



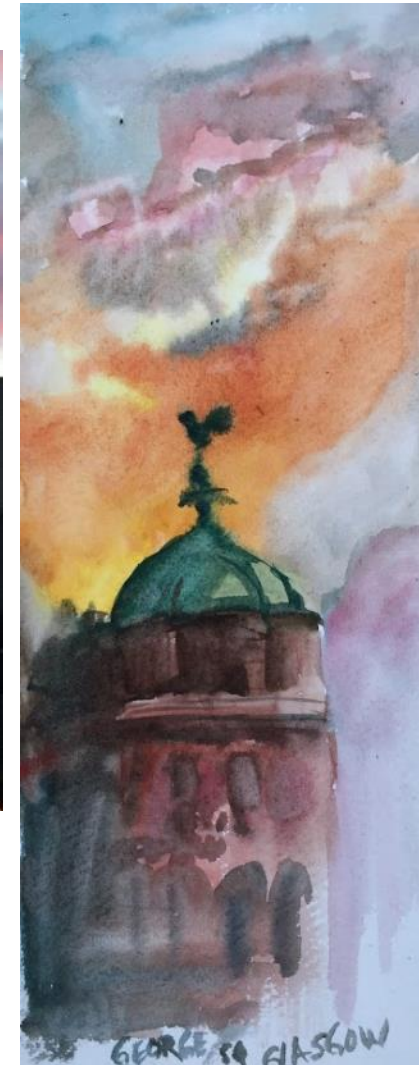
# *Painting Amidst the Highland Midges*

**(Painting Scotland and England)**

Ard Daraich is a self-catering guest house, near Ardgour, Scotland, operated by artists Norrie and Anna on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula. Surrounded by an amazing hillside garden and acres of land with views and wonderful painting scenes, it is accessed by the Corran Ferry, across Loch Linnhe, nine miles south of Fort William. Having discovered Ard Daraich during a previous trip, artist friend, Ruth Westfall and I vowed to come back one

day and paint for a few days. We kept our vow in June, 2017. This is a story of the adventures, challenges, and results of a week's painting in the United Kingdom, which began in Scotland and continued in England.

After meeting on June 1, 2017, in Glasgow, we had time for one painting, since the sun set after 10 PM. We boarded a train for Fort William early the next day. The four hour trip from Glasgow to Fort William lived up to its reputation for being one of the most scenic train routes anywhere, passing through the Scottish highlands and glens and eventually over the Glen Finnan causeway of Harry Potter fame.



**Ruth painted The Glasgow Art School earlier and the sunset around 10 PM**



**Jim painted these surrounding St. George's Square**

Our first glitch came when our car failed to show in Fort William. With a bit of effort, pleading, and scheming, we drove off on the left hand side with a car that only Ruth was allowed to drive, a long story, itself. Ruth had been counting on my experience driving such cars in the UK, but the car company policy did not allow drivers over 75. Fortunately, the car was similar to one she had previously owned, except for the right handed drivers seat, so she handled the driving superbly with some coaching and encouragement. Anxious moments on confusing roundabouts, single track roads, and getting the car into first gear ended well. Facing the classical UK sunshine and showers weather, we drive the first 9 miles to the ferry in a downpour. After a 20 minute wait for the ferry and a few missed turns we pulled into Ard Daraich at 3 PM and were met immediately by a smiling Norrie, who helped us with our bags.



