



■ ABOVE, Jack Pender photographed in 1997 by Phil Monckton.

■ RIGHT, Mousehole early 70s.



■ BELOW, Jack Pender's drawing of Mousehole harbour (untitled).

■ BOTTOM, Drying Nets.



Fitting tribute to a master

A major new exhibition puts one of West Cornwall's most beloved artists where he belongs, reports FRANK RUHRMUND



■ Jack Pender exhibition: the tools of his trade.

COMING from all parts of the county, from Sennen to Saltash, and the country, from Bristol to London, never have so many people packed into Penlee House for the opening of an exhibition as they did for its current tribute show for Mousehole artist Jack Pender, who died in 1968 at the age of 80.

A family man, he would have been especially proud of the fact that the exhibition was officially opened by the eldest of his three children, Robin, and attended and supported by his second son Jason and daughter Tamsin.

Comprised of more than 80 paintings, it's a long-overdue major retrospective – the first in a public gallery – of works by one of the county's most highly regarded artists. It could not be a more impressive tribute.

Born and bred in Mousehole, this exhibition marks what would have been his 90th birthday year. As Cornish as pilchards and pasties, determined to be an artist and follow in the footsteps of his fisherman and painter grandfather William J George (the story of Jack Pender and his grandfather has just been told in a book written by the artist's sister Sylvia Pender Johns), he studied at Penzance School of Art.

Unfortunately the start of the Second World War brought his course of study there to an abrupt end.

He enlisted almost immediately in the county regiment, the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, and consequently saw several years of war service.

Twice wounded, and once reported as being "Missing, killed in action", he served in France where he was one of the thousands of British soldiers forced to retreat in 1940 before the advancing German army, and eventually made his way back to this country via Cherbourg.

Further active service followed in North Africa and in Italy which included the battle for Monte Cassino. He didn't know it at the time, but he later discovered that his brother Bill was also in that action.

Happily they both survived, only for Jack to be posted to Greece. However, this proved

something of a blessing in disguise, for while there he was able to pick up the pieces of his artistic career by studying at the Athens School of Art. On his return to civilian life, he attended Exeter School of Art and the West of England College of Art in Bristol, and on completion of his studies taught at Plymouth School of Art and at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth. Although he found working in both of these establishments

congenial, the call of Cornwall was impossible to resist and in the mid-1950s he came back to his home port of Mousehole to paint and teach. Head of the art department at Treswithian, later Camborne, School, for several years, he was a member of both the Newlyn and Penwith Societies of Artists, exhibited his distinctive semi-abstract paintings with them regularly, and held his first solo show at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, in 1963.

His son Robin has said he: "Reinterpreted what he saw about him, making what he painted resonate for the viewer, capturing the juxtaposition of boats and cottages, fishermen and nets. He spoke of finding the essence of a boat, not to just make a pictorially accurate representation of one. Jack's boats have personality." He exhibited widely, from his native Cornwall to Birmingham, London and overseas, and was part of the

prestigious exhibition "St Ives: 1939-64" held at the Tate in 1965. He was also featured often on film, on television as one of Angela Rippon's Choices, and in the BBC2 series, Look Stranger. As a splendid bonus, Penlee House is screening this film as part of this current exhibition. While, as this exhibition so clearly shows, the range of Jack Pender's artistic abilities was extensive, he was at his very best when exploring the



relationship of boat to boat, of boat to quay, and of boats to the men who sailed them. Few artists painted the fishing boat as a working organism with the conviction he did. A man who, for many, was 'Mister Mousehole', he cared deeply for his birthplace and, as a harbour commissioner, worked hard to preserve the character of the village against the ravages of tourism.

As chairman of the Mousehole Harbour Authority in the fateful year of 1961, when the crew of the Penlee lifeboat Solomon Broune and those they had set out to rescue were all lost at sea, he was one of the trustees of the fund set up in the wake of the disaster to help the bereaved. The trustees were helped in their work by Lord Goodman and as an expression of their gratitude to him a painting by Jack Pender of the Solomon Broune was presented to him at a special ceremony in the House of Lords.

It was typical of the artist's generosity that, when asked to make the painting, he only agreed on the understanding that he would not be paid a penny for it.

A Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd, he was a larger than life character who was never happier than when in the Ship Inn or the Royal British Legion Club in Mousehole, laughing and telling stories but, above all, an immensely talented artist.

While, sadly, it has come too late for the artist himself to appreciate, it is to be hoped that this exhibition will now place Jack Pender where he belongs to be, at the very top of Cornwall's artistic tree. Both the exhibition and the generously illustrated book which accompanies it – Jack Pender – A Tribute, published by Truran at £8.99, available from Penlee House Gallery and Museum and local bookshops – have been sponsored by David Lay FRICS of the Penzance Auction House.

● Not to be missed, this major retrospective of works by Jack Pender can be seen in Penlee House Gallery and Museum, 10.30am-4.30pm (last admission 4pm) Monday-Saturday, until March 8.

■ ABOVE, Penders attend the opening of the exhibition: from left, Tamsin, Jason and Robin.

■ BELOW, Lyonesse (1950).

■ BOTTOM, White Morning.

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