rated. Paul was incensed that Rutter had collapsed him and John into a single chapter, and not merely for reasons of economy. 'According to R', Paul raged, 'your art has the elements of true greatness & I am a genius fashioned by war & altho I can paint better now I've never done anything so 'powerful'.[8] In the decades to come it became

6. John Rothenstein, 1983, pp. 14–15. Rothenstein later concluded that Paul could not have been a more supportive nor a more devoted brother. John, he suggests, towards the end of his life 'used at times to feel a little sad at his lack of acclaim' (p. 122).
7. *Ibid*., pp. 14–15. It has been suggested that one of the reasons that Paul maintained his long correspondence with Gordon Bottomley was that it might furnish informative material for a biography (p. 121). Ever strategic and ever mindful of how his reputation might be enhanced Paul was quite willing on occasion to praise his own work under an assumed name. The 'Robert Derriman' incident of 1919, in which Paul penned at least twelve enthusiastic reviews of his work (and John's) under a pseudonym, reflected badly on him and he regretted it deeply. (See James King, *Interior Landscapes*, 1987, pp. 93–96)
8. Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, *Poet and Painter*, 9 December 1922, p. 61.

something of a constant refrain in their relationship; John feeling – with some justification – that he was used as a stalking horse, Paul carefully positioning himself as the more serious, strategic and dedicated artist, while John was presented as his talented, but at heart more facile younger brother. The great themes that drove Paul – love, belonging, separation, sex and death – were no part of John's uncluttered and uncomplicated paintings, and unlike Paul he clearly demarcated his life from his art. However, both men were wracked by turmoil and anxiety, derived largely from the early death of their mother and evident in their faithless marriages, but especially exacerbated by Paul's disabling maladies and John's recurrent bouts of depression.

By the mid-1940s the brothers were effectively estranged, having not been on good terms for some time. The death of their step-mother Audrey in 1945 required them to apportion her goods and furniture. Now more or less disabled, and reliant on a personal pharmacy of 'oxygen tubes, the night nurses (5 changes), the body washers, the pills, the draughts …'[9] Paul wrote to his brother:

> I mend rather slowly – somewhat up & down and not much headway with work as yet. But just lately I began to feel very unhappy & downhill so I threw all my pills out of window and proceeded under my own steam as it were which made me feel much better.

In the same letter he responded to John's complaint that Audrey's furniture had not been fairly shared between him and Barbara, suggesting that John had indeed 'picked very shrewdly'. The remark was ill-received and John reacted angrily. They never really patched up the quarrel and by the closing months of the Second World War there was little contact and certainly little love lost between the brothers.

9. Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, *Poet and Painter*, p. 266.

PAUL NASH

TENCH POND IN A GALE

1921–2 • ink, pencil and watercolour on paper • 57.7 x 39.9 cm

7 PAUL NASH: BETWEEN THE WARS

In the two decades that separated the world wars the brothers led parallel lives; they maintained occasional contact but their creative lives diverged considerably. Where John found solace and slow recuperation in the calming contours and annual rhythms of the Chilterns, Paul went to pieces. A nervous collapse in 1921 was traced back to emotional shock starting from the period of his work on the Western Front. The onset of asthma that would blight his health for decades to come was blamed (but never conclusively proved) on his exposure to gas lingering on the battlefields in the closing months of the war.

Like many of his contemporaries, Paul agonised over the direction of his art: he felt the crisis in European culture in a way that John simply did not. Paul set himself intense personal and professional challenges: how was it possible to be both a British, indeed quintessentially English artist, and yet still be modern? How could he marry his personal vision with the radical notions of continental modernism? What lay ahead if he abandoned his English Romantic roots? And perhaps more fundamentally, did he dare alienate his many supporters, buyers and patrons by taking his own course of creative action?[1] On occasion these fundamental questions would threaten to destabilise his creativity altogether.

It was to be a restless decade, he and Margaret constantly on the move, Paul seeking out places and objects which might carry a particular charge, his senses ever alert – and needy – to the essential stimuli that fuelled his imagination. In times of crisis, as ever, he turned to nature. Sensing his defences under assault he settled for a while on the bleak wintry shores of southern Kent. Gazing out at the relentless tide exploding on to the long sea walls at Dymchurch he watched as 'man met in conflict with Nature, the two fighting it out, and neither side ever quite able to overpower the other.'[2] Never was a motif so fitted to a turbulent mental state: 'his mind emptied by the horrors of war, and by the jostling of men and transport, his preoccupation became vacancy.'[3] In his paintings of the coast off Dymchurch the waves are as solid as set concrete, drained of colour, army-grey and lifeless. Irresistible force meets immovable object: a collision wrought in tense

1. These questions took many years to crystallise, finding their most complete form in an article by Paul published in 1932: 'Whether it is possible to "go modern" and still "be British" is a question vexing quite a few people today … The battle lines have been drawn up: internationalism versus an indigenous culture; renovation versus conservatism; the industrial versus the pastoral; the functional versus the futile.' (*The Weekend Review*, 12 March 1932, pp. 322–3.)

Sam Smiles conducts a close critique of these battle-lines in his essay 'Refuge or Regeneration', in *Going Modern and Being British* (Sam Smiles [ed.], Intellect Books, 1998, pp. 1–14) suggesting that Paul Nash's binary arguments – whereby the rural becomes the pole of conservatism, stasis and indigenous culture while the urban … aligns itself to modernity, internationalism and change – are rather too neat to withstand historical scrutiny. (Smiles, pp. 1–2)

2. David Boyd Haycock, *Crisis of Brilliance*, p. 327.

3. Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 5.

PAUL NASH

DYMCHURCH

c.1920–5 • oil on canvas • 53.5 x 75 cm

Dudley Museum & Art Gallery, Dudley MBC

passages of paint. It must have drained Paul to make this long cycle of paintings but perhaps it also salved his unquiet conscience.[4]

He and Margaret travelled further afield; in Europe he sought connection with the Surrealist movement, he played with abstraction, he remained intrigued by the metaphysical topographies created by de Chirico. A visit to the USA in the early 1930s yielded little: the press lukewarm to his work. Respect, wrote one reviewer, was of course due to this ambitious Englishman, but these cold-blooded renditions of a dead seaside seemed 'utterly divorced from life'.[5] Paul was stung but he understood the accusation: he could not shake off the hard questions he had set himself on the tense hinterland of the Kent coast. Throughout the 1920s he wrestled with abstraction; Dymchurch had offered the raw ingredients – a sea-wall of hard outlines and unyielding diagonals, jagged breakwaters sticking out into a solid plane of grey ocean. Still-life subjects helped further forge the dialogue he sought between formal structure, geometrics, and organic form. In a rather telling small canvas – *Dead Spring*, of 1929 – he draws on the fixed geometry of a window to contain, indeed entrap, the limpid leaves of a dead or dying plant.[6] *Landscape at Iden*, painted in the same year, describes a land where raw nature is controlled, corralled and cannily harvested for human use; the orchard is pruned hard, the fences taut and well-maintained, a Flemish efficiency reigns, though the neat pyramid of sawn logs have the disquieting resemblance of those great heaps of artillery shells that were piled before being fired in every major offensive on the Western Front.[7]

Formal, orderly, designed with a chilling precision, the paintings of this period have the metaphysical intensity of a De Chirico composition coloured with the restricted palette of late Braque. Somewhere in between lay the authentic Paul Nash: an artist who was rarely drawn to a subject unless it satisfied 'the geometric side of his painter's nature', the side – as Neve has pointed out – that made him a singularly brilliant modernist graphic designer and a respected design teacher in the Thirties.[8] Rarely in Paul's paintings of the late 1920s were the set-square and the ruler far away; without their presiding geometry he could not release the essence of place that was so essential to his personal vision. But at times his work ran the risk of being dull, formulaic, even boring.

The tense and tight design of Paul's paintings at the end of the Twenties might be attributed to an accumulation of personal difficulties which he described in the headings for his embryonic autobiography. The section called 'Searching' stated categorically:

> I fall sick and am hurried home. Signs of trouble but they pass. Margaret's ordeal. We lose her mother. My father is ill, we go to Iver Heath. Father dies

4. With its 'unsmiling' forms and its 'extreme refusal of prettiness', Cardinal describes the gaunt shoreline of Dymchurch as satisfying a slightly masochistic attraction for Paul Nash, a subject to test his diminished resources rather than nurture them. Roger Cardinal, *The Landscape Vision of Paul Nash* (London: Reaktion, 1989) pp. 17–18.
5. *Pittsburg Sun-Telegram*, quoted in James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 148. King gives a full account of the visit about which Paul had deep misgivings. The poor review confirmed those doubts. The Nashes sailed on the *Mauretania*. After it was scrapped in 1935 some of its furnishings including the mahogany panels from the library were installed in the Mauretania Bar at the foot of Park Street in Bristol. The ship's bell is located in Lloyd's Registry in London and is the focus of remembrance on Armistice Day each year.
6. *Dead Spring*, 1929, Pallant House Collection.
7. *Landscape at Iden,* 1929, Tate, no. 5047.
8. Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 6.

> in his eightieth year. Bird Garden. No country peace any more, troubles pile up. We lose three homes.[9]

After his wife's 'ordeal' – a miscarriage – and the death of her mother, more of Paul and Margaret's marriage was spent apart than together. Although they wrote passionate letters of commitment and fidelity, they quarrelled viciously when in each other's company, their intimacy sustainable only at a distance. 'We have lovely times to look forward to', Paul wrote in one of his many conciliatory, bridge-building letters, 'but I expect we have to fight for them – we're both fighters.' James King suggests that it was not until after 1936, and only because of his rapidly deteriorating health, that the gulf between them was finally bridged.[10] The death of Paul's father, from pneumonia, was equally traumatic, 'a part of my life goes with him for in so many ways he and I were linked.'[11]

There were also dense intellectual and creative tensions at play in Paul's professional life. Throughout the late Twenties and early Thirties he engaged with the great debates of the day, recognising the binary arguments that were vexing so many of his peers. In a series of perceptive essays he drew attention to the prevailing debates about British identity and its future, clearly identifying where he felt the battle lines had been drawn up:

> … internationalism versus an indigenous culture; renovation versus conservatism; the industrial versus the pastoral; the functional versus the futile.[12]

Along with many influential writers, poets and painters, he was greatly exercised by the modernisation of the English countryside, with its sprawling suburbs and ugly electricity pylons, rashes of new advertising signage and feverish road building that was reaching across Britain. On many occasions he commented disparagingly about reckless modernisation which he believed was 'prosecuted without discrimination or scruple', and he dedicated his illustrated guide to Dorset to 'all those courageous enemies of "development" to whom we owe what is left of England.'[13] But what exactly lay at the heart of Paul Nash's idea of 'England'? It was in fact a rich, but rather impure, amalgam of ideas that embraced organic ruralism, northern Romanticism, and the disordered imaginings of continental Surrealism. Unsure which way to face Paul found himself in the cross-fire of the opposing tendencies, 'supporting progressive social reforms while remaining attached to a Romantic idea of "the land" in its untamed state.'[14] As he tussled with these political agendas he found his art caught uncomfortably between the two dominating – and quite irreconcilable – movements in modern art of that period: abstraction and Surrealism. As Jemima Montagu puts it so well, Paul 'noble in intention but perhaps flawed in practice, set out to promote and practice both styles.' The contest could not last long, though Paul – determined and singular as

9. *Outline*, pp. 221–3.
10. Paul to Margaret, probably 1927, Paul Nash papers, Tate; Quoted in James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 122.
11. From the chronology in *Paul Nash, Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape*, Tate Liverpool, 2003, pp. 113–119.
12. Paul Nash,*The Weekend Review*, 12 March 1932, pp. 322–3.
13. Paul Nash, *Dorset Shell Guide* (London, 1936), dedication and p. 31.
14. Jemima Montagu, in *Paul Nash, Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape*, Tate Liverpool, 2003, p. 13. Montague's essay is an excellent summary of the opposing forces at play, and Paul's attempt to position himself and reconcile the many tensions around him.

ever – gave it his best shot, bringing together a retinue of architects, designers, sculptors, and painters who shared his 'contemporary spirit', and stood united by 'the adventure, the research and pursuit of modern life' under the modernist rubric of *Unit One*. Typically eloquent, Paul identified their twin aims:

> The pursuit of form; the expression of the structural purpose in search of beauty in formal interaction and relations apart from representation. This is typified by abstract art. Second, the pursuit of the soul, the attempt to trace the psyche in its devious flight, a psychological research on the part of the artist parallel to the experiments of the great analysts. This is represented by the movement known as *Surrealisme*.[15]

Earnest and ideological, the grouping was short-lived and failed to help Paul resolve the tug-of-war between his parallel enthusiasms – on the one hand his need to create 'structural purpose', spatial order and control through formal, sometimes overtly geometric means, and on the other his innate desire and instinct for 'the pursuit of the soul', epitomised by a love of fantasy, the mystical, the spirituality ensconced in the places he cherished. It was a terrific tussle, it produced some fine pieces of art, but it exhausted him. Caught in no-man's-land between surrealism and abstraction, between modernisation and traditionalism, between lineal regularity and impressionistic, organic imagery, it was – as Montagu acutely notes – another of Nash's own personal battlefields.

If anyone came close to understanding Paul's unique Englishness it was the Welsh writer Myfanwy Evans who wrote in *Axis*, the Constructivist journal, in 1937, that Paul's art was almost entirely related to his sense of history. She identified that his central concern was not with 'the past as *past*, but the accumulated intenseness of the past as *present*.'[16] By this she may have meant that archaeological excavation and reconstruction might have stimulated his intellectual sense, but it was the slow reparation of a once-occupied landscape, the grassed over remnants, that truly stimulated his imagination, arousing him to wonder what lay just beneath the smoothened green coverlet. It was his role as an artist to unveil, even unleash, the 'hidden spirit', and to revel in the polyvocality of the 'unseen landscape', not so as to arrive at a single or scientific truth but to understand how the 'evidence of the passing of time, of collapse, decay, burial, forestation, or grassing over [might] stimulate the imagination to re-create the past in its own way.'[17]

After two years of experimentation, which took him into applied and interior design, the theatre and graphic arts, as well as watercolour and oils, with some uneven results, Paul eventually resolved the creative crisis. Appreciating that he had 'made no headway' in his tentative experiments in abstract design, he admitted that he might have lost the essential anchor of

15. Paul Nash, 'Unit One', *The Listener*, 5 July 1933.
16. Myfanwy Evans, 'Paul Nash, 1937', *Axis*, no. 8, early winter 1937, pp. 12–15.
17. Andrew Causey, 'Paul Nash and Englishness', in *Paul Nash, Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape*, Tate Liverpool, 2003, p. 25.