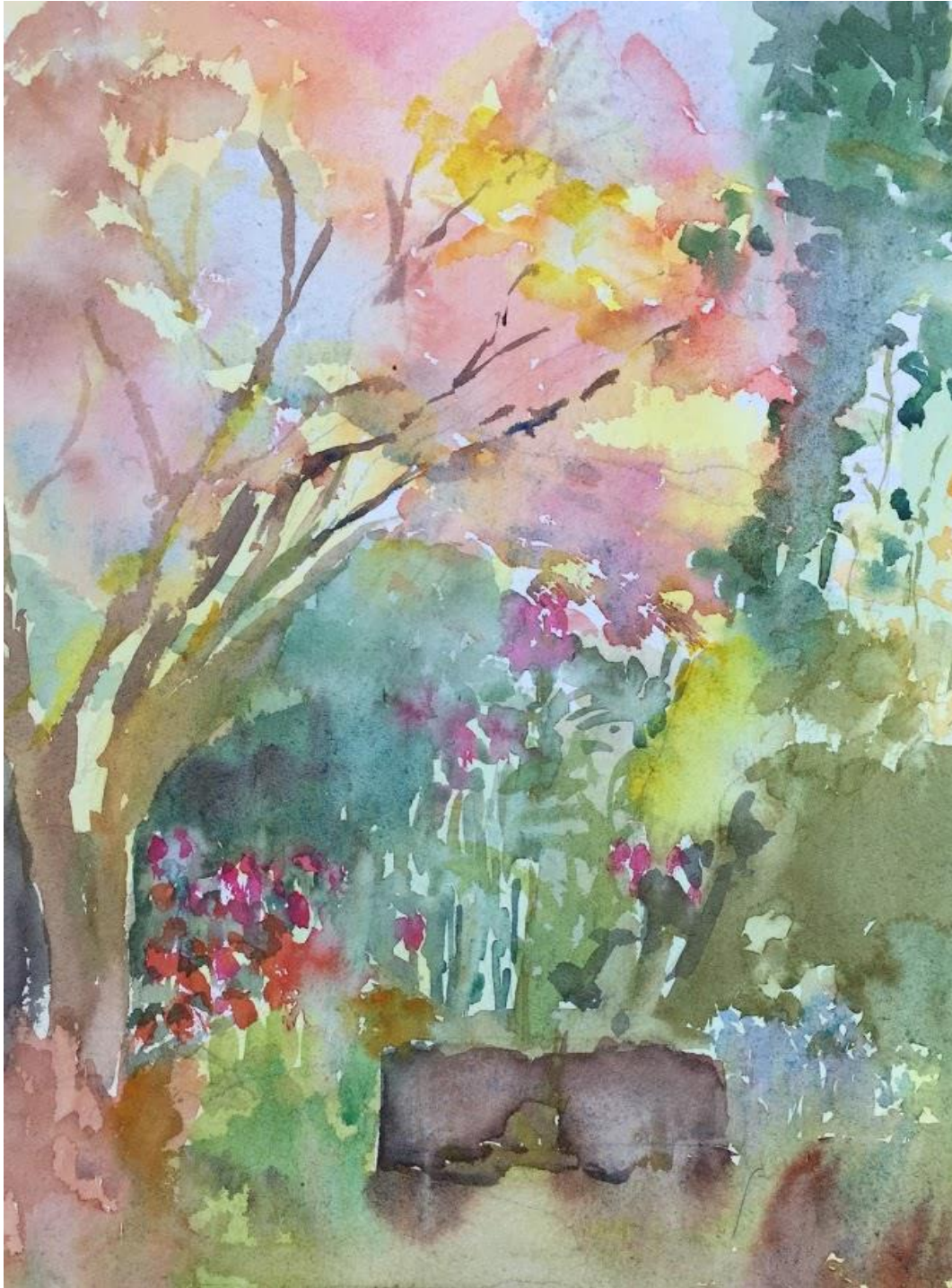
**Ard Daraich house and gardens, and our first dinner, including a loaf of Norrie's amazing fresh-baked bread**





### **Scenes around Norrie's garden**

Our accommodation included two bedrooms, a library with TV and fireplace, and a fully remodeled kitchen with electronic appliances. Paintings and heirlooms were visible in every room. A kitchen cabinet was once owned by Robert Burns. My bedroom, having previously been a large living



room, now featured a four-poster, covered, Elizabethan bed. Every wall was covered with paintings, some by well known artists. We stowed the groceries and headed into the garden to take advantage of the light and sunshine. Blue sky appeared and disappeared.

### **Painting around Ard Daraich**

Ruth chose a painting spot within a few feet of our back door and was painting before I had even picked up a brush.

### **Ruth's first painting from the back porch of Ard Daraich**

Within minutes I found a spot halfway up the hillside garden, overlooking Loch Linnhe that screamed "Paint me!" (See opening figure above) I continued for a quick walk around the garden taking photos before returning to the house for painting gear.



The scene changed quickly with the tide and fast moving cloud.



