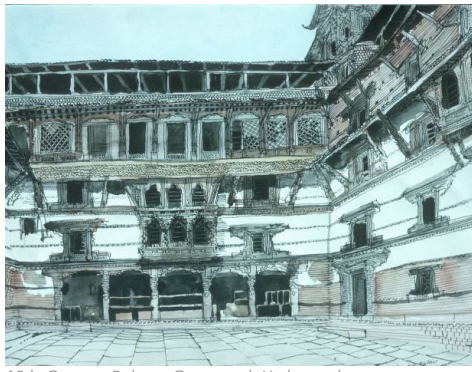


Durbar Square, Kathmandu



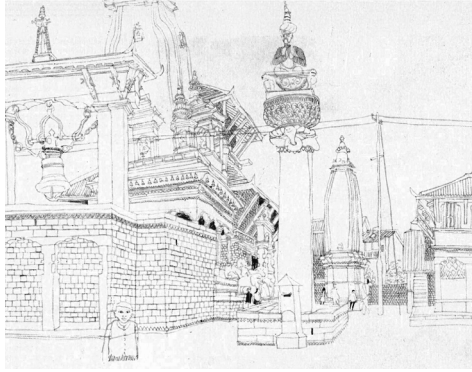
18th Century Palace Courtyard, Kathmandu



Stupa



Corner of Durbar Square



Bhadgaon, Kathmandu Valley



Stupa, Kathmandu Valley



DRAWING AS A WAY OF SEEING

1. But what kind of drawing?

John Ruskin's first sight of the mountains that he grew to love was also the spark that helped launch his career, Andrew Hill points out in his lovely book *Ruskinland: How John Ruskin shapes our World*. As he points out, for Ruskin, *"In order to see the world he always needed to draw it"*. P.52

In 1842, with the doctors suspecting tuberculosis, he left Oxford and went on a ten month trip with his parents to France, Switzerland and Italy. *"Ruskin stocked up on sketch books, ready to record the experience in the way he knew best"* (p.57). His simple advice was *"to draw what you see, not what you know"*.

Ruskin and his family toured Europe in some style. A courier would be sent ahead to haggle with inn keepers and avoid the *"trouble"* and disgrace of trying to speak French or any other language. The family and servants would

follow behind at *"a more modest pace of seven miles per hour 40-50 miles/day in a six person carriage, complete with hidden compartments for luggage, luxurious cushions and snugly fitted windows"*.

As Andrew Hill points out, whilst the railways took over from the coaches in the second half of the century, *"Ruskin maintained an impractical, but romantic nostalgia for the coaching days"*.

Most years my journeys began on the 9.30 am boat train from Victoria Station, my clothes, sleeping bag and sketch books and paints, brushes and dip pens packed into one large rucksack to last me the first few months on my trips into the hastily researched unknown in my preparatory plans with one big question *"what kind of drawings was I going to do?"* I still ask this question, but not as often as I did in those days. In the early days I didn't even take a seat, only a sleeping bag. But I always took brown and black ink, a tin of white powder paint, a variety of different sized pen nibs and a range of pencils. However, with my students at architectural school I learnt to draw with a rotring pen as most students made a mess of a dip pen, but far less so with a rotring pen. I even began to find it easier. I painted in Kashmir for a while before heading for Nepal, but I was still using pen nibs at this time.

When I first went to Nepal it was as if I had reached the roof of the world as I went to see the Swayambhunath, an ancient religious stupa crowning a hill in the Kathmandu valley to the west of the city. Each morning before dawn countless Buddhist and Hindu pilgrims ascend the 365 steps from the eastern side of the hill before beginning a clockwise circumlocation of the stupa.



Vale of Kashmir

In those days I would start drawing around 8.00am and work right through to 7:30pm without lunch but later a good supper, where I would touch up the odd drawing. One day I bought one of those Italian beach chairs, light weight and with fold out arms. Sufficiently cheap that I could throw or give it away before returning homewards. I always stacked up with good paper backs to read and every other month I would take a weekend off in a good hotel, then back to cheaper digs on the Monday. By the Autumn I was usually quite fit for rugby. There was a lot of walking between many of the drawings! It wasn't like I was sitting on an invalids wheely chair, although as I get older it sounds like a great option!

The stupa occupies a central position on the site. Said to be the most sacred amongst Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Nepal, founded about the beginning of the 5th century. For Tibetans and followers of Tibetan Buddhism, it is second only to the Boudanath.

The dome at the base represents the entire world. When a person awakes (represented by eyes of wisdom and compassion) from the bonds of the world, the person reaches the state of enlightenment. The thirteen pinnacles on the top symbolise that servient beings have to go through thirteen stages of spiritual realizations to reach enlightenment or Buddahood.

But as I am about to complete my painting, I hear a foreign sound and look around to see where it has come from. All I see are the saffron robed monks, but one has a small black transistor in his hands. I'd heard the music before but only fleetingly, and several months earlier. It was a Beatles song that had come out earlier that year before I had left on my travels.

It was *Please, please me* their song which had rocketed to Number One on their debut album, fourteen songs long containing eight credited to Lennon and McCartney. The Beatles album was rush released by Parlephone on 22nd March that year to capitalise on the success of the title work that I first heard on the monk's transistor the day before. (But I didn't know all that at the time) but it was quite a surprise on that sunny day, prior to hearing about the Kennedy assassination when he rode in the motorcade with his wife in Dallas during a campaign visit. It was 12.30 pm on November 22nd, 1963.

I had got up early that next morning to make a painting of Durbar Square. Despite the sun, it was a cold, crisp morning as I found a set of steps to sit on whilst I worked away. The Square was where the city's kings were once crowned and from where they ruled. Durbar means palace. This is the traditional heart of the old town and Kathmandu's most spectacular legacy of traditional architecture. Whilst most of the square dates from the 17th or 18th centuries, the original buildings are much older, but many were destroyed in the great earthquake of 1934 whilst this square bore the brunt of the earthquake of 2015 when half a dozen temples collapsed as did several towers in the Hunaman Dhoka palace complex, so a young Nepalese architect working in the studio these last few years, told me. It was designated a Unesco World Heritage site in 1979.

I'd hired a bike for the next day and when I'd finished the painting, I was heading out to Bhadgaon, a small town in the Valley of Kathmandu, half an hour or so by bike from the city. Bhadgaon (pronounced bud-gown) was a small "city" of temples (a veritable sculpture park) about 14K east of Kathmandu at 1401m altitude and known as the "City of Devotees". I had decided to draw with pencils that day so was travelling light. I had just turned a bend in the road when I sighted the American Embassy with its flag at half mast and was told by a Marine on guard at the entrance about the assassination of President Kennedy the previous day in Dallas and, as if to add to the shock of that day, there was a funeral procession through the square I was drawing in (the theatricality reinforced by the wailing of professional mourners that would put the fear of the Gods into anyone!) And as if to reinforce the point, I watched a dog dart into the edge of a fire burning in the hillside below. A young student who had been watching me draw explained that there had been another funeral that day but for a poor family who, not able to afford sandal wood used for most funerals, had used cheaper wood that burnt more fiercely and that, in the more excessive heat caused the head of the dead person to explode and a dog seeing and fancying his chances had rushed in to lap up the dead person's brains. Remembering the Beatles' song the day before was a cheery relief on this mournful day!