PAUL NASH

LANDSCAPE OF THE MEGALITHS
1934 • oil on canvas • 49.5 x 73.2 cm

British Council Collection/
The Bridgeman Art Library

PAUL NASH

DRUID LANDSCAPE
c.1938 • oil on cardboard
58.5 x 40.5 cm

British Council Collection/
The Bridgeman Art Library

his artistic practice, which had always relied on the calm scrutiny of nature and an innate desire to divine its hidden presences:

> I find I still need partially organic features to make my fixed conceptual image. I discern among natural phenomena a thousand forms which might, with advantage, be dissolved in the crucible of abstract transfiguration; but the hard cold stone, the rasping grass, the intricate architecture of trees and waves, or the brittle sculpture of a dead leaf – I cannot translate beyond their own image, without suffering in spirit.[18]

It was a momentous confession. It had been made a little easier by the discovery of two new places that satisfied the twin drivers of his art. In 1934 he had visited the historic first excavations of the Iron Age fort of Maiden Castle in Dorset; a year earlier he had made his first visit to the standing stone avenues of Avebury, in Wiltshire:

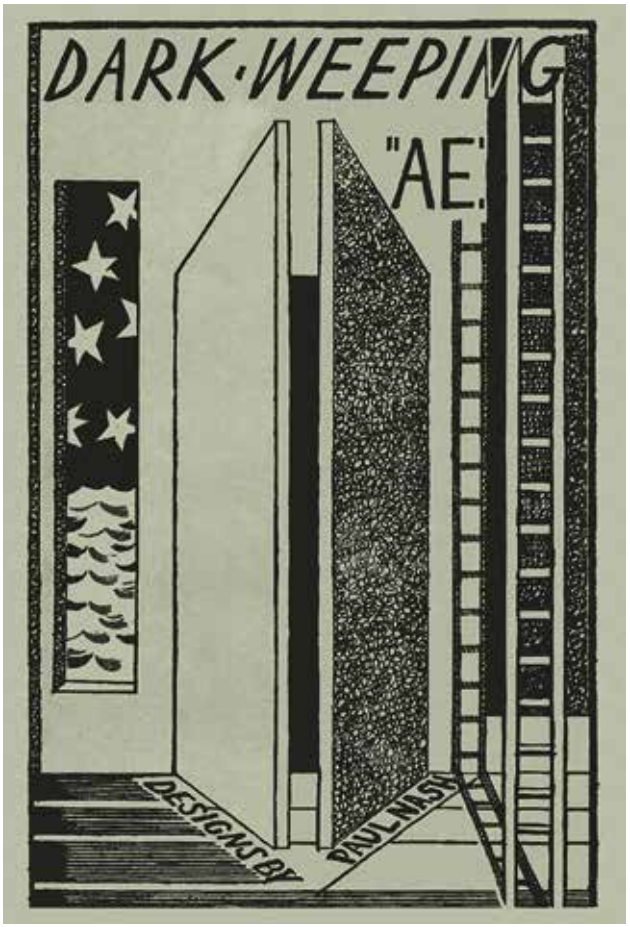
> Last summer, I walked in a field near Avebury, where two rough monoliths stand up sixteen feet high, miraculously patterned with black and orange lichen, remnants of the avenue of stones which led to the Great Circle. A mile away, a green pyramid casts a gigantic shadow. In the hedge, at hand, the white trumpet of a convolvulus turns from its spiral stem, following the sun. In my art I would solve such an equation.[19]

Terrifyingly mute, sublime in their mysterious grandeur, these stones became the *leitmotifs* of his work in the early to mid-1930s. Throughout that decade the imagery of sarsen stones, monstrously toppled trees, outsize tennis balls, concrete-coloured tubular blocks are neatly – and often quite incongruously – arranged in his landscapes of bleached objects:

> Stones, bones, empty fields, demolished houses, and back gardens – all these have their trivial feature, as it were their side; but, also, they have another character, and this is neither moral nor sentimental nor literary, but rather something strange and – for want of a better word, which may not exist – poetical.[20]

It was a gift – from Margaret, in 1931 – of a small portable camera, an American-made Series 2 Kodak which radicalised Paul's perception of the world, or if not radicalised it, helped starkly visualise in two-dimensions the odd ways in which he saw, organised and then prioritised the objects around him. Shifting his viewpoint, adjusting the viewfinder, playing tricks with depth of field, and mastering the art of cast shadow, he uncovered through these deceptively simple black and white snaps a strange litany of shapes in the humdrum everyday of Swanage, that isolated seaside town at the end of a one-way road, in south Dorset. Swanage ranks alongside Avebury, Silbury Hill, the Wittenham Clumps, the Jurassic Coastline, and the South Downs

18. Paul Nash, 'For, But Not With', *Axis*, January 1935, pp. 24–6.
19. Paul Nash, contribution to 'Unit One', editor Herbert Read (London: Cassell, 1934) p. 81. Ruth Clark recalled that on the bus through Marlborough Paul had been wracked by an asthma attack and spent much of the journey bent over in great discomfort, yet his 'misery gave way to ebullience' at the overpowering presences he sensed in Avebury. He later told Margaret: 'If anything will preserve in landscape from a painter's point of view, it will be this country.' In James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 161.
20. *Outline*, p. 229.



PAUL NASH

DARK WEEPING
1929 • cover and illustration for poetry pamphlet

PAUL NASH

EQUIVALENTS FOR THE MEGALITHS
1935 • oil on canvas • 45.7 x 66 cm

PAUL NASH

THE ARCHER

1930–42 • oil on canvas • 71 x 91.5 cm

Southampton City Art Gallery, Hampshire/The Bridgeman Art Library

as a place of incalculable potency for Paul. His unpeopled photographs of the town describe a banal, but visually eclectic, English resort at its most surreal: 'the amoeboid concrete curve of municipal benches, the pyramid of cannon balls on the monument, a square clock on a wind shelter, the frames of wind-breaks on the beach.'[21] Paul may at times have scoffed at the resort with its 'somewhat ludicrous monuments' and the odd 'repulsive Victorian-Gothic structure' but he came to cherish it, realising it as a place that could unleash his imagination:

> Quite apart from its superb natural setting, its quarry landscapes and the lovely bay, it has a strange fascination like all things which combine beauty, ugliness, and the power to disquiet.[22]

In his farmhouse studio at Whitecliffe, Paul spent hours carefully setting up, arranging and then photographing small *tableaux* of *objets trouvé*s on a doormat, slab, or wooden breadboard bringing into wilful juxtaposition the oddest arrangements of cylindrical tubes, right-angled blocks of polished wood, fragments of tree bark, bleached flints, and school-standard geometrical forms. His aim was to create miniature dramas out of these tight constructivist designs. Creatively re-charged, Paul transposed these to the downland landscapes he knew so well, creating unreal narratives such as *Event on the Downs*[23] which features a mute confrontation between a stranded tree stump and a bleached tennis ball, the two locked in poetic parallel monologue under a papery cloud. There are few obvious clues as to how to read such perplexing images. They are as wilfully estranged as any 'chance encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella' – to quote the Surrealist paradigm.[24] But as with all Paul's paintings, they are firmly grounded in the actualities of nature: the sharp perception of local colour, the texture of chalky grassland, the fall of noon daylight are all accurately and convincingly realised in paint.

This ability to seize upon some eccentric feature of a landscape and use it as a lens to focus on a 'hitherto unrevealed mysteriousness within' was an attribute that had been gleaned from Surrealism. Yet Paul lent it a wonderful English twist, creating an extraordinary visual equation – an irrational collision of objects, piped through a conduit of English Pastoral, the entire pictorial edifice painted with 'hallucinatory clarity.'[25] These achievements also called for a unique blend of talents, which combined a restless poetic temperament, a fascination for wonder, and a surrealist methodology tempered by the unerring logic of a graphic designer. Paul's genius lay not just in this uniquely rich admixture but 'like a water diviner or a finder of ley lines on chalk'[26] he was innately attuned to certain places, capable of detecting their hidden qualities, hinting gently at what might be concealed so that they might surrender their poetic meaning.

21. Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 6.
22. Paul Nash, 'Swanage or Seaside Surrealism', *Architectural Review*, April 1936. Swanage is a small port that became renowned for shipping stone from up to sixty quarries in Dorset until extinguished by the railway in the late-nineteenth century; many of the odd architectural features of the town were salvaged from the city of London to serve as ballast for the return journey. Amongst these were cast-iron columns from Billingsgate Market, an archway from Hyde Park Corner, statues from the Royal Exchange, and the entire façade of the Mercer's Hall in the City of London, which was re-assembled as the Town Hall of Swanage. See Michael Jenner, *A Traveller's Companion to the West Country* (London: Mermaid Books/ Michael Joseph, 1992) pp. 24–5.
23. *Event on the Downs*, 1934, Government Art Collection, no. 8536. Nash himself described these landscapes as 'unseen', not in a psychic sense, or as part of the Unconscious. Rather they remain unseen by the majority because they are not perceived. Roger Cardinal's appreciation of Paul's photography is very relevant here, see pp. 39–46.
24. Taken from Lautréamont's delirious 1869 proto-surrealist, novel *Les Chants du Maldoror*, 'as beautiful […] as the chance encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella.' Comte de Lautréamont was the pseudonym of Isidore-Lucien Ducasse, an Uruguayan poet.
25. Denis Farr, *English Art, 1870–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp. 279 and 283.
26. Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 3.

On the bleached rolling uplands of Wiltshire Paul found the exact confluence of so many needs – an ancient topography littered with cryptic clumps and mounds and stones, a powerful aura of primeval mystery, a special place where the weight of a stratified past hung 'still in the air like electricity'. Above all, he sought in this monumental landscape some glimmering of an ordered plan, some movement of a rhythm animating the universe …'[27] and teased out its potency in a suite of highly original paintings such as *Circle of the Monoliths* and *Nocturnal Landscape*.[28]

PERIPATETIC PAUL

Nothing in Paul's circumstances required him to move so often. Yet, he and Margaret never stopped moving, setting up home – sometimes together, but often apart – with a frequency that puzzled John and Christine, who put down deep roots in Suffolk and Essex. Paul's succession of unsettlements and resettlements were forays to seek fresh stimuli, but they were also tactics to protect his ailing health, and to salve a fractious and at times petulant temperament. Yet, since his first momentous visit to Avebury, and after the troubled decade of the Twenties, the Thirties saw Paul achieve national recognition – as President of the Council for the Society of Industrial Artists, as a writer, contributing art criticism for *The Listener*, as designer for theatre, books, posters and interiors. He had launched *Unit One*, gathering into his circle many of the leading British artists of the day, and had been selected to show alongside continental modern artists such as Hans Arp, Georges Braque, Fernand Leger, and Surrealists Max Ernst and Joan Miro. He had met Henri Matisse and travelled to Europe, Africa, and the United States. In 1935 he joined the Committee for the Artists' International Association, and a year later founded the British Surrealist Group, serving on the committee that staged the seminal International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries London. By 1938 he had been selected for a major retrospective at the Venice Biennale, and had major solo exhibitions at the Redfern Gallery and Leicester Galleries in London. It was a rich and mostly rewarding decade. However his innate restlessness prevailed; in 1930 he and Margaret moved from Iden to Rye, spent a summer in Romney Marsh, then four years later settled in Swanage – where Paul began a long affair with the surrealist painter Eileen Agar. In late 1936 they had suddenly to quit Dorset, Paul having suffered the most severe ever asthma attack bought on ironically by the sea air. He and Margaret moved to London, to Eldon Grove amongst a nucleus of artists gathered in Hampstead. The following year Paul's bronchial asthma worsened and he was admitted to a clinic in Hertfordshire. Money was a constant concern; he had taken to writing criticism to alleviate financial worries and in 1938 he began to teach again at the Royal College of Art in London, where his brother John was already an assistant teacher

27. Paul Nash, *The Weekend Review*, 7 February 1931.
28. *Circle of the Monoliths*, 1937–8, Leeds Art Gallery; *Nocturnal Landscape*, 1938, Manchester Art Gallery.

PAUL NASH

THE AVON GORGE

1939 • watercolour • 49.8 x 59 cm

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives
© Tate, London 2014

of Design.[29] On the eve of the war Paul moved temporarily west; visiting Gloucestershire where he became inspired by the panorama of the Malvern Hills; travelled into the Forest of Dean, to Tintern Abbey, the Wye Valley, and on to Wales.

In Bristol he stayed in a hotel overlooking the Avon Gorge. Before he left he had been advised not to miss the essential motifs of the city: the Theatre Royal, Bristol sherry, Vyvyan Terrace, Leigh Woods, the 'Suicide Spot', Christmas Steps, and Douglas Cleverdon's bookshop. 'My brother', he added, 'said I wish you would do something about that Suspension Bridge'. Thus, the view from his room 'gave upon an extraordinary prospect':

> A roseate flush mounted from the western horizon, throwing up the crest of trees into a dark barrier like the battlements of a castle. From these heights, the wood sank deep down the steep slopes of the cliffs into an ever-deepening gulf of blue twilight until arrested by the level plain of the river banks, where the light revived in livid reflections from the gleaming mud flats and the mirror of the Avon itself.
>
> Far above, at a sickening height, hung a crimson bridge held over the chasm by immense chains which swung across and threaded into the eyes of two strangely shaped towers at the full height of either cliff … The whole scene, in fact, set in the pale illumination of the afterglow, had a poetic spell … so far beneath, the river, true element of ebb and flow, seemed motionless.[30]

29. Edward Bawden did not think Paul's second stint at the Royal College of Art went especially well: 'His manner was pompous & any conversation was likely to be broken by an asthmatic struggle for breath', quote in James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 189.
30. Paul Nash, 'The Giant's Stride', in *Architectural Review*, September 1939, reprinted in *Outline*, pp. 238–243.

PAUL NASH

MONSTER FIELD, STUDY II
1939
watercolour with pencil on paper
29.6 x 40.2 cm

Fitzwilliam Museum,
University of Cambridge/
The Bridgeman Art Library

Paul's essay on Brunel's impossible bridge and the sublime chasm below 'brewed a magic for the imagination' which he transformed into powerfully evocative words and a number of drawings, one reproduced as *Giant's Stride – to the Memory of Brunel* in *Outline*. Both essay and drawing capture the sweeping surreality of the bridge, and the dynamic movements far beneath, the ships and tugs chugging upstream in the rising tide, the shrill call of a steam train disappearing downstream into one of the tunnels tucked into the precipitous walls of the gorge. 'The white smoke darted and glided into the darkness like a white snake escaping into a cave.'[31]

Anthropomorphic visions beset Paul when he least expected. In Gloucestershire he chanced upon two toppled trees, felled by lightning, so violently ripped that the roots were fully revealed, their great limbs sprawled asunder:

> Both trees were by now bleached to a ghastly pallor wherever the bark had broken and fallen away. At a distance, in sunlight, they looked literally dead-white, but at closer range, their surfaces disclose many inequalities of tone and subtle variety of ashen tints.[32]

Now laid horizontally they had assumed, in Paul's enchanted eye, the 'personality of monsters'. In his elegant essay on these weird sights, he was at pains to point out that despite their male, bovine appearance, these were not *ersatz* animals, nor objects of mere biological or scientific curiosity, there were now inanimate natural objects that had passed into another

31. 'The Giant's Stride' *Architectural Review*, September 1939, in *Outline*, p. 239.
32. Paul Nash, 'Monster Field', in *Outline*, pp. 244–47.

realm, 'alive in quite another way' and brought into new being through a series of startling watercolours and photographs. They were also caught up in some unseen and malignant force that pervaded the countryside in that part of Gloucestershire: the fear of spreading 'foot and mouth' disease by idle or thoughtless walking across restricted fields. Paul and his companion retreated from the fields suddenly alert to the undertow of invisible dangers that lay around. Yet, typically, it triggered creativity in Paul, 'all sorts of words and images started going off like fireworks in my head', perhaps just as they had nearly twenty-five years earlier amongst the bomb-shattered trees of the Ypres Salient where he had found creative stimulation in the grotesque surroundings of another contaminated habitat. Back in Gloucestershire, the sun had set:

> The afterglow had burnt to ashes, and the vast undulating field, becoming each minute more like a wide river, was losing its light. I drew on my overcoat and slung my camera and field glasses over my shoulder; with my companion carrying the book of sketches, we waded out into the green tide … I felt convinced that it would not be wise to stay in the field after a certain hour …[33]

As the Thirties wound to an anxious close, Paul's professional stock was high: he was esteemed by his peers at home and overseas, regarded by no lesser a figure than Rene Magritte as 'Master of the Object', his work selected to exhibit in the most prestigious galleries and art expositions. Earnest critics enthused about how his work fused English pastoral with the poetic fantasies of continental Surrealism, yet without recourse to any of its nihilistic extremism. He acted as a talisman to younger artists. Admiring Paul's illustrations to *Urne Buriall* in 1936, the young Graham Sutherland described it as 'a poetic and imaginative achievement without equal today in this country.'[34] Yet Paul's health was in rapid and frightening decline, war loomed, and unforeseen challenges lay ahead. For brother John the war seemed to offer a welcome respite, a fallow period that could help re-kindle his creative flame. By contrast Paul felt much less sure, acutely exercised by an increasing sense of his own mortality. He was impatient to pursue his place in European art, to engage in urgent social and artistic debates with his contemporaries, to conquer his abiding fear of death by breaking through to another higher personal plane of existence. He knew his time was running out.[35]

33. 'Monster Field', in *Outline*, p. 247. Monster field has been identified as near Carswalls Farm, Newent, Gloucestershire. Paul had been accompanied by his friend, and driver for the day, Clare Neilson, who with her husband Charles collected Paul's work. In 1938 they had moved to a new home, Madams, in Gloucestershire.