**Painting mountains, including Benn Nevis, in Glenn Coe across Loch Linnhe from Norrie's garden.**



**Jim T. View of Glen Coe across Loch Linnhe, 11x15 watercolor on paper**



Clouds were moving so fast and the tide was moving out, so the lighting of the scene as well as the scene itself was changing faster than I could paint, perils of plein air painting on steroids. After an hour I had a good foundation of a painting of a scene that no longer existed, so I set the work aside and started a new piece. Ruth had finished her first piece and joined me to paint essentially the same scene. We painted feverishly as the sun came and went. What had been a continuous body of water was now filled with small islands and a growing beach.

We could have spent the whole four days painting without leaving Ard Daraich. Everywhere you looked was a painting scene. Norrie's garden, the loch, mountains, an old stone bridge, and even horses. We took advantage of this situation: however, we did venture out to other locations to the north.



**Jim T second painting, Glen Coe across Loch Linnhe, 15x22 watercolor on paper**



**Ruth makes a friend**

### **The midges arrive**

I had read about midges in Scotland, but I had no idea what people meant when they warned about midges. Being prepared with mosquito wipes and spray, we sprayed our clothes and exposed skin. I could see them swarming around as I walked in the garden, and when I sat down, a cloud formed around my face. At this point they were a nuisance, but the spray appeared to prevent their biting. At the end of the day I had not sustained a bite so I thought I was home free as far as the midges go. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Thinking we had solved the midge problem, I eventually chose a painting spot viewing the side of the old stone bridge, the worst possible place to paint. Midges concentrate near the ground and near water where the air is still and are attracted to dark clothing. Within minutes I was sitting in a cloud of midges, so dense I had trouble keeping them out of eyes and nostrils and mouth. They covered the paper, floated in the washes, and were crawling everywhere. Ankles and chest began to itch. They were entering every unsprayed opening that led to skin. After an hour of swatting, spitting, and arm waving, I had a good start on a painting; however, it was the most distracting menace I have ever had painting.



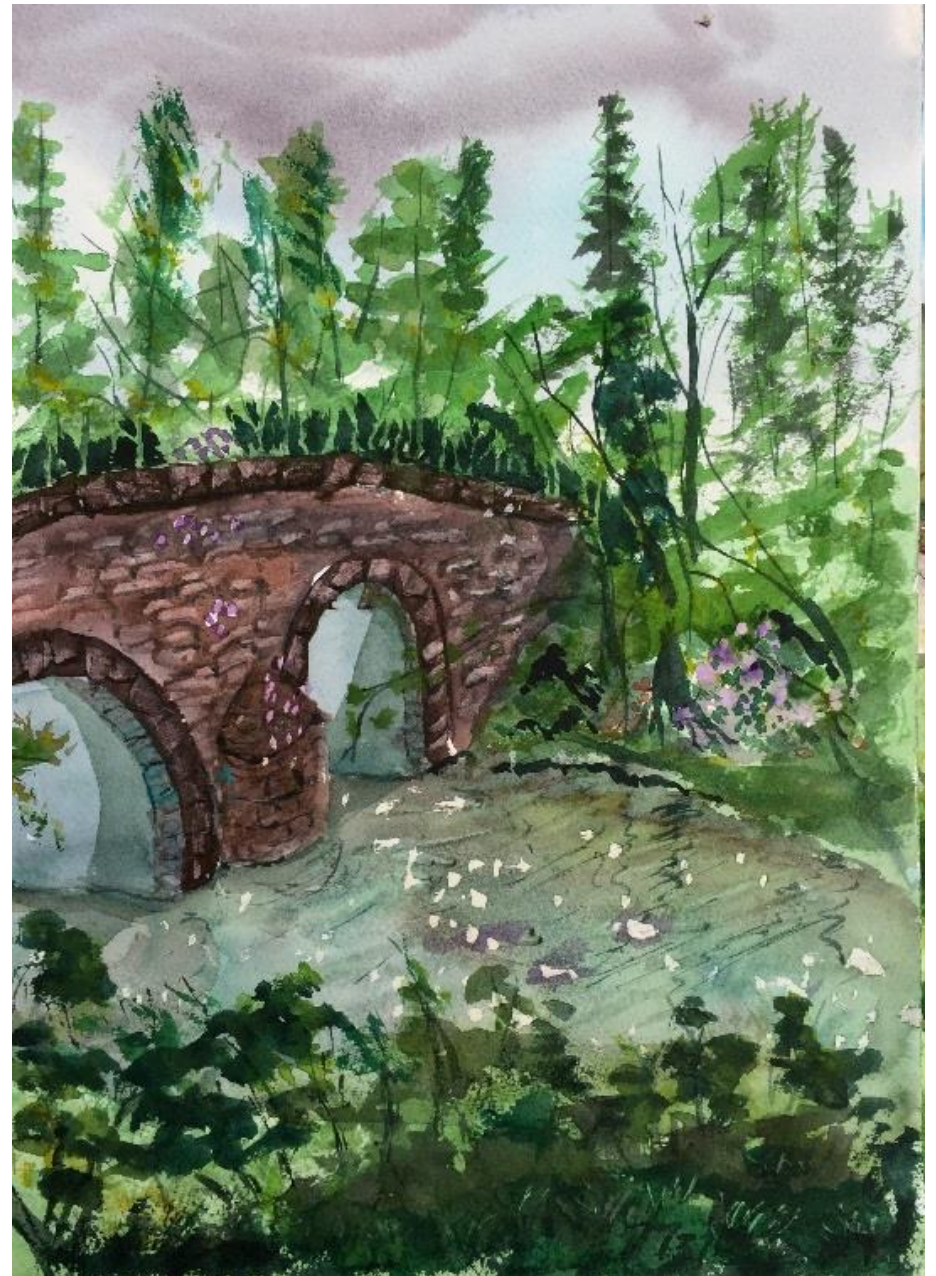
**The Old Stone Bridge at Ard Daraich-My painting view, sitting in a cloud of midges.**

