

JAMES HART DYKE

Whymper's Mountains 150 years on

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Monday - Friday, 10am - 5pm

at
John Mitchell Fine Paintings
44 Old Bond Street, London W1S 4GB

All paintings are for sale unless otherwise stated

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JOHN MITCHELL
FINE PAINTINGS

EST 1931

Over thirty-one days in June and July 1865, Whymper and his guides climbed five mountains and crossed eleven passes. Four of those summits were first ascents including the Grandes Jorasses and the Aiguille Verte, ascending just over 100,000 feet in the process.



Edward Whymper, circa 1870

This catalogue has been compiled to accompany an exhibition of over thirty oil paintings and sketches by James Hart Dyke made to commemorate a remarkable series of first ascents by the Victorian artist-turned-mountaineer, Edward Whymper (1840-1911).

One hundred and fifty years ago, in 1865, Whymper became the first person to climb the Matterhorn; a triumph that concluded an extraordinary career as the most courageous and determined mountaineer of his generation. In fact, it has been widely suggested that Whymper was a generation ahead of his peers in terms of what he accomplished in the mountains. And he had done it all by the time he was twenty-five years old.

This summer the narrative landscapist, James Hart Dyke, spent his own 'season' in the Alps. For over two weeks in August he trekked and climbed, retracing where possible Whymper's footsteps.

Over a period of thirty-one days in June and July 1865, Whymper and his guides climbed five mountains and crossed eleven passes. Four of those summits were first ascents including the Grandes Jorasses and the Aiguille Verte. He ascended just over 100,000 feet in the process and covered the same distance going down. After a string of successes the summer before, Whymper had devised a gruelling campaign for the following climbing season: he intended to scale all the significant unclimbed peaks, and had his sights principally on the Matterhorn. He had failed to climb it eight times since 1861 despite having never seen a mountain, let alone set foot on one, before 1860.

Whymper came from a family of artists who ran a wood engraving business. He too was apprenticed as an engraver although by the time he became proficient – which he soon did – technical advances in printing methods began to supersede this craft. As a young man he went on enormous, solitary walks covering sometimes as much as forty miles or more a day and yearned to be an explorer. At the time he didn't realise it but his chance to fulfil part of his dreams came in 1860 when he was only twenty years old: the London publishers, Longman, commissioned Whymper to produce a volume of Alpine scenery. But once he had arrived, instead of being satisfied with recording what he saw, he wanted to climb and conquer. Neither a sentimentalist nor fearful, Whymper was an unashamed 'peak bagger': in July 1860 he made the following observation in his diary in Zermatt: *'Saw of course the Matterhorn repeatedly; what precious stuff Ruskin has written about this, as well as many other things. When one has a fair view of the mountain, as I had, it may be compared to a sugar loaf set up on a table; the sugar loaf should have its head knocked on one side. Grand it is, but beautiful I think it is not.'* (from E. Whymper, 1871 *Scrambles in the Alps*).