A fine set of contemporary books, prints and images amassed by Clare Nielson has recently been gifted to the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester; a number of the photographs have been made available on-line: http://simon-martin.tumblr.com/post/52539506275/when-looking-through-the-albums-of-vintage

34. Denis Farr, *English Art, 1870–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 279 note.

35. Paul compared one of the fallen trees to the work of Blake, another to Picasso. Many writers have commented on this significant moment of fusion between the traditions of English art and European modernism. See for example Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

JOHN NASH

CONVOY SCENE

watercolour with ink on paper • 30.6 x 46 cm

8 BROTHERS IN ARMS (ONE FINAL TIME)

> This is, before all else, a war of the *imagination*. At first it was called, popularly a war of *nerves*. That is only another word for imagination … Figuratively speaking, [the enemy] turned the whole world into a vast receiving set which he tuned and adjusted to his various programmes.
>
> Where is our imagination, have *we* no ideas, nothing up *our* sleeve. What is needed immediately is a counter imaginative thrust which by its suddenness and novelty will strike straight at his mind as no armoured or explosive missile will at the counter armoured body.[1]

In the late Thirties, on the verge of another world war, John and Christine were in France on one of their rare visits overseas. They were in Brittany where John made a striking watercolour *Cemetery of Boats* at Audierne before returning to Britain. Now re-located to Oxford, Paul and Margaret were trying to set down roots in the city. Paul had resigned his teaching post in London, signed a contract for an autobiography – initially to be titled *Genius Loci* – and was busily setting up an 'Art Bureau for War Service', one of many short-lived projects which Paul eagerly designed but which eventually ran out of steam.

Both brothers wondered whether they might be commissioned as government-sponsored war artists. In fact, very few of those who had undertaken such work in the Great War were to be offered the same opportunity. Despite entreaties, and then earnest pleading, Richard Nevinson – possibly the best-known art 'name' of the First World War – was one of many who failed to be chosen, let alone considered. Sir Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery, Surveyor of the King's Pictures and now in charge of the British War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC) had never much liked Nevinson or his art, dismissing it as facile and banal, offering little more than a 'veneer of modernism', riddled with inconsistencies of style.[2] Such harsh judgment was not reserved for Paul, whom Clark had long highly regarded, and it was not long before the WAAC had offered him a six-month contract. Paul was eager to push on, ambitious to play his part, describing the appointment as 'almost miraculously providential'.[3] 'Mr Paul Nash called on June 15 [1940]',

1. Undated letter, in Alan Ross, *Colours of War*, p. 80.
2. Paul Gough, 'A War of the Imagination: the Experience of British Artists in Two World Wars', in Peter Liddle (ed.), *Lightning Strikes Twice* (London: Leo Cooper, 1999).
3. Paul Nash, 'The Personality of Planes', in *Outline*, p. 248.

a Committee memorandum notes, 'he is most anxious to make imaginative reconstructions of aerial fighting and to this end has provided himself with numerous photographs.'[4]

Comfortable in drawing freely from photographs and confessing to being 'unable to appreciate even simple mechanical contrivances'[5] Paul assembled a large array of images in his studio, digging deep into a 'mine of inexhaustible yield and infinite variety' provided by the Photograph Division at the Ministry of Information. His studio was soon lined with photographs, technical diagrams and other essential data. From this rather unpromising material he had soon produced a set of 'aerial creatures', watercolours of British bombers – the Blenheim, Hampden, Wellington and Whitley. In Paul's eyes there were in fact a menagerie of fabulous creatures, an entire species of air-borne beasts:

> When I first tried to stare a Wellington out of countenance, I was shaken. This baleful creature filled me with awe. Its chief characteristic is a look of purpose, of unswerving concentration upon its goal. Its big mammalian head and straight pointed wings, its proud fin and strong level flight, like that of an avenging angel, all make up a personality of great strength, a formidable machine, heroic and justly unpopular … it resembles the whale so nearly that there seems no reasons why it should not start spouting in the sky at any moment. To watch the dark silhouette of a Wellington riding the evening clouds is to see almost the exact image of the great killer whale hunting in unknown seas.[6]

None of this was meant as whimsy. As was his wont, Paul was deadly earnest. He was also deeply patriotic, stirred into an energetic anxiety about the role that art and artists should be playing in the prosecution of the war and the total annihilation of the enemy. What Paul saw anthropomorphically in aeroplanes he saw keenly in himself:

> Pride, in the proper sense, ferocity and cunning, dignified range or a quiet, ominous detachment, cerebral and deadly.[7]

He regarded the Wellington as a killer whale; the 'Flying Coffin' Whitley as a dove of death; the Hampden bomber was more reptilian, a pre-historic pterodactyl, whereas the short-nosed Blenheim, he thought, rather more enigmatic. But the long-nosed Blenheim, with its two wide nostrils, beaked nose and one glaring eye was most indubitably a shark, a likeness Paul pointed out to one of its pilots clambering into the cockpit 'as if he expected it would bite him.'

Paul's creativity was unbounded. Initially he revelled in the liberation afforded by Clark's committee and their expectation of an 'imaginative interpretation of the subject.' However, his military sponsors, the Air Ministry, were

4. Memorandum, War Artists' Advisory Committee, Papers, Imperial War Museum, London. In 1942 Clark reflected on the parameters set by the committee's terms of reference: 'The War Artists' collection cannot be completely representative of modern English art, because it cannot include those pure painters who are interested solely in putting down their feelings about shapes and colours, and not in facts, drama and human emotions. ('War Artists at the National Gallery', *The Studio*, cxxiii, January 1942, p. 586).

Clark trawled far and wide for the best artists. In its first sixteen weeks the committee considered some eight hundred names, including all those employed during the Great War. Few made the grade. A few veterans – Paul Nash, Kennington, and Bone – were recruited. The fees offered by the WAAC were lower than those offered in the Great War; £150 to £200 was the average price of an oil painting, watercolours might be bought for as little as £10.

5. *Outline*, p. 249.

6. *Ibid*., p. 250.

7. *Ibid*., p. 251.

not at all impressed. The R.A.F. member of the committee, Air Commodore Peake, was antipathetic to Paul's poetic leaps of licence and flights of fancy. There was endless bickering over fees, expenses, material costs, and subject-matter. Paul wrote long, nervy and sometimes irrelevant letters to Clark complaining of his indifferent treatment by senior R.A.F. personnel and quibbled over payments, copyright and the privileges to which he felt entitled. Clark was initially sympathetic, assuring Paul that the Committee had reprimanded the Ministry for being foolish, indeed insulting, in their preference for 'the Royal Academy style' of representation. He offered Paul a more sympathetic haven working directly for the Ministry of Information, where he would be encouraged to 'go on painting flying subjects as much as you like.' Paul did not have it all his own way though: on more than one occasion he had to be reminded, often quite firmly, that he was being well rewarded, indeed paid twice the fee that other artists were asking. Furthermore he was being freely provided with canvases and maintenance support. In early 1941 Clark wrote (to a fellow civil servant) with shared exasperation that his committee could see 'no reason why we should pay for Mr. Nash's long-distance telephone calls. He has a great liking for such calls and has several times rung me up from Oxford, but never on a matter of urgency.'[8]

Paul shrugged off such minor rebukes. Far from feeling that he was being unnecessarily demanding, he believed he had pragmatic and idealistic causes to pursue; pragmatic, because he needed expensive drugs to treat his worsening health; idealistic, because he so wanted:

> to use what art I have and what I can make as directly as possible in the character of a weapon. I have always believed in the power of pictorial art as a means of propaganda … Photography is useful, of course, but it is too general, too much taken for granted. Also it is not very intelligently used on our side.[9]

Unlike many other official war artists who saw the conflict as a necessary interruption or planned interregnum in the course of their life's art, Paul was one of the few artists who, as Alan Ross has astutely observed, gave 'as much thought to the deeper aspects of his relationship to the war as to the painting of his own pictures.'

> For my own part I feel to press on with the job in hand is all I can do so have now evolved a further plan of work which nothing short of an inundation of Nazi termites shall defeat. I may as well confess that my dearest wish is to contribute something useful to the R.A.F. by one means or another … What I do best I believe is what *I* see and am excited about, not what other people see perhaps.[10]

In his many letters and essays written during the war, Paul left perhaps the most complete record of his approach to picture-making. Not only did he

8. The tensions between Nash, Clark, and Peake are fully related in Alan Ross, *Colours of War: War Art 1939–45* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983) pp. 72–84.
9. Paul Nash to Kenneth Clark, quoted in Alan Ross, *Colours of War,* p. 76.
10. Paul Nash to E.M.O'R.Dickey, secretary to the WAAC, 17 September 1940.

PAUL NASH

TOTES MEER (DEAD SEA)

1940–1 • oil on canvas • 101.6 x 152.4 cm

surround himself with technical photographs, to gather 'through their constant presence, a sense of their essential nature and behaviour', he drew when he could from observation, pursuing his 'quarry' in a staff car driven by an N.C.O. or officer who helped supply the 'very necessary element of education' he needed 'for intelligent interpretation of mechanical facts into pictorial equivalents'. Through these combined methods he would:

> … decide upon the aspects of the plane I wished to record and take photographs at once. I would then make a free, rough drawing in line, generally upon a dark paper which could 'take' both a hard wax chalk and water colour in thin washes.[11]

On other occasions he spent time outside, immediately engaged in front of a motif, making carefully observed drawings that would later inform his larger compositions. This is how he discovered the 'fantastic phenomenon of Totes Meer', the vast dump of wrecked enemy aeroplanes in Cowley, a few miles from his home in Oxford:

> The thing looked to me, suddenly, like a great inundating sea. You might feel – under certain influences – a moonlight night for instance, this is a vast tide moving across the fields, the breakers rearing up and crashing on the plain. And then, no; nothing moves, it is not even water or even ice, it is something static and dead. It is metal piled up, wreckage. It is hundreds and hundreds of flying creatures which invaded these shores … By moonlight this waning moon, one could swear they began to move and twist and turn as they did in the air. A sort of rigor mortis? No, they are quite dead and still. The only moving creature is the white owl flying low over the bodies of the other predatory creatures, raking the shadows for rats and voles.[12]

It is an extraordinary image, 'suggestive of irrevocable defeat, of assault and animation halted, brought to a full stop.'[13] Kenneth Clark knew so too: 'The Dead Sea of wrecked aeroplanes is most beautiful', he told Paul, 'the best war picture so far, I think.'[14] Indeed it is: a painting with the power of propaganda but also unmistakably of poetry; a chillingly static vista packed with denuded machine energy. Just as his renditions of the Ypres Salient had captured the void of war, a void crammed with latent danger, crowded full of emptiness, so *Totes Meer* developed ideas first tested on the Western Front, then honed on the tide-blasted beaches of Dymchurch, and the poisoned 'monster fields' of the West Country. But here in the banal surroundings of Cowley, Paul achieved his apotheosis, harnessing all the poetic elements of his pre-war work 'under a controlling moon' patrolled by his favoured nocturnal winged sentry, the white owl.[15]

Like many Britons in the first years of the war, Paul was greatly unnerved by the prospect of invasion. It fuelled his art, lending large canvases like

11. *Outline*, p. 249.
12. Paul Nash to Kenneth Clark, 11 March 1941.
13. Alan Ross, *Colours of War*, p. 78.
14. Kenneth Clark to Paul Nash, 15 March 1941.
15. As Charles Hall says in *Aerial Creatures*, 'Totes Meer' appealed to contemporary tastes in that it was as effective as elegy as it was as propaganda (Charles Hall, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, Exhibition catalogue, Imperial War Museum and Lund Humphries, London, 1996).

PAUL NASH

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

1941 • oil on canvas • 122.6 x 183.5 cm

Totes Meer an air of suffocating fear. 'Everyone was searching the sky', he later wrote of that anxious time, 'expecting some terror to fall: I among them scanned the low clouds or tried to penetrate the depth of the blue. I was hunting the sky for what I most dreaded in my own imagining.'[16] He gave potent form to these fears in the words 'the rose of death', the indelible image of an enemy parachute poetically phrased during the Spanish Civil War. It haunted him: 'I strained my eyes always to see that dreadful miracle of the sky blossoming with these floating flowers.' The image was held in counterpoise with some sixty watercolours of his aerial creatures, some patrolling distant skies, others of burnt-up German 'planes crashed ignominiously in summer coverts, or plush cornfields'. Paul took delight in these 'happy disasters' and they are instantly convincing images from the hand of a recognised master. However, he yearned to make larger, more grandiose statements about Britain's dogged defence; the outcome was a large canvas, 48 inches by 72 inches, which he had negotiated with the WAAC in mid-1941. The result was the magnificent *Battle of Britain*:

> The painting is an attempt to give the sense of an aerial battle in operation over a wide area and thus summarises England's great aerial victory over Germany. The scene includes certain elements constant during the Battle of Britain – the river winding from the town and across parched country, down to the sea; beyond, the shores of the Continent, above, the mounting cumulus concentrating at sunset after a hot brilliant day; across the spaces of sky, trails of airplanes, smoke tracks of dead or damaged machines falling, floating clouds, parachutes, balloons. Against the approaching twilight new formations of Luftwaffe, threatening …[17]

Paul's detailed account is perhaps unnecessary; rarely had he painted so literal an image, an action picture that is both busy with tactical detail but expertly balanced in its design, subtle in its distortions: a composition 'nicely poised between relish and apprehension'. Paul, however, wished it to be regarded as more than an accumulation of uncomfortable 'facts'. In all his war art he was interested in violent counterpoint. And indeed there is a terrible beauty in the sight of two implacable forces pitched against each other; one characterised by the rigid geometric of German bombers, the other by the balletic vapour trials of the defending fighters:

> Facts, here, both of science and nature are used 'imaginatively' and repeated only in so far as they suggest symbols for the picture plan which itself is viewed as from the air. The moment of battle represents the impact of opposing forces, the squadrons of the R.A.F. driving down the Channel, sweeping along the coast and breaking up a formation of the Luftwaffe while it is still over the sea.[18]

Despite these allegorical readings and its calligraphic, almost decorative aesthetic, Paul remained acutely conscious that these airborne aerobatics

16. *Outline*, p. 262.
17. Paul Nash, cited in Alan Ross, *Colours of War*, p. 80. Between 1933 and 1945 Paul wrote lengthy texts about his work for Dudley Tooth, commonly known as 'Picture History', so that he might guide commentators to the proper reading of his work.

Battle of Britain is in the Imperial War Museum, London: IWM ART LD 1550. Nash delivered the work to the WAAC in October 1941; it went on display at the National Gallery in January 1942. On seeing the unfinished painting, a pupil of Paul's – Richard Seddon – advised him to include more black smoke trails and actually painted an example on the canvas, which may still be the one that can be seen to the right-hand side of the composition.
18. During the war Paul wrote three essays on the aerial war: 'Personality of Planes', 'Bomber's Lair', and 'Aerial Flowers', which are all reproduced in *Outline*, pp. 248–65.

would inevitably result in violent death. A closer look at the flowery vapour trails reveals a viscous and oily set of marks, toxic and dangerous which help dictate the mortal flavour of the painting: 'Over my head', wrote Paul, 'in the wild sky sail my strange creatures impersonally with their impersonal crews of light-hearted boys all bent on varieties of murder more horrible than the Medicis' worst dreams would allow.'[19] For all its chromatic anonymity this is a narrative of abject violence, as Charles Hall observes 'there is a dangerous, poisonous edge to it all.'[20]

'THE WRONG KIND OF WAR': JOHN BACK IN UNIFORM

Despite his wish to fly, Paul never went up in an aeroplane, never experiencing for himself that 'wild sky'.[21] Severely blighted by his worsening asthmatic condition, the 'balletic meditation' of his 1941 canvas was the nearest he came to imagining the aerial war. John, by contrast, was keen to play an active part in the conflict, and was wary of a possibly more passive, irrelevant role as an artist.

He had already joined the Royal Observer Corps by the outbreak of war and despite being in his mid-forties spent much of his time seeking useful armed employment 'making sundry dashes' as he described it, 'like an animal in a field towards being as I thought more patriotically employed'.[22] By April 1940 he had gained the rank of Honorary Captain in the Royal Marines but only as an Official War Artist, this time attached to the Navy. It was not what he wished for: 'I fear that after 20 years', he wrote to the curator at the Imperial War Museum,[23] 'the spark of inspiration will be somewhat dulled, besides, what a War!' And indeed it was an odd war; artists found themselves hemmed in by regulations and censorship, by long bouts of routine work with little to punctuate the boredom. John arrived in Plymouth in the midst of a security alert with spies suspected everywhere. While out sketching he was repeatedly harassed by over-vigilant police, his honorary rank counting for little, in fact it made matters worse. Out of sheer frustration he insisted on rejoining the Observer Corps, so that he might feel more useful. 'Yes, dear boy', he wrote to Dickey at the WAAC, 'I feel a bit more useful now. I Paint for the Admiralty, Dig for Victory, and Observe for the Air Ministry.'[24]

Although John travelled throughout the country making drawings of docks, ships, submarines, and smaller vessels he became steadily irritated by the stop-start nature of the work. He complained to Paul, 'This war is the wrong kind of war, it does not come to us very much yet and we can't seem to get at it.'[25] On his second assignment to Swansea he reckoned that 'unless I strike something very inspiring here, certain shreds of honesty compel the feeling that I should not continue in this job.' He was also irked by the tiresome

19. Paul Nash to Ruth Clark, early 1941, Tate archive, quoted in Charles Hall, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, p. 35.
20. Charles Hall, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, p. 35.
21. A number of writers suggest that Paul did in fact sneak a short flight, but this is not now verifiable.
22. John Nash to E.M.O'R.Dickey, *c.*6 August 1940.
23. John to Curator, Imperial War Museum, 16 April 1940.
24. John Nash to Dickey, 10 June 1940.
25. John to Paul Nash, undated, Tate, 7050.933 (with kind permission of John Lewis and the John Nash Trustees).