**" A midge is essentially a large flying chigger." JT**

**"All plein air paintings in the highlands of Scotland are mixed media, one chosen by the artist, e.g. watercolor, and one provided by nature, midges." JT**

**Ard Daraich Bridge, 10x15 watercolor on paper**

Midges are attracted to CO2 from large distances, i.e. exhaling, and to dark clothing. It is said that the best way to avoid midges is to be walking on stilts in a strong wind, not breathing, and covered in a white tent. I violated almost all of the rules that morning, wearing dark, choosing a spot by the



river, and breathing. Ruth, being in a slightly less infested location, began regretting that she had worn short socks, and she had almost completed a nice painting and was ready to move.



**Ruth painting the old stone bridge. As she painted a group of hikers crossed the bridge. She painted them into the painting.**



**Ruth's Old Stone  
Bridge near Ard  
Daraich**

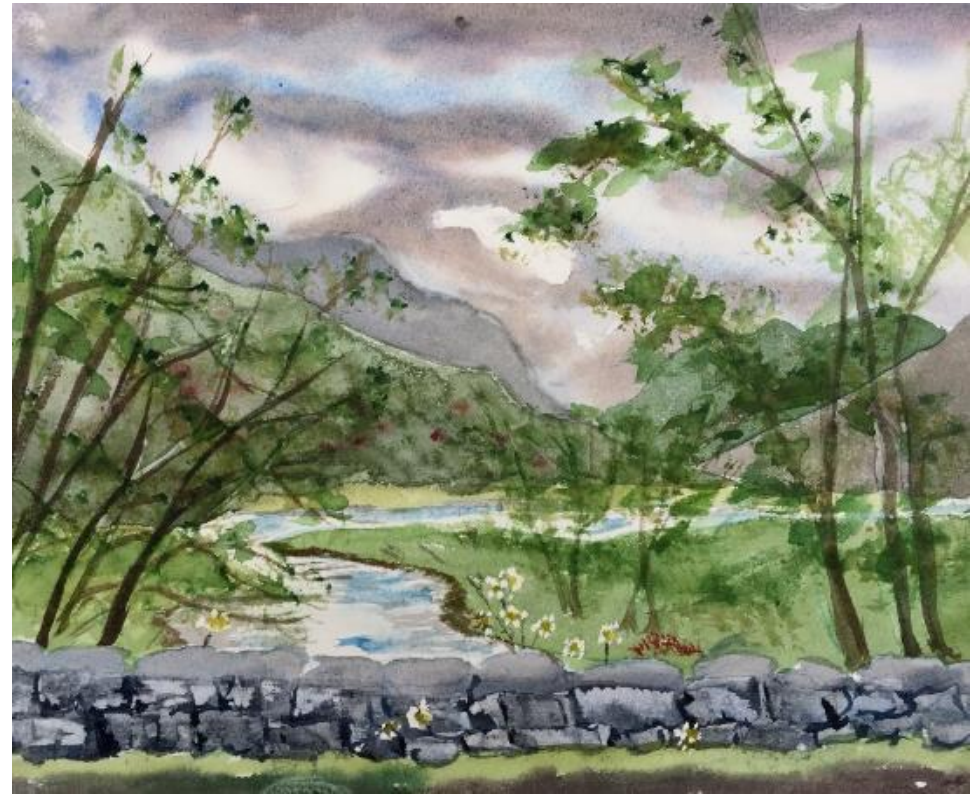
As we crossed back over the bridge and paused, I could see that the midge infestation seemed much less on the bridge and would be a good option for the afternoon. After lunch we looked for other painting options in the garden, walking and inspecting on the way to the top of the garden. Ruth found a spot that included the corner of the house that she liked. We continued upwards to the highest point in the garden, noted a few more candidate spots and then headed back down.

About half way back down I made some kind of mistep onto rain slicked pathway and began a slide as though I were on ice. By the time I came to a stop, I had slammed my head into the ground. Slightly stunned but still stable and capable we made our way back to the house. By the time we entered the house, I could feel an egg-sized knot forming just above my left eye and realized a shiner was on its way. A few quick tests and my overall feeling gave me confidence I had made a lucky strike with the ground without serious damage. After a few minutes with a cold press, I was ready to paint and I insisted that Ruth do the same. She returned to her selected spot and I returned to the bridge.