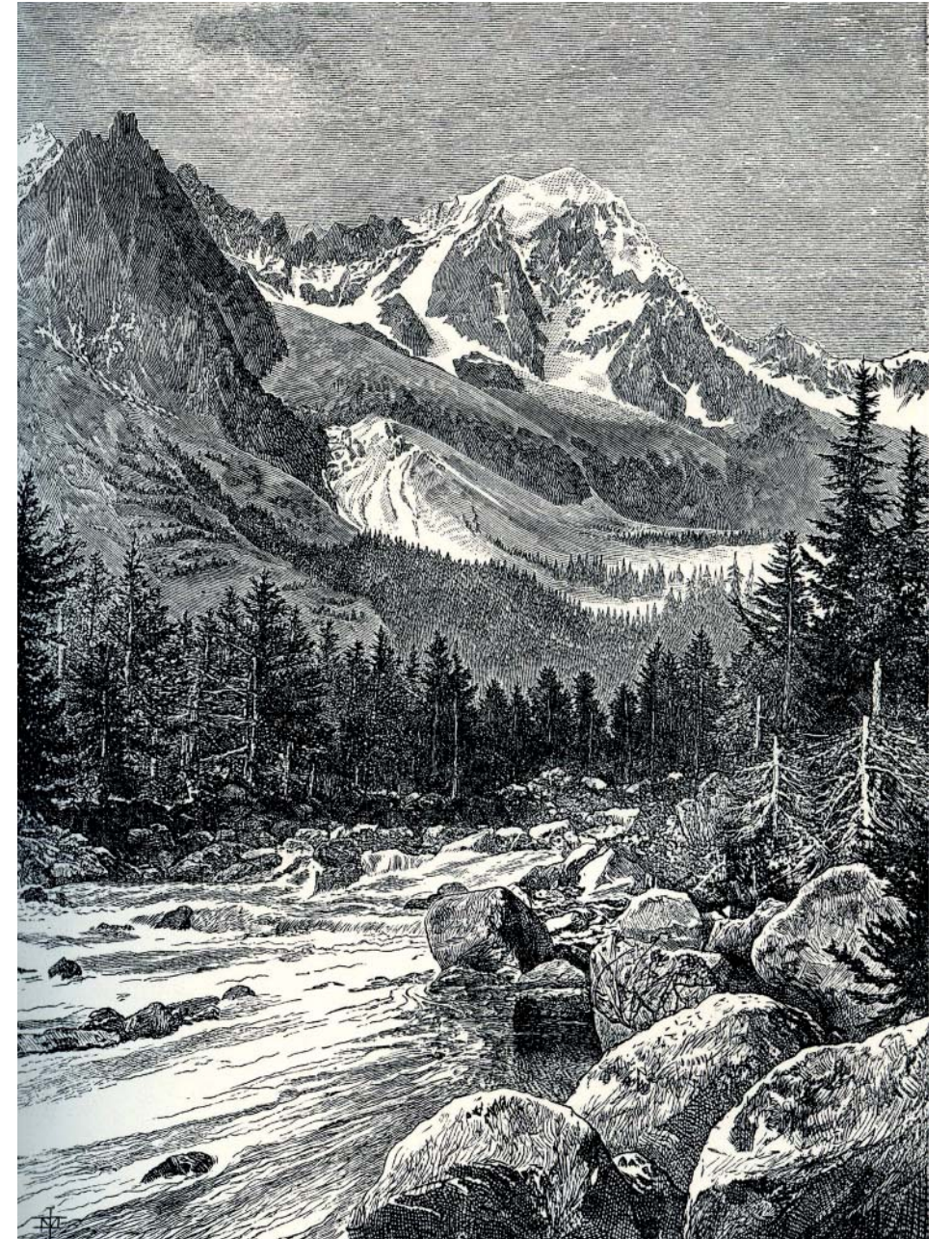
To Whymper the unclimbed peaks, passes and glaciers represented a challenge and he didn't show any enthusiasm for mountains that had already been summited. By comparing his opinion with that of his arch-rival, and arguably far more experienced mountaineer, the Irish geologist and scientist, John Tyndall (1820 -1893), who wrote: *'The Matterhorn was our temple, and we approached it with feelings not unworthy of so great a shrine,'* one can understand the gulf that separated Whymper from his peers. And yet, like an impassable 'bergschrund', and despite so much prowess, Whymper never managed to fully relate to his contemporaries.