JOHN NASH

TWO SUBMARINES BY A JETTY
watercolour with ink on paper • 24.7 x 40 cm

etiquette. There is a witty illustration in one of his letters from 1940 – 'Interruption on the Quayside' – that shows him and fellow war artist Eric Ravilious standing ram-rod erect to salute a passing senior office, their easels, palettes and brushes abandoned in their need to obey Royal Navy protocol.

There were, however, the odd moments of excitement. On one assignment in South Wales his ship was bombed during an air-raid and set ablaze:

> The amount of ducking and throwing oneself flat in the wet was tiring and did not improve the old uniform. I might do a picture of these operations as it was really vivid experience while it lasted but I can't say it would be good propaganda except for the enemy.[26]

John's drawings made in Bristol, Plymouth and Swansea are serious and diligent efforts, but they have little of the spontaneity that had marked his pre-war work. Nor could these rather dutiful drawings compare with the intensity of his front-line experiences in Arras or the Ypres Salient. 'What an odd war this is', became his default refrain, 'it affronts one's sense of what it should be!'[27] By March 1941 he had ditched the honorary tag and earned a commission as a Captain on active service.

> It's a good joke getting right into the Marines by the back door of official war art. No questions were asked about fitness and when they saw me as an honorary Capt. It seemed as if they were sort of hypnotised … I must learn to be a silent if not a strong and silent man.[28]

Paul was impressed but not overly surprised, commenting to Gordon Bottomley with a mix of pride, envy and astonishment that 'Jack … is a pukka captain in the Royal Marines on a hush-hush job somewhere in Scotland at this moment … He didn't like being an official artist for the Admiralty – couldn't do anything, he said & just went on nagging until he got into active service. Was there ever such a chap.'[29] And he came to refer to his incorrigible brother – perhaps a tad sarcastically – as 'John Hushmarine No. 1.'[30]

John's contribution to the intelligence operations in the Royal Navy kept him fully occupied: he served next as Acting Temporary Major in the Royal Marines, was posted to Rosyth in Scotland to serve as a Staff Officer, then on to Portsmouth, under the Commander-in-Chief, and then under the Vice-Admiral to Dover where he played a part in implementing camouflage and deception installations from Kent to Portland along the south coast. Subsequently, he was posted to Portsmouth where he was given greater responsibilities possibly as part of Operation Bodyguard – the overall deception strategy that preceded the Normandy landings. Here he was

26. John Nash to Dickey, 2 September 1940.
27. John Nash, quoted in Brian Foss, *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain, 1939–1945* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 130.
28. John to Paul Nash, undated, Tate, 7050.933 (with kind permission of John Lewis and the John Nash Trustees).
29. Paul Nash to Gordon Bottomley, early May 1941, letter no. 223, in *Poet and Painter*, p. 222.
30. Paul Nash to Dickey, *c.* 6 June 1941.

joined by Christine who served in the Women's Voluntary Service canteen in the dockyard. Little detail is known about his work with Intelligence but he was clearly involved in enemy aircraft identification and recognition, drawing up briefing notes, writing for pamphlets, and disseminating confidential advice on enemy dispositions and the Allies efforts to wage war. In November 1944, his contribution to the Allied Landings in France now over, he was discharged in good standing with the rank of Temporary Captain. Aged 51 John had had a good war; he had made himself useful, he had served his country – one of the very few government-sponsored artists to do so in both world wars – and the thirty or so sketches, drawings and watercolours he had made as an official artist comprise a useful, if slightly undistinguished, portfolio of evidence that recorded the diverse business of the Royal Navy. Perhaps more significantly, the planned parenthesis of war, had served its purpose. The three-year break helped re-invigorate his painting. He resumed his work with a fresh eye and rekindled enthusiasm. After all, as one historian has noted 'his life as a painter was but half over.'[31]

Although neither he nor Margaret knew it, Paul had less than 20 months left to realise his many visions. Yet, after completing his two large canvases *Totes Meer* and *Battle of Britain* he hit a creative block. 'For several weeks of this awful winter', he told Kenneth Clark, 'I could not paint. I had made sure of getting the big canvas in November and I stored it until the Spring gradually building the design up in my imagination but spending most of my hours doing nothing but brood upon Hitler.'[32] Instead of tackling his blank 'big canvas' he concocted bizarre photographic collages of the tyrant's 'horrible head' jammed into a dead sea; a 'frantic monster shark' adrift on the slopes of an earthwork; a flower suspended in mid-air. These remarkable collages channelled his anger but, unfortunately, his third vast painting for the WAAC was the rather disappointing *Defence of Albion*, a clumsy, over-engineered composition of a Sunderland flying boat floundering in bleached waters off Portland. Painted under self-confessed stress, Paul recognised the canvas was flawed, and he was still modifying it late in 1944. Regarding it as a temporary aberration, one critic wrote that it 'falls quite a lot short of the other two in imaginative power. They were, so to speak, allegorical by accident. This … is surely self-conscious synthetic allegory. But it is a failure in the grand manner. Not many other artists are ambitious enough to come a really spectacular cropper.'[33]

For his part, Paul defended it as a treatise in the craft of painting, 'the colour of a dam cold sea off Portland, pale greens and green yellows, steel blues and then *black* ochre and *white*'. He classified it as 'cruiser weight' when compared to the lightweight, even flyweight 'goings on' of *Battle of Britain*.[34] Although not yet ready, if ever, to embrace pure abstraction and liberate his work from the facts of observation, Paul was stung by further criticism in

31. Allen Freer, '*The Delighted Eye*', p. 22.
32. Paul Nash to Kenneth Clark, Clark Archive Tate.
33. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1942.
34. Paul Nash to Dickey, 20 March 1942.

1943 which asserted that he was 'primarily a literary painter whose concerns did not allow him to explore purely painterly art.'[35] Indeed he was more than stung, he was devastated that his art should be so misunderstood, that his ambitions should be so thwarted both by his fast-declining health but also by the shackles of his duties as a government-sponsored war artist. *Battle of Germany*, his fourth and final major canvas for the WAAC, was a fitting *riposte*. It is wholly an imaginary scene, he wrote in one of his habitual descriptive tracts for the press, but one based upon careful studies of official factual evidence:

> The moment of the picture is when the city, lying under the uncertain light of the moon, awaits the blow at its heart. In the background a gigantic column of smoke arises from the recent destruction of an outlying factory which is still fiercely burning. These two objects pillar and moon seem to threaten the city no less than the flights of bombers even now towering in the red sky. The moon's illumination reveals the form of the city but with the smoke pillar's increasing height and width, throws also its largening shadow nearer and nearer. In contrast to the suspense of the waiting city under the quiet though baleful moon, the other half of the picture shows the opening of the bombardment. The entire area of sky and background and part of the middle distance are violently agitated. Here forms are used quite arbitrarily and colours by a kind of chromatic percussion with one purpose, to suggest explosion and detonation.[36]

It was an extraordinarily bold piece of art; with its ambitious feel for form, shape and painterliness it proposed a new course for British painting, soon to be quite overwhelmed by the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the USA. Even Kenneth Clark was taken aback, distraught by his own 'apologetic bewilderment and incomprehension,'[37] recognising perhaps that a new post-war art might be radically different, awkward and discomforting, bringing challenges well beyond his current comprehension. *Battle of Germany* marked a giant leap in Paul's picture-making; a painting of the night (as distinct from the searing sunlight of *Battle of Britain*) it does offer some tangible points of reference – 'the group of floating discs descending may be a part of a flight of paratroops or the crews of aircraft forced to bale out' – and there are hints of 'a winding river, a great Public Square, a processional road striking across a wide Park', but the presiding vision is of near-abstraction, experiential rather than witnessed, punctuated by ambiguous forms, loosened outlines, and chromatic percussions that reverberate across the 'shell-shocked sky'.[38]

It brought his commitment to Clark's committee to an end. His public duties exhausted, he turned away from official patronage to spend a final eighteen months of his life in 'reclusive melancholy'. Fortified by Margaret – now become his nurse, agent, confidante – his health would last just long

35. Philip Hendy, *The Listener,* see also Tate archive, letter from Hendy to Paul Nash, 20 June 1943.
36. Paul Nash, War Artists' Archive, Imperial War Museum, 1 October 1944.
37. Kenneth Clark to Paul Nash, 30 October 1944.
38. *Defence of Albion,* Imperial War Museum, London, IWM ART LD 1933; *Battle of Germany*, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM ART LD 4526.

enough to realise most of his painterly visions, to address – but perhaps not fully answer – the great dramas and mysteries of existence, not least his fascination with the soul visiting the Mansions of the Dead:

> This idea stirred my imagination deeply. I could see the emblem of the soul – a little winged creature, perhaps not unlike the ghost moth – perched upon the airy habitations of the sky…[39]

39. 'Nurse, agent, confidante' is from James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 193–4; Paul Nash's words on the *Mansions of the Dead* is taken from *Aerial Flowers*, written in 1944, and which forms a coda to *Outline*.

PAUL NASH

VIEW FROM WITTENHAM CLUMPS

1913 • pencil, watercolour, chalk and ink • 60.3 x 68.5 cm

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

9 SUN AND MOON: THE TRAVELS OF 'THE GREAT LUMINARIES'

As the Allied invasion of France got under way in the summer of 1944, Paul embarked on a series of canvases which outwardly seemed to have very little connection with conflict. 'I am', he wrote to Clare Nielson in June, 'doing some strange new pictures. Giant flowers blooming among the clouds or sailing down the night skies like falling stars.'[1]

The aerial war had given Paul a convenient backdrop for his fascination with flight, flying and the infinite sky, but ultimately he felt more comfortable articulating the cyclical nature of death and life through his keen understanding of the natural world.[2] Once his WAAC commission had expired he promptly abandoned any further dealings with destroyed machinery and aeroplanes, fallen or flying. Acutely aware that his health was in terminal decline he wanted, observed one close friend, 'to face the awful and too early discontinuance of his life, largely by persuading himself that the experience of death was akin to flowers aerially borne, a kind of eternity of fragrant and gentle drifting …'[3]

Paul wrote about his physical condition with candour, albeit laced by a grim, self-deprecating humour. Unnervingly honest about his prospects it was as if he now realised that his entire creative quest had been a search for the pictorial equivalents of death, 'a pursuit of the quintessential paradox that in the midst of life we are in death':

> Death, about which we are all thinking, death, I believe is the only solution to this problem of how to be able to fly. Personally, I feel that if death can give us that, death will be good.[4]

To augment these powerful visions of flight, to 'explore that mysterious domain of the air'[5] he returned to a set of motifs that had been important to him since his youth – the Wittenham Clumps, an ancient tree-topped burial ground in South Oxfordshire. This well-known landmark 'stood up with extraordinary prominence … two hills, both dome-like and each

1. Paul to Clare Nielson, June 1944, quoted in James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 210.
2. Simon Grant, 'A Landscape of Mortality', *Tate Magazine*, issue 6, 1 August 2003.
3. James Thurber to Anthony Bertram, quoted in *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955). Paul had struck up an unexpected friendship with *The New Yorker* cartoonist James Thurber on his US trip in 1931.
4. Paul Nash, 'Aerial Flowers', in *Outline*, p. 260–5.
5. *Ibid*., p. 274.

planted with a thick clump of trees whose mass had a curiously symmetrical sculptured form'. Since September 1911, when he had first felt their innate magic, they had become 'the pyramids of my small world'.[6] Three of his major oil paintings from the mid-war years – *Landscape of the Summer Solstice, Landscape of the Moon's Last Phase,* and *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* – use the Clumps as their setting for Paul's elaborate visual treatise on the converging of opposites:

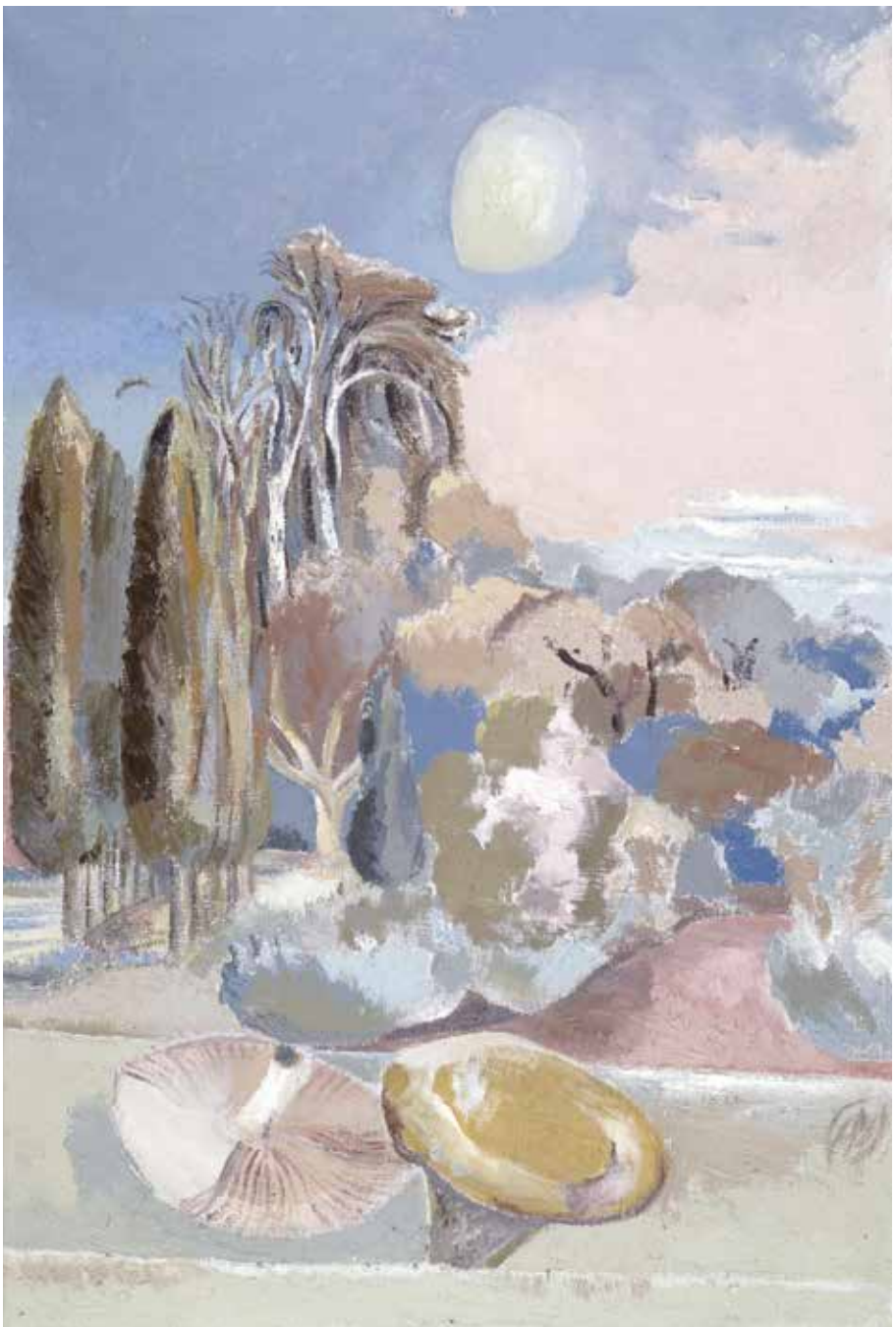
> The phenomenon of the Spring Equinox, for example, presents the *fact* of equal day and night; which contains the idea of simultaneous sun and moon – a red disc and a white. Again, the thought of division into light and darkness in equal parts suggests a divided space wherein a landscape, on one side, is lit by the setting sun, while the other lies under the influence of a rising moon.[7]

Fascinated by the infinite mysteries of birth, decay, death, and renewal, Paul drew on what was immediately around him. From Oxford he and Margaret would visit Hilda Harrison's home at Boar's Hill, a few miles south-west of the city. Seated in her 'charming neglected garden' Paul could look east across Bagley Wood and the Thames Valley to spot the Wittenham Clumps some twelve miles distant. His health now so poor that he found walking quite exhausting he relied increasingly on binoculars to identify and draw the salient features of the distant mounds. Transforming spatial depth into a decorative flatness it lent his late landscapes a compressed and foreshortened appearance, with the distance looming up to the same plane as foreground objects. The visual effect, immediate and intimate, was so radically different from the cool objectivity of the unrelated objects arranged so carefully (and cryptically) on the southern English downlands.[8]

Just as he crossed a vast space with his field glasses, so these late renditions of the Clumps spanned time, reuniting Paul with a place of incalculable importance to his personal iconography. Through a sequence of extraordinarily rich and moving paintings he merged this 'beautiful legendary country' with the foliage and flowers of his own garden, drawing metaphorical strength from the trumpet-like white flower of the convolvulus, from giant sunflowers which he described as 'terrifying', and in the 'dying, dark, ethereal flowers' of the poisonous hellebore.[9]

Laden with literary and paganistic links to the English countryside, the sunflower became a deeply potent symbol for Paul who had become inspired by James Frazer's book on folklore *The Golden Bough,* published in 1922. Amongst many readings of these rich and complicated paintings, Roger Cardinal has suggested that Paul was using the image of the sunflower as a magnet to draw the sun ever closer, rendering 'that unearthly object

6. *Outline*, p. 122.
7. *Landscape of the Summer Solstice,* 1943, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; *Landscape of the Moon's Last Phase,* 1944, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox,* 1944, National Galleries of Scotland. The text is taken from Paul Nash's *Picture History.*
8. The compression of pictorial space is well described by Roger Cardinal, *The Landscape Vision of Paul Nash,* p. 104.
9. Quoted in Andrew Causey (ed.) *Paul Nash: Writings on Art*, p. 160, cited in Simon Grant, 'Paul Nash: War Artist, Landscape', in *Paul Nash: Modern Artists, Ancient Landscape* (Tate Liverpool, 2003), p. 46.