To my amazement, standing on the bridge left me completely free of midges. I had a couple of hours of midge free work, probably because of the height and a little breeze. I'm not sure that was my best painting, but it was definitely my most enjoyable



**Painting from the midge free bridge at Ard Daraich**





Ruth's painting of the house from high in the garden

Ruth's only driving glitch occurred at Ard Daraich while attempting to turn around on the narrow road leading to the old stone bridge. Hearing the car horn, I looked to see the front of the car tilted sharply downward, the right front wheel out of sight in a deep ditch, and the left rear wheel high in the air. Though she exhibited a blend of terror and embarrassment, it looked worse than it was. Norrie emerged to witness the excitement. He had seen this exact thing before, so he knew what to do. Within a few minutes he had hooked the car up to his truck and pulled it back from the ditch. He had rescued others from the same peril.

## **Glenfinnan**

Ard Daraich is an hour's drive from Glenfinnan on a mostly single track road. A single track road is wide enough for only one car, so wide spots are added on both sides of the road, periodically at distances that usually match the visibility of the road. It takes considerable attention and skill since one not only must watch the road, but also know always where the next wide spot is and which approaching car it belongs to. In Scotland, if the passing place is to the right-hand side of a vehicle, the driver would never pull in to the passing place to let the other driver pass. Instead the driver would stop just short of the passing place on the road, to leave space for the oncoming vehicle to manoeuvre into the passing place which would be on their left. If a car comes up behind you, you use the wide spots to allow passing, since the last thing you want is to try and fit three cars into a wide spot. In Scotland, where most drivers are accustomed to single-track roads, it is customary for drivers to acknowledge each other with a wave, or flash of headlights at night. Ruth handled the single track road brilliantly. Well, there were a few anxious moments, but the outcome was good.

At Glenfinnan, painting views are everywhere on both sides of the road, and a short hike provided even more.