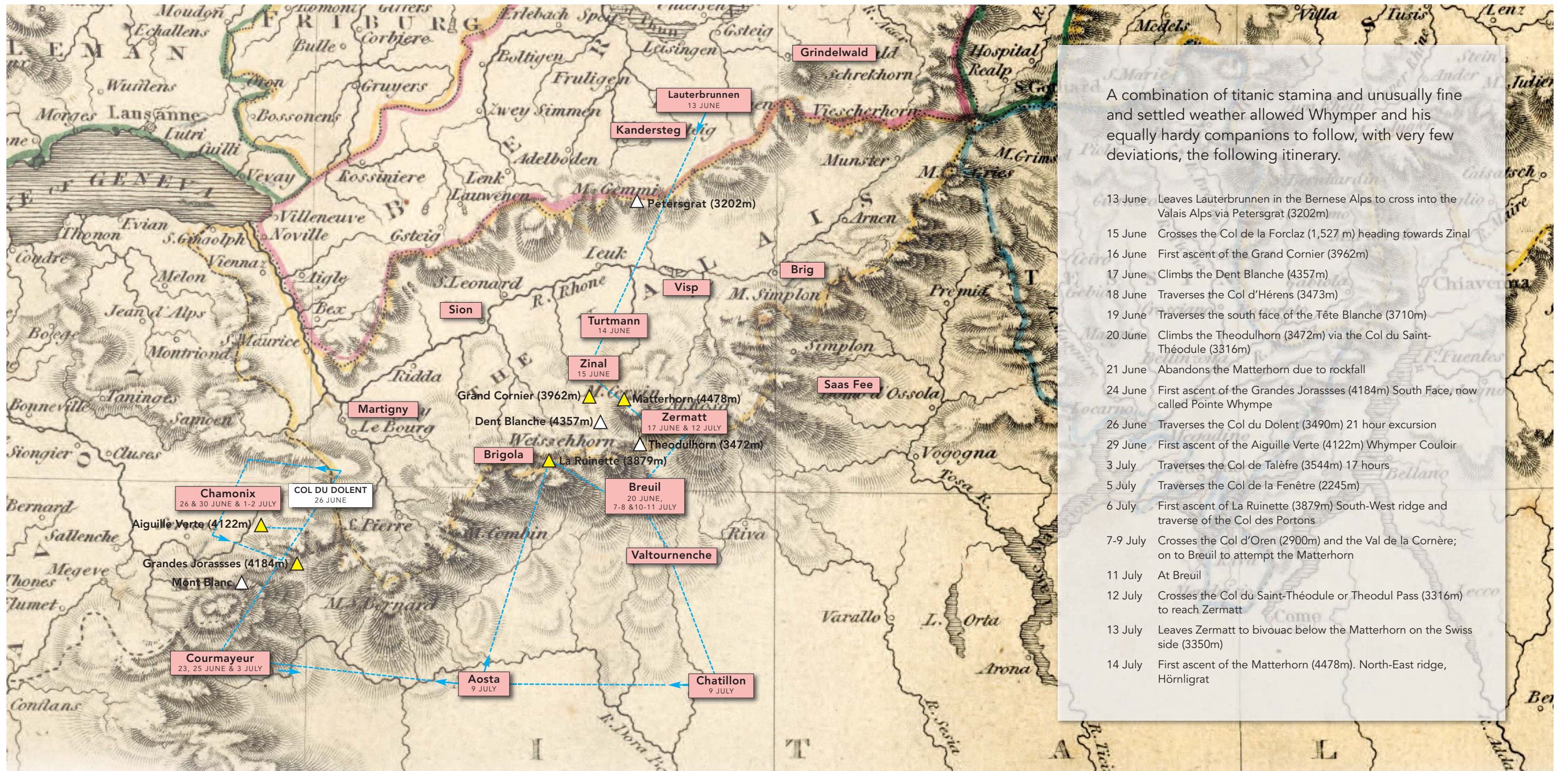
The mountain that came to obsess him above all others, the 'impossible' peak he craved to get to the top of first, was tragically the one that would haunt him for the rest of his life. Conquering the Matterhorn made him a household name but the infamous disaster on the way down on 14 July 1865 cast a long shadow over Whymper's life and those of the deceased climbers' families. The story needs no further telling but there is no denying that the rampage of giant walks, multiple traverses and epic climbing waged by Whymper over that month stands unique in the annals of mountaineering.