PAUL NASH

NOVEMBER MOON

1942 • oil on canvas • 76.2 x 50.8 cm

Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge/The Bridgeman Art Library

PAUL NASH

ECLIPSE OF THE SUNFLOWER

1945 • watercolour on paper • 71.1 x 91.4 cm

British Council Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library

accessible to understanding'. Simultaneously, the sun seems to be magnetised by the flower 'drawing it up in a thrilling exaggeration of scale that transforms the modest plant into a token of awesome potency'.[10] Wrestling with ideas of microcosm and macrocosm, of solar and lunar powers, at times the mythic complexities embedded within his imagery could not be easily unlocked; their equation was simply too dense, too richly earnest. Of his canvas *Sunflower and Sun* Paul confessed:

> I cannot explain this picture. It means only what it says. Its design was evolved from the actual landscape under much the same atmospheric conditions. There was such a sunflower and some such effect of sunlight. All the elements of this picture were present in more or less degree. But the drama of the event, which implies the mystical association of the sun and the sunflower is heightened by the two opposing ellipses and by the other echoing forms of the sky which retaliate with the same apparent movement of outspread wings made by the leaves of the flower.[11]

He became similarly obsessed by the changed appearance of mistletoe after its death, with its rich golden yellow that might 'possess the property of disclosing treasures in the earth.'[12] In Frazer he read astonishing stories of ritual midsummer fire festivals, where lighted firewheels were spectacularly rolled down English hillsides to represent the course of the sun in the sky. Unlike his plantsman brother, Paul drew far-reaching symbolic conclusions from these tales, fusing the sunflower's petals with burning planetary discs to create personal, political and mythical possibilities.

Although the symbolism in this richly striated late work is almost wilfully 'arcane and secretive'[13] it is possible to understand such canvases as *Eclipse of the Sunflower*[14] on many levels: as a 'final visionary rumination on war', as a positive suggestion that a benighted European culture could actually overcome the forces of darkness, but also as a self-portrait, the artist as the burning disc escaping, as he put it, 'into vast lonely spaces in complete freedom of bodily action' escaping the earthbound restrictions of land, but 'in death, returning to it.'[15]

With his life waning and draining from him, on 'bottled oxygen and borrowed time', this final suite of paintings impelled Paul to concoct images of reconciliation in which 'the polar values of the sun and the moon, of life and death, of masculine vigour and feminine sanctuary' became fixed in a dream-like state, frozen in the fragile moment.[16] Serene, blessed, balanced in perpetual equilibrium, the motifs that filled these last canvases were the apotheosis of Paul's landscape vision, readying him for his next and final 'peaceful journey to other worlds & spheres of the mind'.[17]

10. Roger Cardinal, p. 104. James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (2 volumes 1890; 2nd edition, 3 volumes, 1900; 3rd edition, 12 volumes, 1911–14) is a major study of religious myth which argues that fertility cults the world over underpin the Christian promise of renewal through death. Paul assimilated this imagery into his own personal mythology and blended it with the lifelong influence of the more devout William Blake, particularly 'Ah Sunflower' from *Songs of Experience* (1794). See Tom Overton, British Council website, http://venicebiennale.britishcouncil.org/people/reference/paul-nash/ and with reference to Frazer, see: http://collection.britishcouncil.org/collection/artist/5/18421/object/39123
11. Paul Nash, *Picture History.*
12. Paul's meditations on Frazer, *The Golden Bough,* and Balder are contained in notebook 3 in the Tate Gallery Archives.
13. Andrew Causey, 'Review', *The Spectator,* 22 June 2013.
14. *Eclipse of the Sunflower,* 1945, British Council Collection.
15. Quoted in Andrew Causey (ed.) *Paul Nash: Writings on Art*, p. 160, cited in Simon Grant, 'Paul Nash: War Artist, Landscape', in *Paul Nash: Modern Artists, Ancient Landscape* (Tate Liverpool, 2003), p. 46.
16. Roger Cardinal, *The Landscape Vision of Paul Nash*, p.118. Cardinal describes this last work as 'fastened in dream-like apposition, held timelessly at the moment just before fusion.'
17. Margaret Nash to Gordon and Emily Bottomley, letter no. 269, 14 July 1946, *Poet and Painter*, pp. 267.

JOHN AND CHRISTINE: HEADING EASTWARDS

John and Christine had visited East Anglia on and off since 1929, but as the war ground to a halt in Europe and the Far East they decided to leave their Buckinghamshire house in Lane End and head eastwards. They settled in Wormingford, a small village a few miles north-west of Colchester, in Essex, where they had bought, for £750, a two-storey farmhouse called Bottengoms. It was a primitive place, low-ceilinged, a steep staircase, its only source of water an open culvert that ran across the kitchen floor, for years it had no electricity. They were enchanted from the moment they stumbled across it:

> I went on down past the house [recalled Christine] which was actually impossible to get near to. The nettles and elders were right up to the top of the ground-floor windows. There was no trace of a garden, no sign of a path. So I continued down the track and sat for a long time under a willow tree by a barn and I thought it was the most beautiful place I'd ever seen, but absolutely impossible to contemplate as a house to live in. The idea of reclaiming it, and maintaining it even if we could reclaim it, seemed even more formidable. I must have stayed there under the willow tree at least an hour before, very regretfully, I walked back up the leafy track.[18]

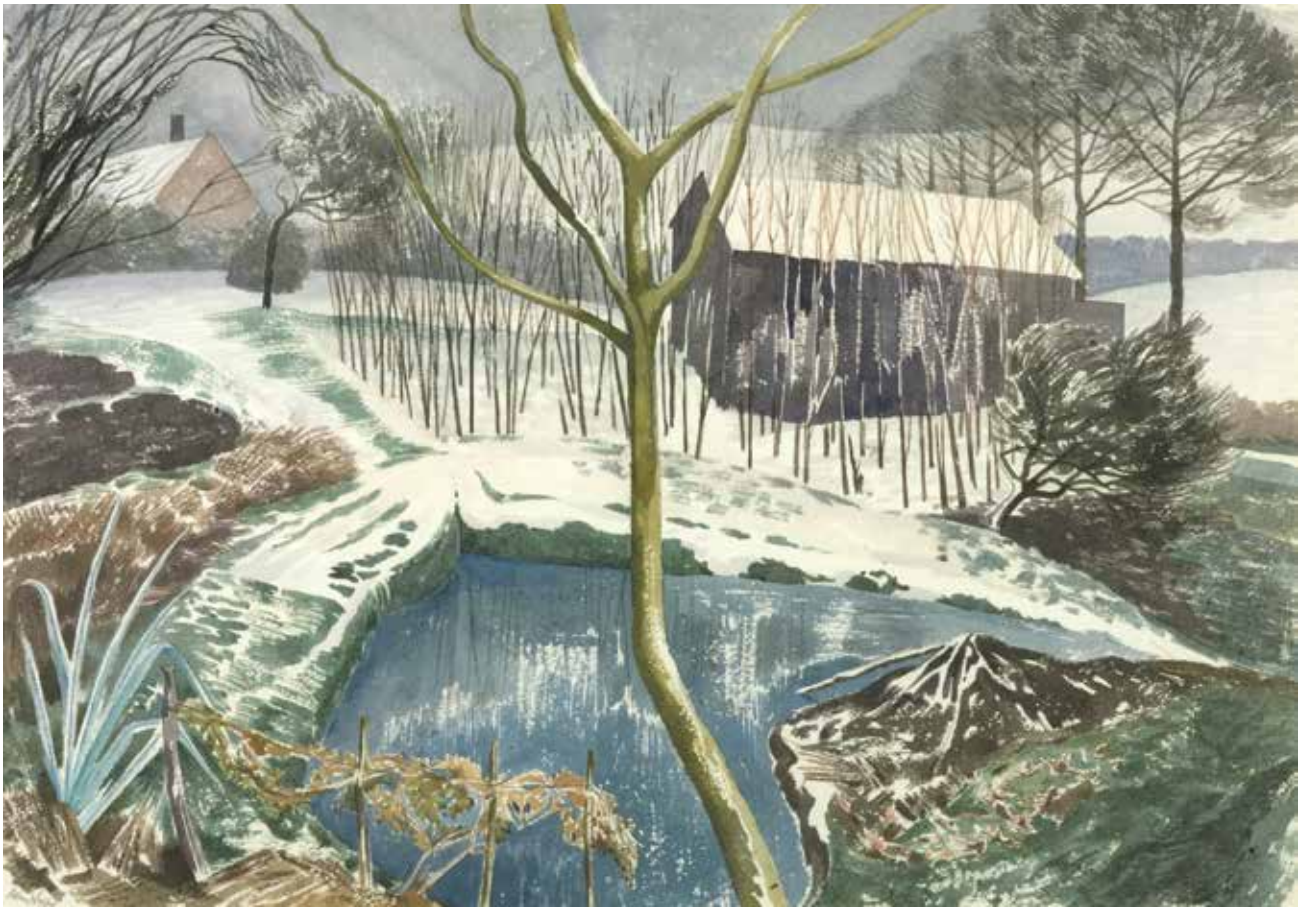
Yet reclaim it they did. A posse of friends and helpers from the village helped John rediscover the garden; Christine tackled the house, restoring it sufficiently for them both to live there for the next thirty or so years, 'the old homestead' as John called it. His studio was at the top of the house, a small L-shaped room with two windows separated by the chimney-stack. The windows, recalled one of many regular visitors, looked out onto a characteristic John Nash landscape, indeed 'so characteristic that one has a momentary sense of looking at one of his paintings.'[19] He became attached to the Stour Valley, bringing a fresh eye to a topography already fully graced by Gainsborough and Constable, but it was the landscape around Wormingford which provided John with an inexhaustible supply of subjects. Drawn as ever towards water, over the following decades John conjured up a seemingly endless suite of paintings that feature ponds, streams, ditches, rivers and waterfalls. He painted them in every season, from the height of summer in *Mill Pond, Evening* of 1946, to the deepest winter in *Frozen Ponds*, an oil of 1959. In fact he painted many of the same subjects over and over again, 'the ponds lost behind the bamboos and gunneras in July and then stripped naked in the January frost.'[20] John never lost his sense of wonder in the natural world. That much is clearly evident from the consistent quality of his painting in the three decades following their move to Bottengoms. He looked upon familiar views with a fresh eye as though seeing them for the first time, a sensation noticed by all who wandered the Essex countryside alongside him:

18. Christine Nash, quoted in Allen Freer, *'The Delighted Eye'*, p. 23.
19. John Rothenstein, *John Nash*, p. 81.
20. Allen Freer, *'The Delighted Eye'*, p. 24. Neve points out that it was not the eminent English painters who attracted him to the Stour but the place itself: 'Good river scenery,' wrote John in his inimitable manner on a postcard within sight of Gainsborough's Connard Wood, 'Think we might stay.' (Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 44)

JOHN NASH

THE BARN, WORMINGFORD

1954 • oil on canvas • 66 x 82.5 cm



JOHN NASH

WILD GARDEN, WINTER

1959 • watercolour on paper • 40.6 x 57.1 cm

> It was an utter pleasure to go for a walk with John – everything came to life and looked quite different and more interesting through his eyes. Even fishing was a pleasure; sitting beside him and listening to him talking about the landscape and the sky, and all the different lights and shades and shadows.[21]

In his paintings John often pitches the viewer into a central space, eschewing the need for any 'introductory' foreground. Often he takes a high viewpoint as though looking out from a first-floor window. In taking this pictorial approach he is so different from brother Paul who – at the height of his mystical paintings of the Purbeck and Wiltshire downs – invariably locates the main motifs of the subject in the middle distance, very rarely allowing any tangible object to spill out into the front of the picture plane. It is hard to put a finger on why John's paintings work so effectively. Like many of Stanley Spencer's landscapes they are painted with a brittle sharpness that speaks both of intense concentration and also a deeply felt knowledge of how the natural world works. His work offers a countryman's feel for how its many components fit together. But unlike Spencer's occasionally improvised compositions, John's landscapes are underpinned by an authoritative compositional infrastructure. Look for example at his fine rendition of *Mill Buildings at Boxted*,[22] which has a dominant triangular wedge of field on the left, a wedge held in check by a rectangular pillar of foliage in the exact centre, this edifice partly reflected in an exacting arc of ruffled water that pulls the eye from the middle of the scene up to the front of the painting. Absolutely intuitively John makes bold decisions about the design; once committed to these interlocking foundation blocks he can focus – instinctively, like an artist with 'green fingers' – on the tactile values of the roof tiles, or the lopped cut of a pollarded willow, or a dozen other highly-detailed observations of the natural world. 'In looking at a landscape', John once related in a rare interview:

> its abstract features appeal pretty quickly. Although representational I am primarily interested in the structure underneath, though I hope not obviously. In fact such changes as I make are based more on selection than specific alteration.[23]

John spoke of being ever interested in 'close-ups', which allowed him to accentuate the abstract superstructure of a view, ready to take an interest 'in half a haystack as much as in a wide sweep of landscape.' Through an intense love of his chosen subjects, a love which Rothenstein has described as 'intensely direct, and imbued by a reticent nobility', he was sustained in his practice for the next thirty years. There is though an inescapable loneliness in his work, an undertow of melancholy in his man-made but unpeopled landscapes. 'The only figure…' observes Neve acutely, 'is Nash himself, the viewer and the degree of introspection implied by the paintings makes the possibility of intrusion by other people almost alarming.'[24] Possibly his most effective compositions are those that depict bare winter fields, especially

21. Natalie Bevan to John Rothenstein, in Rothenstein, 1983, p. 92.
22. *Mill Buildings at Boxted,* 1963, Tate, T00592.
23. John Nash in conversation with John Rothenstein, quoted in Rothenstein, 1983, p. 119.
24. Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 45.

JOHN NASH

THE LAKE, LITTLE HORKESLEY HALL
c.1958 • oil on canvas • 60.6 x 76 cm

purchased from John Nash, R.A. in 1958
photo credit: © Royal Academy of Arts, London; photographer John Hammond

those covered in a thin dusting of snow. Not only was he more productive in winter (having been busy gardening much of the summer) but the white of the snow simplified planes, made 'ridges and banks, branches and furrows clearer and more orderly, showing the rib-cage of the land.'[25] Ice-covered fields and pale winter skies gave full vent to his draughtsmanship, his expert treatment of complex linear shapes, the tracery of leaf-stripped elms, the curved parallel lines of stubble poking through light snow, the soft colours that he preferred in his later years.