The rain gods seemed to be teasing us. The second we drove into the parking lot, it started to rain. It was a sunshine and showers day, rain for 10 minutes, then sunshine for 10. After a cup of coffee, we moved to a position with this view to paint. By



the time I had a drawing it started raining. We waited 10 minutes and the sun came out. This continued until I had the paper covered with paint, and the rain was back. I began to paint holding an umbrella over the painting. The rain got harder and harder until we could no longer keep rain off of the paper, so we stopped. On the way back to the coffee shop, the sun came out again, so we elected to take a footpath that looked intriguing. Within a short walk we found some great views from a hillside in the shelter of trees and set up to paint again. Ruth produced a respectable painting and I did a drawing before rain shut us down again. This time we elected to drive further up the mountain where we could view a different look on the western side of the peninsula and found better weather.



**Ruth's beginning at Glennfinnan**



**Jim T View at Glennfinnan, 15x22,  
Watercolor on paper,**



**The famous Harry Potter Causeway at Glenfinnan**

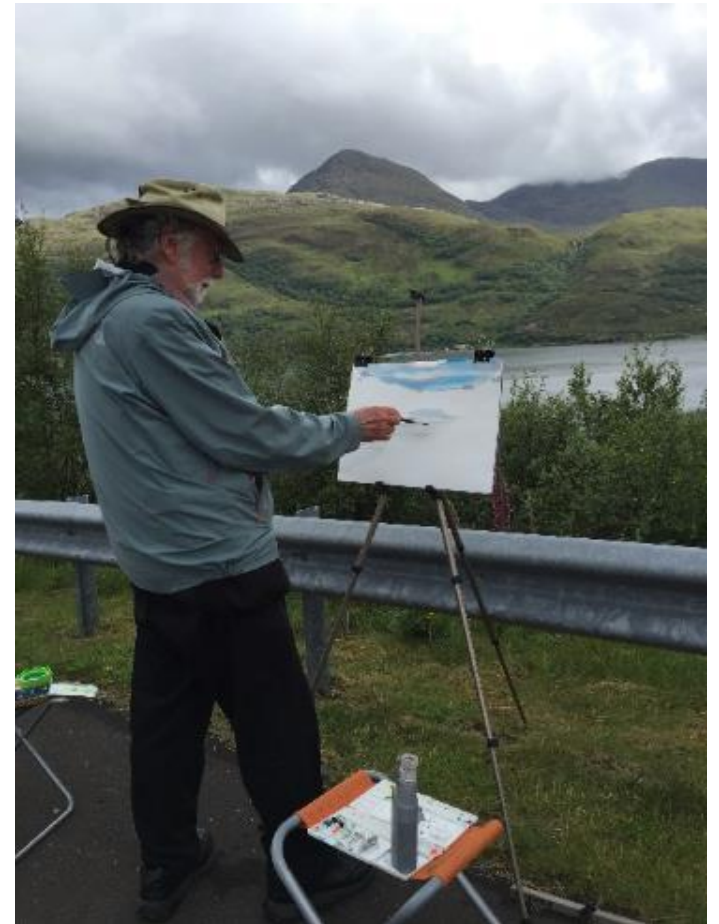


**Painting View from a Hillside Walk at Glenfinnan.**

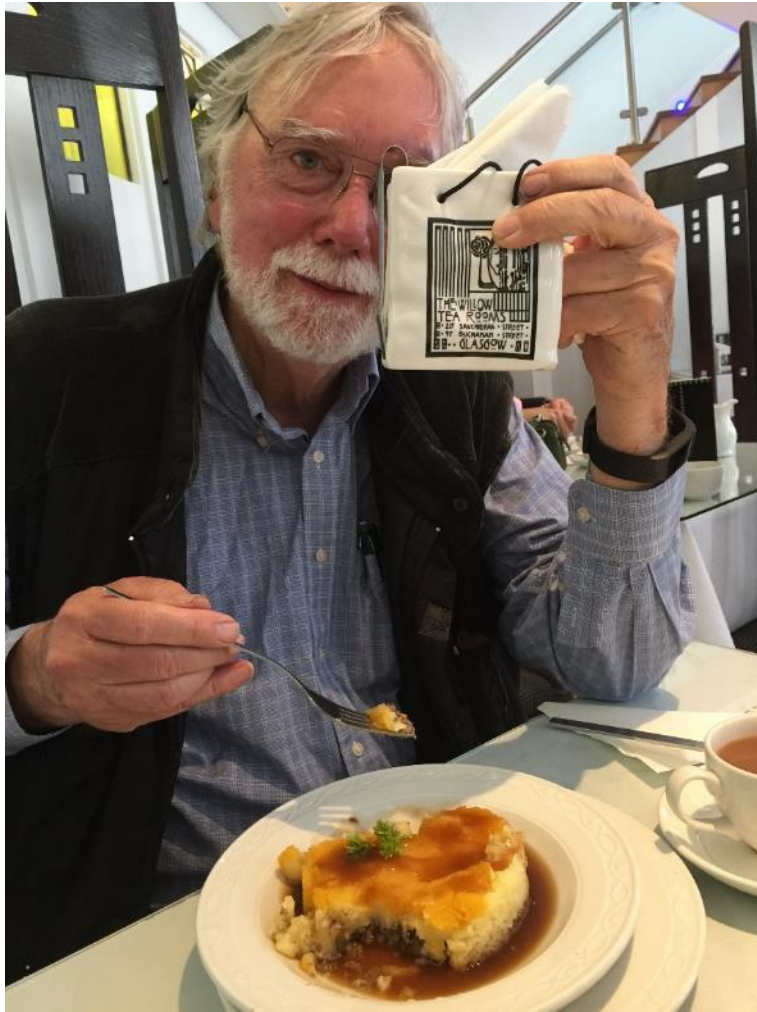
After leaving Glenfinnan, we stopped at a roadside park with an excellent view and painted for a few more hours before calling it a day.



View across Loch Ailort



After five days painting, we packed the car and headed for the Fort Williams station in a steady rain. We caught the 12 o'clock train and arrived in Glasgow at 4 PM. This gave us time to leave our bags and walk around Glasgow for a meal and another go at painting. Near the station, we found the famous Willow Tea Room and had an afternoon meal. I couldn't resist the haggis.



