

COLOURS OF OUR DAYS – by Jeni Neill

I am John Gedge from Yarmouth way, known as Painter Jack. My grandpa caught the herrings; nan fret till he got back. They made kids who waltzed the dancehalls, ran the seafront clubs. Turning from a life at sea to sit and draw the land, my fingers curled around a brush, not the rope of grandpa's hand.

My eyes sharpen to the shift of light and its ever-changing hue. They look to paint and frame a tale; one known by just a few. I watch still and patient in sun and wind and rain, gathering thoughts on what I see – what's gone and what do remain. Walk with ghosts through rows and denes to see the past again.

Marsh harriers now share space with red kites' turns and calls; wellies flop up highstreets, sheep painted for festivals. We shift, rebrand, dilute, take less, hoping to make more - like fish and plant's diversity, where fen edge meets saltmarsh shore.

I am John Gedge, with paint brush at the ready. But my viewpoint's squint is limited unlike those gliding birds of prey - who sense harsh wind approach before the forecast's shared, hear the tinkle in a spider's web, feel dew before it reaches grassy blade. My perspective needs to alter, work with all this change - for Painter Jack can grow and his subjects rearrange. Our scenes may shift, escape my sketch, charcoal, brush, and pen, but safely etched in memory I know fen light will shine again.

I've tried to lay honest marks, share what I can see, but sometimes from one day to next, coastline is lost to me. Ronald Blythe unwittingly kept note of all we've lost, but now it goes too fast to catch – ways of life crashing like waves too roughly tossed. History keeps drowned Dunwich, hidden Sutton Hoo, but I don't look to stories, I'm drawn to shades of blue; linear lines of sky, land, sea, touched by the same tinge. Neither Constable's comfort nor Gainsborough's green capture the spirit of this marginality.

All creation, whether learnt, adapted, real or old, needs time to settle in. My eyes share what's been and gone and will return once more. Nothing is new, shot with no root. Seed

comes from what has been before. So fret no more when change and loss have us take our heads in hands, with the warnings so contrary to our rulers' greedy plans. Our footprints on the sand shift too fast to be observed: but recall toddlers' stumble until determined they emerge.

So here I be, Painter Jack, woke to a new dawn. I'm down Yarmouth Pier today, paints ready for a storm. Pa and Ma pull mobility scooters up to see the colours of their days: these colours true as the weather, told in my blues, blacks, mauves and greys.