John's work changed only modestly over the coming decades. Some have suggested that it grew technically richer, compositionally a little more complex, but for year after year his method of painting changed hardly at all, maintaining its consistent pace and reliable qualities, combining an intense love of his subject, a 'freshness, unity and unequivocal directness' which set him aside as one of the country's most distinctive and memorable biographers of its southern landscapes.[26]

Bottengoms was a busy and sociable place with a steady stream of visitors that formed a circle of close friends around them. Unlike Paul and Margaret with their restless wandering from place to place, John and Christine evolved a regular and comfortable lifestyle in Essex, Christine still serving her invaluable role as cook, carer, devotee, ensuring that she kept anything from him that might cause him worry or concern. John maintained a strict schedule of studio work, painting steadily from ten in the morning until just before four in the afternoon. Soon after then a substantial afternoon tea would be taken often in the company of close friends drawn from the neighbourhood, 'the dear ones' as he called them; drinks at six and then an elaborate dinner prepared by Christine. Quieter evenings might be spent reading or playing the piano, occasionally as a duet, or engaged in simple domestic duties, sewing or writing letters. According to John Rothenstein, John dreaded being alone when Christine was away and he would call upon close friends, chiefly the author Ronald Blythe, to keep him company. The 'stylish tenor' of their lives, their elegant dinners and sense of occasion was in stark contrast to the chaotic interior of the house with its stacked up frames and paintings, some on their way to and fro various exhibitions, great piles of books and paperwork fallen willy-nilly, and correspondence scattered everywhere amongst the vases of flowers and many ashtrays, for both were such heavy smokers 'that the dull cream walls and the ceilings were steadily darkened'.[27]

Freer has observed how Christine helped manage John's money to the last penny. When he travelled to London to attend meetings at the Royal Academy – where he had been elected an Associate in 1940, and became a full member in 1951 – she would give him five pounds and on his return he handed her the change. The arrangement worked perfectly well. There was, however,

25. Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 46.
26. See Allen Freer, *'The Delighted Eye'*, p. 24.
27. John Rothenstein, *John Nash*, p. 91.

less equilibrium between John and Paul. While John took immense satisfaction from his election to the Royal Academy and was to prove a loyal and conscientious member, Paul mocked his brother for accepting the appointment: 'Just the place for you,' he said, deriving much amusement from his younger brother's commitment to a place Paul had always associated with hidebound conservatism.

Just as John's daily schedule was a source of constancy and stability for his creative metabolism so was his annual cycle of work. Edward Bawden knew something of John's rhythm of work over the year, but not everything:

> Sketch-book drawings were called for in the summer months & transformed into paintings in the winter. Mysterious operations that then took place in the studio can only be guessed at. Did he, I wonder, carefully enlarge the sketchbook drawing by the laborious method of squaring up? How he began the painting having squared it up & redrawn it I do not know. Once he had showed me a drawer full of paintings which had been half begun, with pale washes of colour here & there, unresolved paintings, & I wondered whether he would work on them again or had they been put aside incomplete as a record. An examination of the drawings might reveal a good deal about his method of working. What I feel sure about is he panicked not at all, that to extricate a drawing he did not passionately scratch or slash at it & probably never rushed off to the bathroom to wash the paper clean.[28]

'Such behaviour', further remembered Bawden, 'would be out of character. He told me, I remember, that he never experienced a crisis … A painting might peter out, die gracefully in the arms & John by no means heartbroken would begin by drawing it afresh.' Bawden, along with Eric Ravilious before the war, had been one of John's regular painting companions on one of the annual working trips which Christine diligently planned and arranged up to the very last years of his life. 'On five occasions', recalled Bawden in 1979, 'we shared a painting expedition in Wales on the Gower Peninsula & again near Haverfordwest at Littlehaven; in Cornwall during a cold wet spell of misery in the De Lank Quarry at Blisland; at Dunwich in Suffolk & in Shropshire at Ironbridge'.

> If the Nashes were thinking of an excursion Christine would set off alone to make a reconnaissance & it was on her report of the pictorial potential of the selected place that John acted. On arrival & having settle in John would make a desultory sally to have a look round, returning shortly in a fairly gloomy state of mind, saying little or nothing unless by happy chance he had spotted a little-known wild plant. Such a discovery induced a friendlier attitude to an alien countryside & soon he could be seen walking around with a small sketchbook, standing now & again to draw something & as the days went by he might be seen sitting on a stool doing a more elaborate drawing…[29]

28. Edward Bawden to John Rothenstein, 24 April 1979, quoted in John Rothenstein, 1983, pp. 117–18.
29. *Ibid*., p. 83.

Such was the rhythm of their life together; whether in Essex or far further afield John would 'sniff out' a subject in an area first reconnoitred by Christine. Patiently, professionally, he would gather his mass of painting equipment, set up, and diligently make watercolours or squared-up drawings that would later be coloured indoors. He 'never worked feverishly, however urgent the need to complete a picture, but in a calm easy going way' wrote an admiring fellow painter.[30] Back in Essex, in his attic studio, John would choose the most appropriate study to transfer to canvas, and in his smoke-filled room, working on a table and easel he would bring the initial sensation of the place diligently and patiently back to life.

ONE ENDING

By mid-1946, in the immediate wake of their step-mother's death, Paul and John were still at odds with each other over their divisions of the inheritance. John still smouldered from Paul's impolitic use of certain words in his last letter. In early July, writing from the Florida Hotel at Boscombe, ten or so miles east of his beloved Swanage, where he and Margaret had gone to seek some rest from Oxford and to see the sea for the last time, Paul did what he could to mollify his tetchy younger brother. He urged him to not attach any '*Sinister* implications' to the word 'shrewd', preferring instead to relate some of the idiosyncrasies of his current billet:

> This is an unbelievable place, inaccessible for us save by taxi! But the sea view stretches from a glimpse of the Isle of Wight and S[outh] W[est] and those frightening Old Harry Rocks. And the whole wall is windows with a balcony (modern arch). Just beyond is a derelict pier … All very queer & *surr*ealist as young people say.[31]

After writing the letter Paul went to bed. He never awoke. He died of a heart attack in his sleep. He was 57 years old. John's reply is not recorded.

Margaret wrote soon after to Gordon and Edith Bottomley sharing with them that she was 'heart-broken, but completely reconciled to my fate, as he would not have been able to work, or even to endure life with his glorious courage & enduring sense of beauty & poetry.'[32]

Paul may, as Margaret intimated, been able to paint to the very last hour, but he had been under doctor's orders for the past six months not to stand at his easel, and had been seated on the hotel balcony to make his last watercolours. 'His heart was worn out', related Margaret, 'but never his mind, nor his eye nor hand had yet ceased to respond as obedient & faithful servants to his will.'[33]

30. Carel Weight, quoted in John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 84.
31. Paul Nash to John Nash, undated but probably late June early July 1946, quoted in James King, *Interior Landscapes*, p. 222.
32. Margaret Nash to Gordon and Emily Bottomley, letter no. 269, 14 July 1946, *Poet and Painter*, pp. 267–8.
33. *Ibid*.

JOHN NASH

PAUL NASH: OUTLINE

1948 • illustration for book cover

10 ENDINGS: A CODA

Paul Nash was buried with four generations of his family – 'those fine ancestors who made him love England,' wrote Margaret – in Langley Churchyard, Buckinghamshire. The spot was later marked by an imposing twin-pillared memorial, at its foot a stone carving of a bird of prey staring into a large and lengthy dedication plaque:

> In loving memory of Paul Nash
> Painter. Designer.
> Born London May 11th 1889.
> Fell asleep July 11th 1946.
> Whatsoever things are lovely
> Think of these things
> This memorial to her
> Beloved Paul is placed
> here by his wife Margaret

John helped clear Paul's studio, noticing how limited was his range of colours, and making him realise afresh that neither he nor his brother had been particularly adventurous colourists. Might John have recalled that memorable quip of Paul's friend Ben Nicholson who had remarked, of Paul's mid-career work, that he could not look at his paintings without wanting to reach for a glass of water.[1] And indeed, when compared to many artists, Paul's career was short, truncated before he had time to explore the imagery of ghosts, for him a necessary next quest after his work on Balder, mistletoe, and sunflowers – 'ghosts, souls and general behaviour after death.' Obituaries were generous; *The Times* 'of such exceptional length in this time of thin newspapers. Even the lean and emaciated *Daily Telegraph*, wrote Gordon Bottomley with sadness and pride to Margaret, 'gave him four inches more than any other painter had had for years.'[2] Art history has been generous too, and justly so. Paul's standing as one of the greatest English artists of the twentieth century remains unchallenged. Ranked as the most evocative landscape painter of his generation, his leadership role has also been recognised. He is counted a pioneer of modernism who promoted European avant-garde practices such as abstraction and surrealism, but without relinquishing his essential grasp of the English sense of place.

1. Cited in Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, p. 11. In a penetrating discussion on the similarities at times between Paul's work and Ben Nicholson, Cardinal writes of Paul's occasional reliance on 'low-budget colours', faded greys and browns, dull blues and blacks. (Roger Cardinal, *The Landscape Vision of Paul Nash*, p. 79) Elsewhere he describes the 'impression of coldness, radiance, sharpness' and the hard luminosity of his colouration, slightly tempered by the fact that he never varnished his finished canvases. (p. 76)

2. Gordon Bottomley to Margaret Nash, letter no. 270, 17 August 1946, *Poet and Painter*, pp. 268–9.

Yet, it is often his paintings from the Western Front that are most frequently cited, for devising a new visual language of war, for their intense pathos, for creating amidst the desolation 'an elegy for the pastoral mode itself.'[3]

And what of John: how have historians remembered his long and diligent sojourn in the British landscape? Not especially well, it seems. Even the standard texts on British art fail to recognise his work, ignoring, at best belittling, his achievements, invariably referring to him as Paul's brother, more often Paul's younger brother. In her brilliant panorama of *British Art since 1900,* Frances Spalding writes eloquently of Paul's many achievements, even mentions the Society of Wood-engravers and the Golden Cockerel Press, and the unique contribution to the medium of Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious – John's erstwhile painting companions – but of John not a single mention.[4] In recent years there has been a modest rehabilitation of his talent and contribution, but it is still totally eclipsed by Paul's. Oddly enough, it is perhaps John's most atypical painting that is so often cited, his large war composition *Over the Top*. Reproduced often, and invariably with its riveting story of maiming and death as an essential adjunct, it seems so removed from John's every day concerns, 'his natural reticence, his gift for understatement and his fidelity to his subject'.[5]

After Paul's death, John's life with Christine continued much as it always had. Little interrupted the regular pace of his studio day or his painting year, he cherished his snug homestead and his close social circle who were always ready to provide the necessary companionship. Honours flowed his way: ARA in 1940, a full Academician in 1951; he was awarded CBE in 1964 and an honorary degree from Sussex University three years later. That same year, 1967, the Royal Academy gave him the unique tribute of a major retrospective exhibition of over 260 oils, water-colours, pen-and-ink drawings, illustrated books, the first such show of a living Academician. John exultant but also unsettled, dogged by the deep melancholia which seized him periodically. 'You've really done enough old sod, why not take a rest,' he jibed in a letter written soon after the success of his retrospective, 'But I hate entire rest – besides it's not economically feasible.'[6] And so, in time, he turned again to his daily regime, drawing outdoors, happiest in the winter, painting quietly and regularly in his attic, exhibiting to quiet recognition and assured sales, snug in their Essex 'homestead'.

Christine died in sutumn 1976, suddenly and with a minimum of 'fuss and bother'.[7] She and John had been married for 58 years. John died ten months later. A possible stroke soon after Christine's death brought on the decline though he still struggled into the studio where his work rate fast tapered away. Very close friends and his sister Barbara cared for him in the final months. John was buried beside Christine in Wormingford Churchyard.

3. Robert Hughes, *Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980) p. 179.
4. Frances Spalding, *British Art since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987). In overlooking John Nash, Spalding prefers to twin Ravilious and Bawden as two recent graduates from the Royal College of Art (RCA), looking for a cheap cottage to rent in Essex, with a shared 'nimble sense of humour' and a passion for wood-engraving, nurtured by their tutor at the RCA, Paul Nash (pp. 70–71).
5. Allen Freer, *'The Delighted Eye'*, p. 26.
6. John Lewis, *John Nash, the Painter as Illustrator* (Pendomer Press, 1978) p. 28, quoted in John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 107.
7. Ronald Blythe, quoted in John Rothenstein, 1983, p. 112.

Obituaries were kind and respectful, but it was his local newspaper that, a few years earlier, had really captured the essence of John Northcote Nash RA CBE:

> A painting by John Nash is like a sentence spoken by a gentleman, perfectly enunciated, quiet, complete, yet with a certain reserve about it as of things left unsaid.[8]

8. Review in *The Colchester Express* of John Nash's show at the Minories, Colchester, sponsored by the Victor Batte-Lay Trust and the Colchester Art Society in collaboration with the Royal Academy, 1967.

JOHN NASH

THE FARM POND

1940 • oil on canvas • 64.1 x 76.8 cm

MEMORIES, SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS

STAGING THE RWA EXHIBITION

BY GEMMA BRACE

Staged at the Royal West of England Academy in the summer of 2014 the exhibition 'Brothers in Art: John and Paul Nash'[1] asks 'how is landscape remembered?' and 'how do we remember through landscape?' Bound temporally and experientially by the trauma of not one, but two world wars, the exhibition weaves its narrative between the divergent paths of two brothers, John (1893–1977) and Paul Nash (1889–1946). Nestled between Paul's monumental hilltops and John's swaying corn sheaves, the the English landscape becomes the focus; a place for remembering and forgetting, where memories converge framed by the cultural and social reverberations of conflict. Within these landscapes lie spaces for reflection and resolution, where fragments can become whole. Here, amongst painted shadows and reflections, individual and collective memory resides, immortalised and memorialized in drawings and paintings whilst 'people remember as they are remembered by things.'[2]

> The Brothers Nash are always interesting, Paul with his head, where a poet's should be, in the clouds, and John, like the child that the painter should be, putting his hand in his mouth to tell us what he has seen in the field and on the farm that afternoon.[3]

John and Paul Nash were landscape painters in the purest sense. They shared a unique way of looking at the land, shaped by childhood pastimes, constant and close study, and the travesty of war. Their primary concern was always for nature and the countryside around them, depicting the fields and shorelines of their native land. They belong to a group of artists who attempted to balance the radicalism of their European contemporaries with a particularly English sense of Modernism. Stylistically they trod two very different paths, veering between the literary and the lyrical, surrealism and traditionalism. In the exhibition 'Brothers in Art' we are confronted with a panoramic vision of the British countryside, both imagined and real.

Landscape forms the underlying thread of the exhibition. However, it is not only presented as the soil and stone that constitutes our geographical

1. Exhibition developed from an original idea by James Russell, writer and curator.
2. Andrew Jones, *Memory and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 223.
3. Walter Sickert, 'Review of The London Group', *Burlington Magazine*, January 1916 reproduced in Anna Gruetzner Robins (ed.), *Walter Sickert The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 401.

understanding of the term. It is also a psychological concept, as James King suggests in his insightful biography of Paul Nash, in which it is applied to our interior vision or landscape: our 'memory-scape'. This internalized account contributes to the suggestion that both brothers' work can be understood as acts of commemoration. Programmed in 2014 to coincide with 'Back from the Front'[4] at the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, it highlights the integral role played by landscape in 'defining post-war realities, materialities, and the human experiences of them'[5] utilising the notion that commemorative spaces and sites provide a framework for remembering.