A haggis meal at the famous Willow Tea Room.

After Scotland we retreated to Flitwick, Bedfordshire, where Pauline and I spend summers. Pauline chauffeured us to various painting sites and recorded events photographically. Ruth's "bucket list" items for England included a pub meal, a stately English garden, sheep, horses, deer, ruins, churches/chapels, moors. She put a good dent in it with this trip.

Our first venue was Houghton House, an English Heritage ruin, once a noble home, said to be the House Beautiful in John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress". Pauline and her sister, Alison Farrow, also an artist, joined us. Strong winds prevented setting up easels. While we were there, three musicians showed up and entertained us as we painted.





Ruth painted this view by using another wall as a wind shield.





Ruth painted this view by using a ruin wall as a wind break.



Alison solved the problem by painting from inside.



During the next few days we painted pubs, stately homes, Flitwick Moor, Hatfield House and gardens, Woburn, and Pauline's garden.

## Hatfield House

Hatfield House and Garden is an artist's dream when it's not raining. It was another sunshine and showers day. After tea and cake in the tea shop, we scouted for painting scenes. Off and on showers limited our painting choices, so after a walk around the gardens, we found potential scenes that could be painted in from available sheltered locations.



Our first attempt at painting the mansion from the rear was a washout, so we moved to shelter. Ruth created an ink drawing from a wall sculpture, giving me an opportunity to do some figure work.





Ruth meets the queen and draws her in ink.