Two weeks before the Matterhorn climb, Whymper had laid waste to an equally formidable monster, the Aiguille Verte, which towers above Chamonix. This triumph was, in all likelihood, the first ascent he was most proud of and it is worth remembering when reading the staggering facts (listed on page 7) that Whymper was an exceptionally resilient walker above everything else. During Whymper's Alpine seasons, the 'Golden Age' of mountaineering, it was not unheard of for climbers to walk to Geneva and back from Saint Gervais, near Chamonix, in twenty-four hours; a journey of 86 miles.



Whymper's engravings for the Longman commission. Left to right, the bergschrund on the Dent Blanche; the summit of the Col du Dolent; opposite, the Grandes Jorasses seen from the Val Ferret, Italian side





A combination of titanic stamina and unusually fine and settled weather allowed Whymper and his equally hardy companions to follow, with very few deviations, the following itinerary.

- 13 June Leaves Lauterbrunnen in the Bernese Alps to cross into the Valais Alps via Petersgrat (3202m)
- 15 June Crosses the Col de la Forclaz (1,527 m) heading towards Zinal
- 16 June First ascent of the Grand Cornier (3962m)
- 17 June Climbs the Dent Blanche (4357m)
- 18 June Traverses the Col d'Hérens (3473m)
- 19 June Traverses the south face of the Tête Blanche (3710m)
- 20 June Climbs the Theodulhorn (3472m) via the Col du Saint-Théodule (3316m)
- 21 June Abandons the Matterhorn due to rockfall
- 24 June First ascent of the Grandes Jorasses (4184m) South Face, now called Pointe Whympe
- 26 June Traverses the Col du Dolent (3490m) 21 hour excursion
- 29 June First ascent of the Aiguille Verte (4122m) Whymper Couloir
- 3 July Traverses the Col de Talèfre (3544m) 17 hours
- 5 July Traverses the Col de la Fenêtre (2245m)
- 6 July First ascent of La Ruinette (3879m) South-West ridge and traverse of the Col des Portons
- 7-9 July Crosses the Col d'Oren (2900m) and the Val de la Cornère; on to Breuil to attempt the Matterhorn
- 11 July At Breuil
- 12 July Crosses the Col du Saint-Théodule or Theodul Pass (3316m) to reach Zermatt
- 13 July Leaves Zermatt to bivouac below the Matterhorn on the Swiss side (3350m)
- 14 July First ascent of the Matterhorn (4478m). North-East ridge, Hörnligrat



IT IS NEARLY FIFTEEN YEARS since the first James Hart Dyke exhibition at our gallery, *Visions of a travelling Artist*. Even then, there was a favourable reaction from some leading art critics towards James's work, who identified his talent and originality. In the intervening decade and a half we have enjoyed a fruitful association with James and held many more exhibitions, as well as securing from him many commissions for our clients. Nothing, however, could have prepared us for the impact of his major exhibition, *A Year with MI6*, which we held at a colleague's gallery in February 2011. It featured on the ten o'clock television news and on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row*, and attracted international press coverage. James's oils and watercolours captured life inside the Secret Intelligence Service in a way no photographer ever could have, and, in the diversity of technique and subject matter, both real and abstract. It may be said that this was the show which changed James from painter to artist. *Waiting in the Hotel Room*, the signature piece of the exhibition, was used by MI6 in their recruitment advertising campaign in the national press and was also shown in a lecture at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Just recently, James Hart Dyke was commissioned by the producers of the James Bond films, Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, to design the official 50th Anniversary poster. As if this was not 'product endorsement' enough of James's work, one of his paintings appeared in *Skyfall*.

