

Sketching and Drawing the Landscape

With Stephen Martyn

I'm sure many people will have wandered round the local area and have thought, "Wouldn't it be nice to do a sketch or a painting of this view?" The same thoughts often come to us on holiday of course. I'm going to show you how those thoughts can turn into reality. All it takes is some inexpensive art materials and a little time.

The word sketch often conjures up a vision of being out in the countryside somewhere, quickly rattling off a pencil drawing or watercolour painting of the scene in front of us. That can be the reality too, but it takes a bit of practice for the process to become as effortless as one might hope. The key to success is accurate drawing, which is a skill that can be learnt, and in this article that's what I'm going to be concentrating on.

Your materials can be very simple and obtainable from any art shop. A cartridge paper sketch book, perhaps A4 size with spiral binding, plus a couple of soft pencils, a 2B or a 4B is about right. A nice soft eraser completes the kit, except for one thing, a large elastic band. Why an elastic band? You'll find out as soon as you start to sketch outdoors, when the slightest breeze sets the pages of your sketchbook flapping. Take two elastic bands in case one breaks!

To start with, you need a subject. Choose something that appeals to you but something that is not too complicated. A well executed drawing of a simple subject is far more enjoyable than a laboured effort at something large and complex. For this demonstration, I've chosen the ruined church of St Mary, near Appleton Farm, West Newton, which is a couple of miles from my studio. An interesting pattern of shapes, but not too daunting, and a good view of the church can be easily had from the verge opposite. If the weather is unkind, you could sketch this subject from inside a car, which can be a more comfortable way of working.

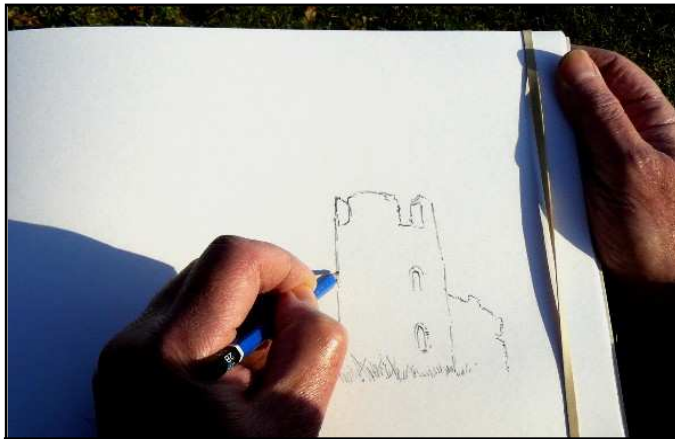


Ruined Church, Appleton Farm, Norfolk

Some people are lucky and have a natural ability to be able to draw. For the majority of us, and I certainly include myself here, it is a skill that develops over time, although often less time than you might think. The one thing that you must constantly keep in your mind is to look and observe first, and only then to make a mark on the paper. The tendency is to draw what your brain

thinks the scene looks like, not what is actually there. Have a good look at the scene first and decide what is the most important area, the focal point. Position that away from the centre of the paper and not too close to the edge. Often about a third of the way in from either the left or the right looks best.

Start drawing from the focal point and work your way out from there. Have a think about how large the subject of the sketch is going to be, because a common error is to start drawing too large, so that you run out of space before you get everything in. It can help to make few light marks on the paper to



Starting work with the pencil – note the elastic band. Yes, I am left-handed!

indicate the top, bottom and sides of a building, for example. In fact going lightly with the pencil is a very good idea, until you have the main shapes of the scene established. Only then start to put in more detail and perhaps firm up the line with a little more pressure on the pencil.

Simple measuring techniques can be hugely helpful. How many times does the height of that door

go into the overall height of the building, for example. Or, is the end wall of the building the same length as the side wall, or longer, shorter, half the width. I'm sure you get the idea. One of the trickiest things is getting the angle of a line correct. Closely observe and think about every line before you mark it on the paper. Hold your pencil out at arms length and use it to sight the line as this often makes angles much clearer to see. Again, ask yourself questions. Is the line of that roof horizontal or is it going up from left to right and if so, by how much. It may seem tedious at first, and you're raring to get the sketch completed, but simple measuring, taking angles, asking yourself questions can literally force you to draw what you see, not what your mind, playing tricks on you, deceives you into drawing what you *think* it should be like. After a few sketches, the process becomes more instinctive and you can speed up, but keep looking at your drawing and ask yourself the most important question of all, "does anything look *wrong*?"

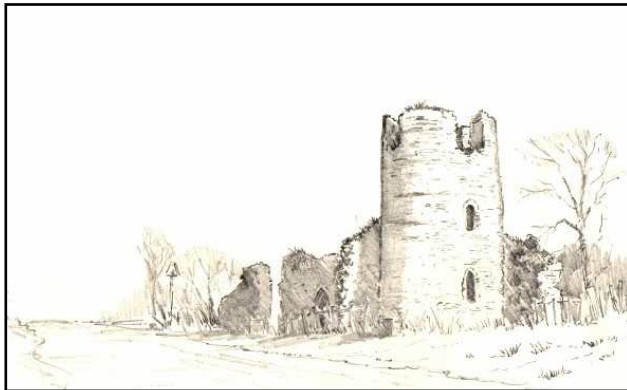
Eventually, perhaps with much rubbing out of incorrect lines, you arrive at a line drawing of the



The line drawing is almost complete

scene in front of you. Your work isn't quite done yet, however. In nature, nothing has a line drawn round it. We see shapes by patterns of tone, light and dark. So, for our sketch to really come to life, we need to put in some shading.

If the sun is shining, the shadows will be there for us to copy. If not, then we have to imagine what would be lit and what would be in shadow, something



The finished sketch of the ruined church

that can take a little practice. Diagonal strokes with the pencil are most useful for this, but I sometimes use vertical or horizontal shading to emphasise the structure of an object. As you start to develop a pattern of light and dark tone on the paper, the subject will appear to be much more three-dimensional than a simple line drawing, as I hope you can see from my finished sketch.

Do get out and have a go! If you have found this article useful, but you'd like to learn more, visit the Tuition and Events pages on my website learnwatercolour.com where you will find out how I can actually show you these techniques.

In my next article I'll be talking about drawing trees, and introducing you to the possibility of working in ink as well as pencil. Happy Sketching!

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