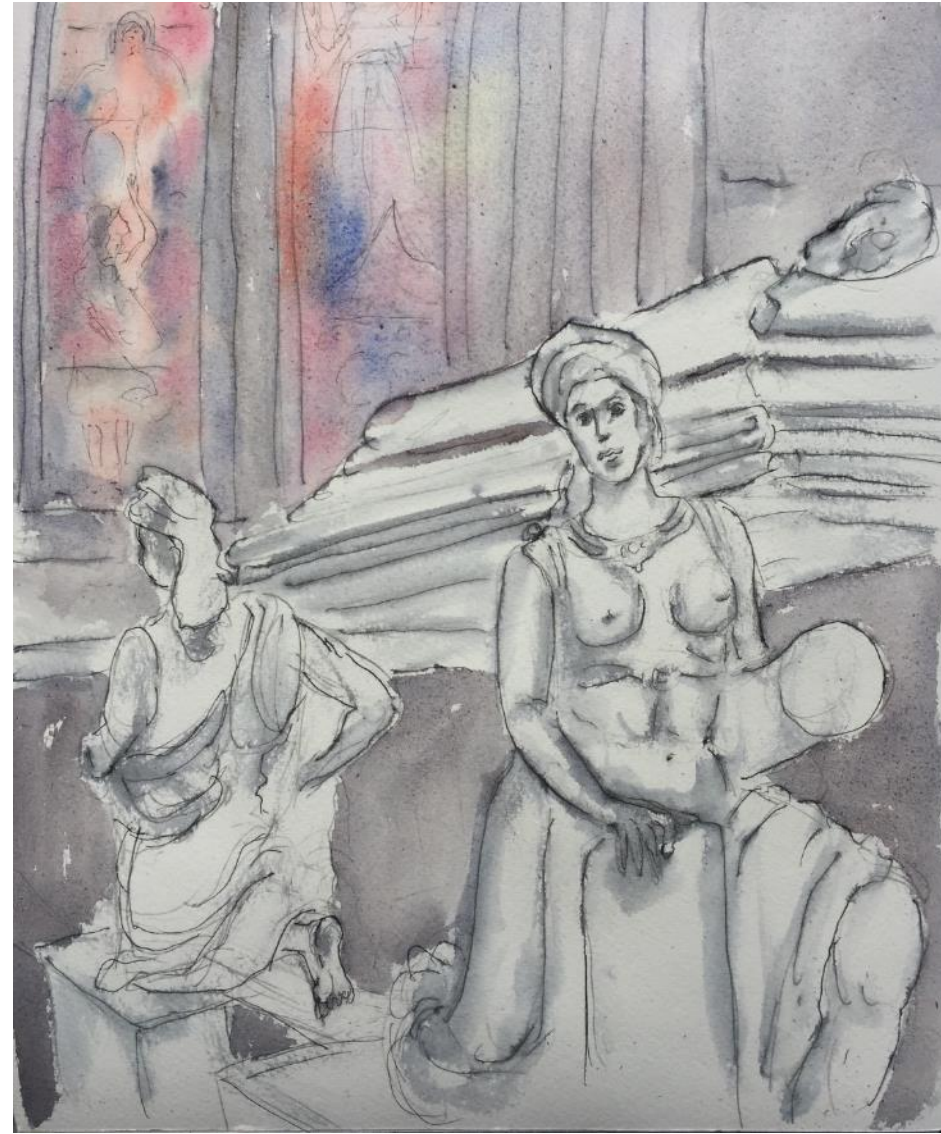


Jim's Figure work

Among the possible painting locations, we explored St Etheldreda's Church, which is next to Hatfield House, and asked the docents if we could do some sketching inside. They were delighted that we had come and gave us their blessings. We soon discovered this to be a prime painting venue, regardless of the weather. The tombs, sculptures, carvings, and windows, including a Bourne-Jones, stained glass window offered many possibilities.



Pauline photographed the Bourne-Jones window



Ruth (left)-Church alter, Jim (Right)-Four Virtues (two shown) at the tomb of Sir Robert Cecil





**The Jolly Cooper-** We had lunch at the Jolly Coopers in nearby Wardhedges. After lunch, standing in the street, we did quick studies of the pub





Jolly  
Coopers  
17

**Woburn-** In Woburn, I painted the Black Horse and Ruth painted a row of the Georgian stores on the High Street.





**Flitwick Moor**-The moor is one of my favorite places to paint, and I have been painting it for many years, never running out of scenes.



**Ruth (left)**

**Jim (right)**





We discovered a new foxglove forest in the moor.



Ruth's painting of the foxglove forest



Ruth and I traded paintings of Flitwick Moor.

She chose this one that I painting in 2013 of the River Flit, which runs through the moor.







**Pauline and I at a Flitwick Moor kissing gate. We never pass one without a kiss.**

**Pauline's Garden**

**Photo from September 2016**



Ruth's water color



Jim's Oil (from a previous time)

On Saturday, we took Ruth to the Flitwick Station around noon, where I saw her safely onto the Thamelink train to London, where she would catch her afternoon Virgin Flight back to the USA.