SIDE-BY-SIDE

'Brothers in Art' begins its narrative in November 1913, a year that had brought the brothers' mixed fortune. Paul was struggling to find direction following his first one-man show at the Carfax Gallery, London, 1912, yet in contrast, John, who had no official training in art, experienced a hugely industrious summer in which Paul found him 'so extraordinarily productive' that he could only stand by 'to amaze and envy.'[6] In the autumn the opportunity arose to hold a joint exhibition[7] at The Dorien Leigh Gallery, a grand name for what proved to be little more than a lampshade shop on Pelham Street, South Kensington, London. Twenty-five drawings were exhibited, John sold seven and Paul five, leading the latter to declare that it had been 'a success beyond our highest hopes.'[8] The drawings exhibited were mainly of landscapes, although whereas Paul's literary absorption was still apparent with *Lavengro and Isopel in the Dingle*,[9] John favoured an illustrative approach, populating the rural idyll with figures and farm-life such as in *About a Pig*.[10] Whilst John was painting what he saw, Paul was 'still making art from art, rather than from life.'[11]

The exhibition was a moderate success, attracting interest from amongst others Roger Fry (1866–1934), William Rothenstein (1872–1945) and Michael Sadler (1861–1943), resulting in a modest degree of critical acclaim for the young artists. A consequence of this was that both brothers were invited to show in the 'Exhibition of the Work of English Post-Impressionists, Cubists and Others', Brighton Art Gallery, 1913–1914, organized by Spencer Gore (1878–1914) and The Camden Town Group. This was in addition to invitations from The Friday Club, The London Group and Roger Fry's Omega Workshop. To echo Paul's own words, they were 'quite the rising young men.'[12] If there was rivalry between the brothers it is hard to glean. In Paul's insightful, yet highly stylised, autobiography which finishes mid-1913 John appears infrequently, cast as a peripheral figure.[13] Yet perhaps there was an initial frustration on Paul's part towards his younger, untrained brother. Suddenly he was not only sharing the limelight but their reputations had

4. 'Back From the Front' encompasses a series of exhibitions and events at the RWA in summer 2014.
5. Nicholas Saunders, *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), p. 143. In this text Saunders notes that human interaction with the landscape was at an unprecedented level during WWI, provoking a need to renegotiate the social construction of landscape.
6. Quoted in Ronald Blythe, *First Friends* (London: Viking, 1997), p. 41.
7. Ronald Blythe suggests that there had originally been talk of Dora Carrington sharing the exhibition with the brothers in Blythe, 1997.
8. In a letter dated *c.* mid-November 1913, reproduced in Claude Colleer Abbott and Anthony Bertram (eds), *Poet and Painter, Being the correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910–1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 67.
9. *Lavengro and Isopel in the Dingle*, 1912–13, ink, graphite and gouache on paper, 46.4 x 37 cm, Tate, London.
10. *About a Pig*, *c.* 1913, pencil and watercolour, 28 x 38 cm, private collection.
11. Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times* (London: Constable, 1988), p. 35.
12. Quoted in Abbott and Bertram, 1955, p. 67.
13. Paul does appear supportive of his brother's artistic ambitions sharing his circle of friends from the Slade and introducing him to collectors and patrons.

now merged. In a letter from Paul to John, dated 9 December 1922, the elder brother wrote 'I know most people think of us as one flesh – John painting with the right hand, Paul with the left, or at least as being in the same house, eating out of one bowl and having our wives in common.'[14]

Despite this initial tendency to view the brothers as one talent, as Paul Gough states in his introduction to this book, the brothers' subsequent reputations grew to differ greatly. Whereas Paul's work has become synonymous with British modernism, in contrast, John's work is often portrayed as less imaginative, less ambitious, and ultimately less modern. John's marginalisation can clearly be seen in the tangential role he has played in popular accounts of Modern British art, popping up in the chorus line, but seldom the star of the show. His work is often described in more lyrical than critical terms, a result perhaps of his apparent lack of interest in new artistic movements.[15] John Rothenstein recalls John's enthusiasm for the East Anglian countryside which he declared was 'compared with the West … it's more brilliant in atmosphere, and it's subtler, less obviously dramatic.'[16] This phrase could just as easily be used to sum up John's artistic career in comparison to Paul's.

The Dorien Leigh exhibition can be seen as the precursor to this separation. Now looking back, the year 1913 also clearly holds great historical significance. It was the eve of war and the psychological effect it would come to have on the brothers was tangible. In the years leading up to their first experience of active combat their work grew in competency, with John frequently noted as the more technically proficient artist. Rothenstein notes the rapidity of John's progress,[17] getting to grips with colour and oil whilst Paul is still playing with his sombre nocturnal palette of blue and green washes. *A Gloucestershire Landscape*[18] painted in 1914, demonstrates the painterly control that John maintained throughout his lifetime, marrying form and colour in harmonious tension. It bears the early hallmarks of *The Cornfield*[19] coming close to achieving pastoral perfection with the sun streaming through the verdant landscape and its glimmering sheaves of corn. However, upon reflection the black cloud which casts its bulbous shadow across the lush green grass now appears rather ominous.

REMEMBERING – PLACE AND GENIUS LOCI

Focusing the start of the brothers' tale in 1913 allows us to identify the early landscapes that first came to inspire the two artists. The poster for the exhibition 'Drawings by Paul and John Nash'[20] features the brothers standing side-by-side, Paul in bohemian attire and a more traditionally besuited John. In the background are the Wittenham Clumps – the hill-top that Paul grew to revere – and in the foreground John's swaying corn

14. Quoted in James King, *Interior Landscapes: A Life of Paul Nash* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd, 1987), pp. 62–63.
15. In 'The Art of John Nash', *The Lady*, 10 January 1957. Ronald Blythe suggests that John's work belonged to a tradition of artists who have freed us from fussiness, offering an unsentimental beauty.
16. John Rothenstein, *John Nash* (London: Macdonald and Co, 1983), pp. 72–73.
17. *Ibid*.
18. *A Gloucestershire Landscape*, 1914, oil on canvas, 51.2 x 61.5 cm, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
19. *The Cornfield*, 1918, oil on canvas, 68.6 x 76.2 cm, Tate, London.
20. Anstice Shaw, writer and friend of the brothers, recalls seeing the poster in 1942 hanging on the wall next to the fireplace at Paul and Margaret's home in Oxford. She describes it as looking 'faded and dingy' yet the brothers looked so 'spry and young' in 'Paul Nash and John Nash: as remembered by Anstice Shaw', September 1983, audio recording, Tate Archive.

sheaves. Dancing a merry line across the outlying fields are the figures of Rupert Lee, Margaret Odeh (soon to become Nash), Rosalind Pemberton and possibly Ruth Clarke following a white stag.[21] King notes how it rather succinctly encompasses their mutual concern as landscape painters whilst also offering a point of separation, Paul's Clumps reaching skywards for the clouds like the poet, and John's sheaves firmly planted in the ground.[22]

These two landscapes are returned to time-and-time again throughout the brothers' work, creating touchstones that act as memory-markers. The discovery of the Wittenham Clumps is frequently discussed as one of the great 'events' in Paul's artistic career. Located several miles from Sinodun House, his uncle's home near Wallingford, South Oxfordshire, the Clumps provided an endless source of fascination – a 'talismanic' site, to borrow Gough's phrase.[23] Reflecting on the discovery of the Clumps in his auto-biography *Outline*[24] Paul describes the event as a pilgrimage in which he determinedly sets out to capture and contain the very spirit of the place. And it did not disappoint – upon arrival he was faced with the fundamental realisation that what lay before him was 'the life of a landscape painter.'[25] Examples of the Clumps are present throughout the RWA exhibition creating chronological bookends demarcating the beginning and end of Paul's life. They reflect the central position that he himself attributed to them: 'For although in my mind they stood apart from other symbolism – for Sinodun and all the pleasures that implied – it was the lack of them that told most, whether on site or in memory. They were the pyramids of my very small world.'[26]

It is 'the lack of them' that we first experience in 'Brothers in Art'. The vibrant *View from Wittenham Clumps*[27] depicts the fields and farmland that lie beyond. Portrayed from this perspective the Clumps are only present through their absence. It is worth noting that the work bears certain stylistic similarities to John's work *Haymaking*[28] produced in the same year. The geometrical form of the cornstacks loom large in the foreground of both works, splaying out in perfect symmetry to the fields beyond. However, whereas John's landscape is rife with activity, Paul relies on the poetics of place to make its presence felt.

The Clumps are revisited towards the end of the exhibition in the sketch *Landscape of the Wittenham Clumps*.[29] Dated 1946, the year of Paul's death, it bears testimony to the fact that they were indeed 'the guardians of the last stage of his life.'[30] In this particular sketch the Clumps appear somewhat fragile and it is productive to pause and consider the structural resemblances between Paul's chosen medium and the concept of memory. Here, depicted in pencil (and a loose grey wash) the Clumps face imminent erasure, fading with time like a distant memory. In contrast to the concrete finality of oil,

21. Identified by King, 1987, p. 62.
22. Although the exhibition focuses on John's drawing and painting it is important to remember that he had a long and highly successful career as a book illustrator receiving particular acclaim for his botanical drawings and wood engravings. For examples see the second edition of White, Gilbert, *The Natural History of Selborne* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951).
23. Gough, this volume, p. 77.
24. *Outline,* pp. 121–123.
25. *Ibid*., p. 123.
26. *Ibid*., p. 122.
27. *View from Wittenham Clumps*, 1913, pencil on paper and watercolour, 60.3 x 68.5 cm, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.
28. *Haymaking*, 1913, tempera on panel, 39.3 x 48 cm, The Courtauld Gallery, London.
29. *Landscape of the Wittenham Clumps*, 1946, pencil and grey wash on paper, 17 x 25 cm, The British Council Collection, London.
30. David Fraser Jenkins, *Paul Nash: The Elements* (London: Scala Publications Ltd. 2010) p. 26.

they are in danger of disappearing before our eyes. Cultural historian Simon Schama suggests that memory is first the work of the mind: 'Its scenery built up as much from the strata of memory as from layers of rock.'[31] In the final stages of life, Paul's memory of the Clumps supersedes any physical experience. The drawing can be seen as a culmination of the strata of memory, layer upon layer, slipping away.

CAPTURING THE LANDSCAPE

Both Paul and John experimented with a number of different mediums with which to capture the landscape, achieving their greatest successes in watercolour and oil. John learnt his early technique of watercolour washed over waxy crayons from his friend, the artist Claughton Pellew-Harvey (1890–1966), but it was Harold Gilman (1876–1919), a member of the Camden Town Group, who taught him how to master oil paint.[32] Gough defines this method as the application of single layers of opaque paint 'dry in texture but saturated in colour.'[33] This technique was to serve him throughout his career and there is little difference between the treatment of pigment in *The Edge of the Plain*[34] painted in 1926, and *The Farm Pond*[35] in 1940. Rothenstein suggests that understanding John's method is essential for appreciating his work, referring to the notion that he made things legible (whilst maintaining complexity), although John himself bemoaned his critics who, to paraphrase, declared his style as 'trivial and conventional.'[36] In comparison, Paul was a relative latecomer to oil, only truly realizing its potential with his Great War memorial paintings such as *The Menin Road*.[37]

This discussion of medium is useful in providing us with a more abstract understanding of the relationship between landscape and memory in their work. Memory is a fragile concept. It balances delicately between absence and presence, light and shade, its reflection often obscured and transfigured. It is at once both subjective, belonging to the individual, yet it can also create a deeply resolute wide-ranging cultural sense of sharing. If Paul's pencil drawing of the Clumps (1946) marks a tentative half-stage or half-memory that is caught between being and disappearing, then with watercolour this metaphor can be extended. Watercolour as a medium possesses an innate duality, encompassing light and shade, transparency and opacity. Water-colour floats, bleeding and overlapping, creating tributaries and pathways across the paper. From fragile beginnings it rushes forwards, merging into a watery 'other' world where memories bleed and amalgamate with one another. Compared to the opaque solidity of oil where images become concrete, set and placed in time, it lacks permanence, locked somewhere between past and future. It mimics the impermanence of land-scape as a

31. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Harper Collins: London, 1995), pp. 6–7.
32. See Frederick Gore's introductory essay in *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by John Nash* RA, exh. cat (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1967) for a detailed discussion of Gilman's influence on John's work.
33. Gough, this volume, p. 24.
34. *The Edge of the Plain*, 1926, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
35. *The Farm Pond*, 1940, oil on canvas, 64.1 x 76.8 cm, Wolverhampton Art Gallery.
36. Blythe, p. 72.
37. *The Menin Road*, 1919, oil on canvas, 182.8 x 317.5 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 2242.
38. *Avon Gorge*, 1939, watercolour, 49.8 x 59 cm, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.

concept and memory as a cognitive act. *Avon Gorge*[38] embodies this transitory quality, loosely portrayed in watercolour, ready to slip off the page at any moment. Paul refers to this landscape as the mythical sounding 'Giants Stride' describing in *Outline* how the intriguing scenery put him under one of his spells.[39] A similar sense of being caught somewhere between an imagined place and reality is captured in *Folly Landscape, Creech, Dorset*,[40] a location Paul described as a 'lost place'.[41]

IMAGINING THE REAL – MEMORY-SCAPES

In Paul's notes for *Outline* he sketches out chapter abstracts for the years following 1913 giving them titles such as *Making a New World*, *Old World Revisited*, *Searching* and *Finding*, listing within each chapter events such as his first sight of Dymchurch and the discovery of Mimosa Wood. His choice of language implies the joy of discovery shared by both brothers who employed a similar technique of scouting the countryside for new locations (John also utilized the help of his wife Christine Nash in this endeavour). Working outdoors they would sketch in pencil or create quick pen-and-ink or watercolour washes,[42] producing small studies from which to work upon returning to the studio. John referred to these sketches as 'midges' but they could also be considered memory-markers in their own right. This habit of recording and then re-imagining provides a useful point at which to consider the difference in the brothers' unique way of picturing the landscape. Despite sharing similar methods they translated these memories of scenes and places into finished works rather differently. Ronald Blythe (born 1922), writer and close friend of John and Christine, defines this in his suggestion that even during childhood, they translated Wood Lane House and the surrounding Buckinghamshire countryside 'into two kinds of imagery … Paul's symbolic and poetic, John's botanic and agriculturally influenced.'[43] Paul is frequently referred to as an 'imaginative artist'. Certainly his earlier literary drawings, combining poetry and art in a Blakeian fashion, and then his later preoccupation with surrealism support this claim. Yet John was also capable of capturing the landscape in a manner that owes more to the imagination than to realism.[44]

A number of places held a bewitching draw for Paul throughout his life time including the garden at Iver Heath;[45] Hawks Wood; the Avon Gorge, Bristol; Romney Marsh and Dymchurch, on the Kent Coast; Ballards Head, Swanage in Dorset; and the Avebury stone circle, Wiltshire. These locations became internalised for Paul, creating a series of memories upon which he could draw, weaving and overlapping memory-scapes into landscapes. His work can be viewed as a painterly equivalent to the 'memory theatres' of the Renaissance, or the *ars memoria* of the Ancient Greeks before them.

39. Paul Nash, 'The Giant's Stride' first published in *The Architectural Review,* September, 1939; reproduced in *Outline*.
40. *Folly Landscape, Creech, Dorset*, 1935, watercolour, 66.5 x 83 cm, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.
41. Paul Nash, 'Swanage or Seaside Surrealism' originally published in *The Architectural Review*, April 1936; reproduced in *Outline*.
42. David Fraser Jenkins suggests that Paul in fact considered these earlier watercolours as amongst his best work, 2010.
43. Blythe, p. 18.
44. In Frederick Gore's introductory essay in *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by John Nash RA,* exh. cat (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1967) he attempts to define the difference between John and Paul's translation of the landscape suggesting that 'Paul is less engaged in the truth of things seen. The visible is beckoned by poetic insight', p. viii.
45. The garden and surrounding countryside at Wood Lane House provide Paul's first encounter with the *genius loci* that is so often associated with his work, seen in *The Bird Garden*, 1911 watercolour, ink and chalk, 38.7 x 33.6 cm, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. It was here amongst the flowers and shrubbery that John also developed his botanical fascination with the inner structures of plant life, explored in his woodcuts and illustrations.