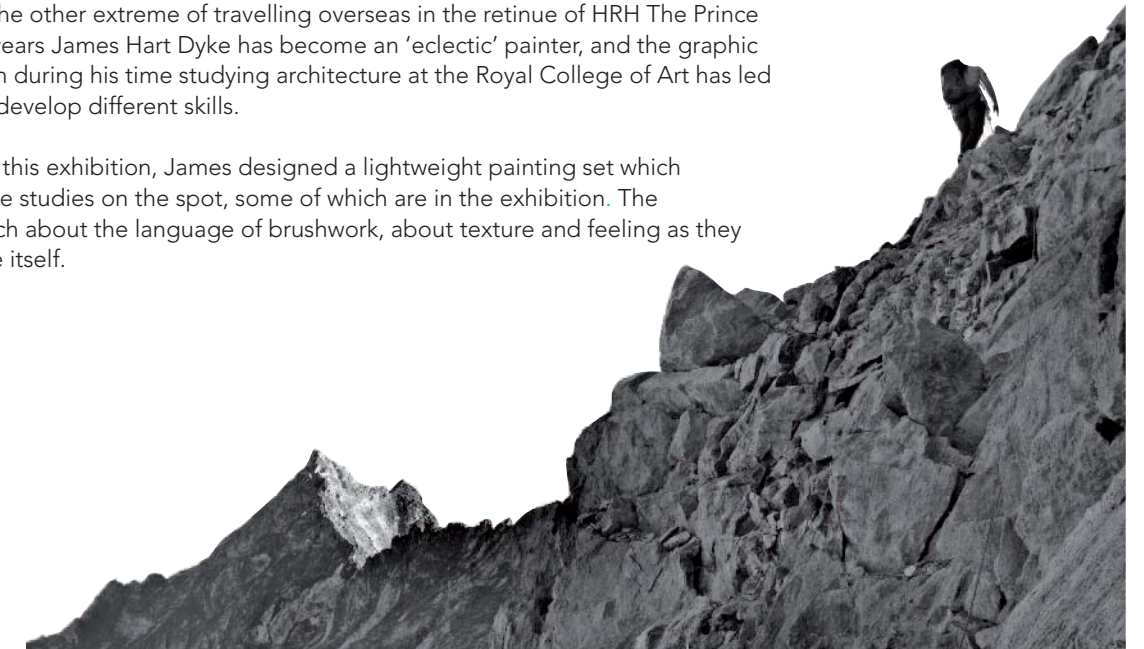
In 2013 Aston Martin invited James Hart Dyke to create a series of paintings to record its Centenary year and James was given exclusive behind-the-scenes access to the Aston Martin factory, the Le Mans and Nürburgring 24-hour races and other special Centenary events.

Above from left to right, James painting on the summit of the Blanc de Moring, his first alpine ascent (see paintings on pages 16 and 23); crossing a scree field in the Zinal valley (see painting on page 21); at work on the Glacier de Talefre; just minutes after a massive rock-fall on the Aiguille du Tacul.



James Hart Dyke remains at heart a dedicated painter of landscapes, and there are references in many of the pictures to the extensive travelling that has enabled him to train his eye and which has helped his work evolve into maturity. In the last decade James's gruelling trips at altitude in the Himalayas, in the Atlas Mountains and to active war zones have been complemented by the other extreme of travelling overseas in the retinue of HRH The Prince of Wales. In recent years James Hart Dyke has become an 'eclectic' painter, and the graphic sense instilled in him during his time studying architecture at the Royal College of Art has led him to explore and develop different skills.

For the purposes of this exhibition, James designed a lightweight painting set which enabled him to make studies on the spot, some of which are in the exhibition. The paintings are as much about the language of brushwork, about texture and feeling as they are about the image itself.



It is fitting, too, that James should exhibit with us, as he represents a direct continuation of the tradition of the intrepid painter-mountaineers of old, whose work is seen in our firm's annual *Peaks and Glaciers* exhibition of Alpine paintings. There are few living painters more qualified than James in being able to tackle the altitude, terrain and weather conditions that such a journey entails.

