

RICHARD PEARCE

BRYHER ARTIST

Perched above a beach on the north-western edge of Scilly is a studio and gallery – an extraordinary island location for an extraordinary island artist





"I had a charmed life as a young man. I never missed a summer on the islands, working for Barry Mumford up at Longstone, doing spuds and bulbs. It was a great time, rowing in the gigs and enjoying the beaches. All of my life, I have never been away from Scilly during the summer. I would head off in the winters, often ending up in France or Greece. Once summer returned, I'd be back on Scilly."

Eventually, Richard settled on St Mary's with his wife Caroline. For three or four years he managed a farm at Trenoweth before acquiring Vine Farm on Bryher.

"We stuck at Vine Farm for about five years but it didn't work out for us. So many things went wrong, machinery broke down, you name it. In the end we were nearly bankrupt. So we were looking for new sources of income. I was labouring on a building job down at Harbour View at the time, when I found some old canvas boards. I took them home. Caroline had given me some paints for my birthday and one evening I just started painting. I painted right through the night! I ended up having an exhibition at the Bryher Community Centre and sold every single picture. That was seventeen years ago."

"My style has changed a lot since those days. I started off doing highly-detailed chocolate box stuff. Once Tresco Gallery got going, I came into contact with quite a few West Cornwall artists that the gallery brought over here.



Golden Eagle Studio sits just above the beach at Great Par, Bryher. The low, narrow building once housed the historic gig Golden Eagle, now on St Mary's. The gig shed has since been transformed into the workplace and gallery of Richard Pearce.

"It was almost buried underneath the sand when I took it over fifteen years ago. The roof had gone and builders had begun to take stone from its walls. There wasn't really anywhere else for me to have a studio on Bryher. The Duchy got a grant for the materials from the Rural Development Agency and we did the work."

Richard was standing at the end of the studio, working on a new painting. Through the large window behind him were the sea and the Norrard Rocks. It is a most appropriate location for an island artist.

"I was born on St Mary's in 1953. The Pearces came to Scilly during the building of the Bishop Rock lighthouse, married into the St Agnes' Hicks family and never left. My father was Leading Fireman up at the airport but later in life he became a wood-carver, making figureheads and models of gigs. He was an artist himself and there were always painting materials left around the house for us kids to use. He always wanted us to be able to paint or draw, if we had the inclination. My father was probably the main influence on my artistic life."

As a young man, Richard led a slightly nomadic lifestyle, working on Scilly in the summer and in Europe during the winter.

Talking to them helped me to loosen up, develop my own style and paint the way I wanted to. Previously I had felt a little isolated artistically."

Richard tends not to take part in many shows or exhibitions these days. After the wayfaring days of his youth, he is very happy to stay on Bryher as much as possible. "Even going to St Mary's these days seems a bit of an effort," he joked. His book, *Depending On The Tide*, goes some way to appease admirers of his work, who are often keen to get hold of a catalogue of his paintings. Richard is very much a local artist, something reflected in the enjoyment that he takes from his own work and that of others.

"Part of the pleasure that I get from painting is simply taking paint on the brush and putting it on to the canvas but it's also very satisfying just to make a living on a precarious bit of rock like this. Lots of good artists come here to paint but if I could have one painting it would have to be something by Matt Lethbridge. I love his style – you can almost smell the sea. The paintings carry with them his own incredible experience." 🌊

Richard Pearce can occasionally be found at The Golden Eagle Gallery on Bryher, Isles of Scilly. For further reference: www.rpearce.net