PAUL NASH

FOLLY LANDSCAPE, CREECH, DORSET
1935 • drawing and watercolour • 66.5 x 83 cm

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

PAUL NASH

LANDSCAPE OF THE MALVERN DISTANCE
1943 • oil on canvas • 53.5 x 74.2 cm

Southampton City Art Gallery, Hampshire/The Bridgeman Art Library

Material archaeologist Andrew Jones offers an interesting account of these whereby a memory theatre is described as a physical construction, reliant on the spatial ordering of objects and based on the relationship between memory, image and place. Objects and images activate the memory, aiding recall, often of stories or places that can't quite be grasped by the mind's eye.[46] In Paul's later work this theory becomes increasingly relevant to understanding his surreal visions, such as in the *The Archer*[47] which he described as 'a private fairytale of my own invention.'[48] Here, he brings together a number of objects including a model of the Men-an-tol,[49] a mirror and a screen, like players on a stage.[50]

Certain places and scenes held equal fascination for John, creating a similar indexical register of memories. Less peripatetic than Paul, John settled in several places[51] before making his final home in 1943 at Bottengoms Farm, Wormingford – 'a pastoral dream, at once commonplace, rural, workaday, and yet extraordinary',[52] portrayed in *The Barn, Wormingford*[53] which depicts the view from his top-floor studio in the attic. John was far from sedentary however in his pursuit of new locales and he travelled the country producing a series of works based in Bath in the twenties, and revisiting favourite spots such as the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire, the Gower peninsular in South Wales, the Isle of Skye and Cornwall.[54] John's portrayal of the landscape relied less on a fusion of the imaginary and the real and more on the exact selection of specific memories 'In looking at a landscape, its abstract features appeal to me pretty quickly. Although representational I am primarily interested in the structure underneath, though I hope not obviously. In fact such changes as I make are based more on selection than specific alteration.'[55]

FRAGMENTS – WAR IS UPON US

However, as Ken Taylor reminds us, our memory of landscape is not always pleasing and we cannot simply select those elements that bring us pleasure: 'It (memory) can be associated sometimes with loss, with pain, with social fracture and a sense of belonging gone, although the memory remains, albeit poignantly.'[56] In August 1914, less than a year after the success of the Dorien Leigh exhibition, war broke out, and by September Paul had enlisted in the Artists' Rifles. After periods stationed at home in 1917 he travelled to Ypres Salient for combat, returning injured shortly after. His return to the Western Front in October the same year was as an Official War Artist, an assignment that brought him home for good that December. In contrast, John contributed to a number of domestic war efforts before enlisting in the Artists' Rifles in September 1916, then serving on the front line from November 1916 to January 1918. Alongside their fellow combatants both brothers experienced unimaginable horrors. Arguably John witnessed the greatest atrocities in the

46. Jones, 2007, pp. 166–167.
47. *The Archer*, 1942, oil on canvas, 71 x 91.5 cm, Southampton City Art Gallery.
48. *Outline*, p. 100.
49. Megalithic site in Penwith, Cornwall. Men-an-Tol is Cornish for holed stone.
50. An idea explored further by David Fraser Jenkins in his accompanying essay to the exhibition 'Paul Nash: The Elements', Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 2010. It is also worth considering Hal Foster's meditation on memory and surrealism in which he discusses how a familiar landmark acts as a trigger for memory, concluding that 'If we can grasp this dialectic of ruination, recovery and resistance, we will grasp the ambition of the surrealist practice of history.' Hal Foster, 'Outmoded Spaces', in Ian Farr (ed.), *Memory* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 1993) p. 54.
51. Most memorably Gerrard's Cross, 1919–21 and Meadle, near Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, 1921–44.
52. Allen Freer, *John Nash: 'The Delighted Eye'* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), p. 2.
53. *The Barn, Wormingford*, 1954, oil on canvas, 66 x 82.5 cm, Royal Academy of Arts, London.
54. See works in the exhibition: *The Edge of the Plain* (John Nash, 1926, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge); *Oxwich Burrows* (John Nash, 1938, watercolour, 38 x 55.2 cm, British Council Collection, London); *Deer Park* (John Nash, watercolour, undated, Gibberd Gallery, Harlow); and *Penwalk Cove* (John Nash, undated, watercolour, Gibberd Gallery, Harlow).
55. John Nash, in Rothenstein, 1983, p. 119.
56. Ken Taylor, *Landscape and Memory: Cultural Landscapes, Intangible Values and some Thoughts on Asia*. In 16th ICOMOS General Assembly and International Symposium: 'Finding the spirit of place – between the tangible and the intangible', 29 September–4 October 2008, Quebec, Canada, p. 2.

direct line of fire, but Paul's unflinching approach to his official artist duties had also 'put iron' into his 'dainty art.'[57] There is no doubt that conflict had created a new source of energy for both artists.[58]

Upon their return home the brothers set about re-establishing their artistic practice, working side-by-side in an old potting shed in Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire – a period which Gough refers to as ultimately their final period of 'painterly brotherhood.'[59] By day the brothers worked on official war paintings including the completion of much lauded works such as *Oppy Wood,*[60] *Over the Top*,[61] *Menin Road,*[62] and *We are Making a New World*,[63] a selection of which are represented in the exhibition through reproductions. In these works the relationship between landscape and memory becomes thwarted by trauma and as artists the brothers are faced with the impossible task of how to remember and represent the horrors of war. These enduring images of WWI show the landscape torn apart and contribute to our visual lexicon of conflict. The poet and literary critic T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) summed up this fragmentation in his extended poem 'The Wasteland' (1922), describing the world left behind by war as a 'heap of broken images'.[64] It is from this destruction that John and Paul Nash sought to navigate the blasted fields, and skeletal copses, renegotiating the very idea of landscape.

RECOVERY – SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS

In 1918 Paul was a 'war artist without a war'[65] attempting to purge himself of literary frailties in order to create a tougher language befitting in tone with the destruction he had experienced.[66] Meanwhile, John, despite a positive reception to his own war paintings, had already fallen into Paul's shadow, his elder brother now widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent narrator of modern warfare. However, there was no need for either brother to depart from landscape altogether. Rather the opposite as Ysanne Holt purports when she suggests that the early twentieth century, and in particular post-World War One, marked a return to rural landscape, now seen as 'a site where an ideal modernity can be forged.'[67] The popular notion that modernism stutters in British art after World War One is contested again by David Peters Corbett who argues instead that artists like Paul were creating a new language, treating landscape in a way that 'both looks away from modernity and attempt[s] to register the presence of the modern within it.'[68] At the same time the notion of England and Englishness geographically, culturally and artistically, underwent a shift following the Great War. It was under this auspice that the brothers set to work again. By day traumatic memories of war played at the forefront of their artistic practice, but by evening as shadows gathered and nightfall fell upon the now silent countryside a space for creating something new presented itself.

57. Yorke, 2001, p. 38.
58. See in this volume, chapters 3 and 4, for a detailed discussion of their experiences on the front line.
59. Gough, his volume, p. 56.
60. *Oppy Wood*, 1918, oil on canvas, 182.6 x 213.3 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 2243.
61. *Over the Top*, 1918, oil on canvas, 79.8 x 108 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 1656.
62. *The Menin Road*, 1919, oil on canvas, 182.8 x 317.5 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 2242.
63. *We are Making a New World*, 1918, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM: ART 1146.
64. T.S Eliot, 'The Wasteland' in *T.S. Eliot, Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).
65. *Outline*, p. 218.
66. Paul Gough, *A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War*, (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2010), pp. 135–136.
67. Ysanne Holt, 'An Ideal Modernity: Spencer Gore at Letchworth' in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 91.
68. David Peters Corbett, 'The Geography of Blast: Landscape, Modernity and English Painting, 1914–1930' in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 135.

Material archaeologist Nicholas Saunders offers a framework by which to understand this, suggesting that 'Modern war has an unprecedented capacity to make, unmake and remake matter, individuals, cities, nations and continents.'[69] Following World War One, art played a significant role in the remaking of Britain, and landscape art in particular saw a strong resurgence as a genre in which to examine the past and imagine the future. In some ways it was John who best achieved this with his work *The Cornfield* which Blythe recalls John saying he had painted as a 'thank-you' for surviving the Western Front.[70] It typifies the English countryside, the sun shining down on a bucolic idyll, recalling the very tradition of English landscape painting and conjuring up memories of John Constable's (1776–1837) own depiction of a cornfield, described as 'a specimen of genuine English scenery'[71] when exhibited at the Royal Academy, London, in 1826.[72] In *The Cornfield* the sun hangs low in the sky and half the image is shrouded in shadow, but where the sun still lingers it casts a golden light across the fields, full of hope and promise.

The Cornfield was purchased by Edward Marsh (1872–1953) an avid patron of young artists, yet despite this positive reception to new work both brothers struggled in this period, with Paul in particular appearing to flounder. Haunted by memories of war, his work became rife with symbols of turmoil. The works *Tench Pond in a Gale*[73] and *Palings*[74] belong to a handful of paintings made after 1918 in which violent weather imposes upon his work producing turbulent landscapes. This is particularly evident in *Tench Pond* in which the swaying branches and driving rain fragment the picture-plane causing our eyes to dart anxiously across the image. Anthony Bertram describes this intrusion as a 'disturbing stranger',[75] intimating a link between its blustery presence and the psychological effect of the war on Paul's art. In a passage in *A Terrible Beauty* Gough asserts this less cautiously suggesting that he had absorbed the notion of 'pathetic fallacy into his very being'.[76]

However, both brothers found solace in new 'places', both physical and abstract. In 1921 Paul suffered a breakdown, seeking recuperation on the Kent Coast. Here he discovered Dymchurch.[77] With its ready-made abstract form in the shape of the long, concrete seawall, it provided a place for recovery. Water also became a significant 'place' for John. Ponds, canals, lakes and streams seamlessly connect landscapes across the years creating watery tributaries between the works. In certain paintings water is also a space for reflection, both literally and philosophically. A reflection is a counterpart to an image, it can be exacting or distorted. To reflect is to consider, therefore a reflection can also refer to a thought that has occurred upon careful meditation. Each meaning suggests a two-stage process, the original and the copy, the thought and its revision. Both notions are useful in understanding how landscape is 'remembered' in the brothers' work. In *The Moat, Grange*

69. Saunders, 2003, p. 1.
70. Blythe, 1997, p. 92.
71. BP Spotlight display, 'Constable's Cornfield: A Specimen of Genuine English Scenery', 25 March–29 September 2013, Tate, London.
72. When Paul Nash describes his first visit to Norfolk with Pellew-Harvey in *Outline* he wonders himself that it is not haunted with the memories of past landscape painters such as Constable and John Sell Cotman amongst others.
73. *Tench Pond in a Gale*, Paul Nash, 1920–1, ink, pencil and watercolour on paper, 57.7 x 39.9 cm, Tate, London.
75. Anthony Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist* (London: Faber, 1955), p. 128.
76. Gough, 2010, p. 127.
77. Paul painted numerous variations of the coastal defences at Dymchurch, the following of which appears in the exhibition: *Dymchurch,* Paul Nash, 1920–25, oil on canvas, 53.5 x 75 cm, Dudley Art Gallery and Museum, Dudley.

Farm Kimble[78] the trees are bowed, their spidery tendrils drooping towards the water's edge, threatening, but not quite managing, to disrupt the surface. The narrow channel of water appears almost stagnant, reflecting the encroaching trees in its glassy surface. We are drawn to this, the reflection, the secondary vision: the memory of a landscape within a landscape. It is seen again in *The Lake, Little Horkesley Hall*[79] and *The Pond at Souldern*.[80] The very act of remembering is inherent within the painting.

Shadows are an equally ubiquitous feature of these landscapes. In John's work they are particularly important, stretching out across the canvas as in *The Cornfield* or dancing upon the surface in *A Path Through the Trees*.[81] Like reflections, shadows create copies, distillations tethered to the memory of the original. They are to light, what absence is to presence, a notion of duality played out throughout art history, best encapsulated in the texts of Pliny (23–79 AD) a and Plato (429–347 BC) respectively.[82] In discussing the looming shadow in *The Archer,* King suggests that Paul's real love was the 'shadow world',[83] an idea that takes on greater meaning when we dissect the term in a more abstract fashion. In *Equivalents for the Megaliths*[84] the pre-historic standing stones are replaced with cubic forms. Framed against the background of an ancient hill fort these new shapes possess the outline of the old. They are shadows of their former self, although in one sense they pre-figure memory, containing the essential shape and structure of their equivalent. These shadow-memories have overtaken the real, supplanting it with a new imagined landscape.[85]

These Megalithic sites were not the only objects to be re-imagined. Both brothers shared a deep love for trees and woodlands, an affinity planted firmly in their childhood. These too had to be remembered and reconstructed after the War. Gough has previously referred to the 'totemic monumentality of trees'[86] situating them as objects of commemoration in relation to post-war landscapes. He grounds them in the words of the writer and artist Robert George Talbot Kelley (1861–1934): 'I never lost this tree sense. To me the war is a memory of trees.'[87] He also coins the phrase 'forest trauma'[88] making direct reference to a particular wound that both Paul and John needed to heal.

For both brothers, but particularly Paul, trees had come to represent human life and human loss. Even before the devastation of northern Europe, Paul had begun to utilise trees to represent people within his work. In *The Orchard*[89] Paul's work had started to adopt a more rigid form and structure. His subject matter here is of a man-made landscape. The trees stand in straight, ordered lines, enclosed by a ferocious metal and barbed wire fence creating a barrier between viewer and subject. In contrast to the rounded curvatures and rich colour of John's Gloucestershire landscapes (of a similar time), Paul's appear

78. *The Moat, Grange Farm, Kimble*, *c.* 1922, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 50.8cm, Tate, London.
79. *The Lake, Little Horkesley Hall*, *c.* 1958, oil on canvas, 60.6 x 76 cm, Royal Academy of Arts, London.
80. *The Pond at Souldern*, 1926, oil on canvas, 71 x 92 cm, Wolverhampton Art Gallery.
81. *A Path Through Trees*, *c.* 1915, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61 cm, Tate, London.
82. See Victor I Stoichita's *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997) for an insightful discussion.
83. King, 1987.
84. *Equivalents for the Megaliths*, 1935, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 66 cm, Tate, London.
85. Although they are not included in the exhibition it is worth noting that Paul also encountered another method of 'remembering' the landscape in his lifetime; photography. In 1931 he discovered the enquiring eye of the camera lens, helping him search out and capture new details and configurations of objects. Gough suggests that through photography Paul also 'mastered the art of the cast shadow', (this volume, p. 00). Stoichita, 1997 provides an interesting discussion on the implicit relationship between photography and shadows.
86. Paul Gough, 'Cultivating Dead Trees; The Legacy of Paul Nash as an Artist of Trauma, Wilderness and Recovery', *Journal of War and Culture Studies,* 2011, p. 4.
87. Paul Nash, in Gough, 2011, p. 5.
88. Gough, 2010, p. 129.
89. *The Orchard*, 1914[?], watercolour, ink and pencil on paper, 57.5 x 48.2 cm, Tate, London.

JOHN NASH

THE FALLEN TREE
1951 • oil on canvas • 70 x 91.7 cm

purchased from John Nash, R.A. in 1951
photo credit: © Royal Academy of Arts, London; photographer Prudence Cuming Assoc. Ltd

stark, skeletal and cool in tone. The trees stand like tombstones in a graveyard, and from then onwards it is hard not to encode this arboreal anthropomorphism into his later work.

A PATH THROUGH THE TREES

This essay has simultaneously attempted to ask how we remember through landscape, and, how is landscape remembered. It explores the liminal space between the real and the imagined, a realm in which memories flicker and fade, haunting the undergrowth and lurking in shadows. It asks this question in the context of conflict, considering how any artist was able to emerge from the devastation of two world wars. Paul has long been accepted as a 'seminal figure' in any 'appreciation of a land-or-memory-scape touched by war and recovered through peace.'[90] But here is a place in which John's work too can be reappraised in this context. Whereas Paul carved out his own escape experimenting with abstraction, surrealism and imaginative configurations of pre-history, John remained consistent to one artistic vision throughout his lifetime, developing and honing his craft. It was his complete loyalty to landscape that guided him forward: 'I am convinced now even more than formerly that a strict adherence to nature is the only thing worth doing, even at the risk of being dull? … But how can nature be dull. What is cubism or anything else to nature …'[91] 'Brothers in Art' presents the work of each of these artists in a broadly chronological fashion, allowing for two important resting points, commemorating both World War One and World War Two. Within this context the notion of memory takes on a deeper gravitas. These are not simply landscapes 'remembered'. They are landscapes re-membered, re-envisaged and re-imagined. In art we seek to remember through the physical manifestation of events, likenesses, feeling and place, a concept that runs throughout 'Brothers in Art'. Ian Farr suggests that a single memory or experience can only be deciphered through juxtaposition, by seeing it side-by-side.[92] Indeed as a physical form the exhibition itself acts as a type of memory theatre, a montage of places and images from which memories and landscapes tentatively emerge and the characters of John and Paul Nash take centre stage, and as Gough remembers them in war, here they are remembered in peace.

90. Gough, 2011, p. 4.
91. Letter from John Nash to Dora Carrington, 1914, in Blythe, 1997.
92. Ian Farr (ed.), *Memory, Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2012).

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John Nash: Sir John Rothenstein's 1983 book has a list of John Nash's exhibitions, accurate up to that year.