We are privileged to be able to present this latest 'journey' from the brush of the remarkable James Hart Dyke. We are, equally, grateful to our friend and fellow Alpine enthusiast, Jeff Colegrave, (see page 42) who kindly agreed to guide and lead James up and over some of the hallowed terrain that Whymper explored in 1865.

William Mitchell
October 2015



Left to right, James descending the ladder on the Mer de Glace; on the summit of the Blanc de Moring; painting beside the Schonbiel Hut



The Glacier du Tacul seen from the Mer de Glace
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

Looking across to the Grandes Jorasses from the Refuge du Couvercle
oil on canvas
38 x 50in (97 x 127cm)







The Dent Blanche and Grand Cornier seen from Blanc de Moming
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)



The Col de Talèfre
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)



The Matterhorn from the Gandegg Hut
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)



The Matterhorn: North Face
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)



Whympers campsite below the Aiguille Verte
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)



The Dent Blanche from the Cabane du Mountet above Zinal
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

The Dent Blanche seen from Blanc de Moring
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 30cm)







The Theodulgletscher seen from the Gandegg Hut
oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)



The Matterhorn: North Face study
oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)



The Matterhorn from the Gandegg Hut
 oil on acrylic on board
 6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)



Monte Rosa from the Gandegg Hut
 oil on acrylic on board
 6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)



The Dent Blanche in afternoon light
oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)



The Dent and Col du Hérens
oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)



The Matterhorn from the Gandegg Hut
oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)



Matterhorn study: North Face
oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)



In the captions on the following pages, I have where possible, included as much topographical detail as relevant.

During my two week trip I camped in Zermatt for several nights and then stayed in mountain huts for the remainder of the painting expedition.

The early mornings and late afternoons, particularly during the more settled weather of the second week, offered the best opportunities for sketching and painting.

The rest of each day was taken up by negotiating glaciers and climbing ridges to find the best vantage points from which to record the various mountains and passes of interest to this project.

James Hart Dyke



PAGE 11

The Glacier du Tacul seen from the Mer de Glace

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

This impressive view of the Tacul Glacier was painted from middle of the Mer de Glace looking up at the Dent du Géant on the left and the Tour Ronde in the far right background. Jeff and I had just witnessed a massive rock-fall off the Aiguille du Tacul which would have crushed us had we stayed there ten minutes longer. A huge dust cloud enveloped us as we rushed down and away from it onto the Mer de Glace.

Photograph of the near miss on page 9.



PAGE 12

Looking across to the Grandes Jorasses from the Refuge du Couvercle

oil on canvas
38 x 50in (97 x 127cm)

I made studies of the Grandes Jorasses on two consecutive evenings from the Refuge du Couvercle (2687m) The original hut was built under the distinctive lid (couvercle) of rock which sheltered Whymper's tent on the night before he made a first ascent of the Aiguille Verte on 29 June 1865. See page 20, *Whymper's campsite below the Aiguille Verte*



PAGE 16

The Dent Blanche and Grand Cornier seen from Blanc de Moming

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

Leaving the Cabane du Mountet (2142 m) at 5am we climbed slowly up the Blanc de Moming (3661m) to complete my first ever summit with an altitude gain of over 1,500 metres. I was terrified although Jeff was very reassuring and calm. I made some brief studies in acrylics from the top. Photographs of me painting from the summit on page 8, as well as footage of us moving along the snow ridge roped together.



PAGE 17

The Col de Talèfre

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

We made another early start from the Mountet Hut to cross the Glacier de Talèfre. On our traverse we found remnants of a crashed aeroplane and a human jawbone. A large 'bergschrund' yawned ominously ahead and we were unable to navigate safely and successfully through the crevasses. We returned to the Cabane du Mountet.



PAGE 18

The Matterhorn from the Gandegg Hut

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

As part of my acclimatization program, I stayed at the Gandegg Hut (3029m), near to the Theodul Pass (3295m) which Whymper crossed many times. I spent my first week alone based in Zermatt in a leaky tent which got flooded out one night. The weather was unreliable at best with the Matterhorn surrounded in cloud for most of time. This study was worked up from the one seen on page 32.



PAGE 19

The Matterhorn: North Face

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

I made a long and stunning trek from Zermatt to the Schonbielhutte and back again. Having relatively 'raced' up to the Gandegg Hut from Zermatt on the first day with Henry, a fellow climber I had met in the campsite, my feet were now badly blistered from my new climbing boots. I was forced to buy a cheap pair of soft trainers which were ideal for this walk and greatly reduced the pain. The view of the North face of the Matterhorn reveals how the east ridge, Hörnli, is not so vertical as it appears from Zermatt, which was of great interest to Whymper.



PAGE 20

Whymper's campsite below the Aiguille Verte

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

The present Refuge du Couvercle was built in 1932, about 70 metres from the original hut, seen in the picture. The Aiguille Verte looms far up on the left hand skyline.



PAGE 21

The Dent Blanche from the Cabane du Mountet above Zinal

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

It was a very long walk up to the Mountet hut from Zinal. My feet enjoyed a well-earned rest and airing whilst I made a study for this painting (see page 30, *The Dent Blanche in afternoon light*) and Jeff took some photos of me at work.



PAGE 23

The Dent Blanche seen from Blanc de Moming

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 30cm)

This is a close up study of the Dent Blanche from the same viewpoint as *The Dent Blanche and Grand Cornier seen from Blanc de Moming*, on page 16.



PAGE 26

The Theodulgletscher seen from the Gandegg Hut

oil on acrylic on board
12 x 16in (30 x 40cm)

By looking down over and into the glacier, I tried to grasp its vertiginous drop off down onto the end of the Gorner Glacier which terminates above Zermatt.



PAGE 27

The Matterhorn: North Face study

oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)

See page 19.



PAGE 28

The Matterhorn from the Gandegg Hut

oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)

After a rough night in the Gandegg hut, suffering the effects of altitude, I woke to a clear, sunny morning. The first one of the trip. I had a fantastic view of the Matterhorn and Theodulgletscher which I painted in the morning light. Whymper knew the Theodulgletscher like the back of his hand and I began to feel I was as close to his footsteps as I had been so far.



PAGE 29

*Monte Rosa from the Gandegg Hut*oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)

Turning my back on the Matterhorn, I painted the highest mountain in Switzerland (4634m) at first light. Although Whymper didn't climb the Monte Rosa (4634m) that year, the view is wonderful and I couldn't resist trying to capture it in paint.



PAGE 30

*The Dent Blanche in afternoon light*oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)

This study was painted after a long walk in from Zinal.



PAGE 31

*The Dent and Col du Hérens*oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)

Painted on my way back from a day trip to the Schönbielhütte. The walk was quite long but beautiful. The Col d'Hérens (3462m) is on the far right of the image. Whymper got lost looking for this pass.



PAGE 32

*The Matterhorn from the Gandegg Hut*oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)

This was painted in the evening, just before a hearty dinner in the Gandegg hut where I stayed whilst acclimatising. Whymper would have walked across the glacier in the foreground on his way across the Theodulpass. I was delighted to find that the altitude had no negative effect on my paints.



PAGE 33

*Matterhorn study: North Face*oil on acrylic on board
6 x 8¼in (15 x 21cm)

The same as *The Matterhorn* on page 27 but I like the looseness of this study.



JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS

EST 1931

John Mitchell Fine paintings was founded in 1931 and remains an independent family business, now in its third generation. The gallery is located at the Piccadilly end of Bond Street. We specialize in buying and selling European and British pictures from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries with a long-held interest in Dutch and Flemish Old Masters and eighteenth century English paintings. We also advise on auctions, framing, conservation, CGT and valuations for probate. Our rigorous selectivity in the paintings, watercolours and drawings we offer is backed up by long experience, integrity and scholarship.

For more information on this exhibition please contact:

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