

THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF GRAHAM SUTHERLAND'S PORTRAIT OF SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL (1954)

by Celia Lee

The following article is a discussion of the known facts, that include an exclusive interview with Lady Williams the former Miss Jane Portal, who was at that time (1954) Secretary to Sir Winston Churchill. We open with some reactions to the portrait's unveiling:

Oscar Nemon: "Sir Winston told me that a portrait by a painter of a person should be 75 per cent the story of the sitter and 25 per cent the story of the artist."

Peregrine Spencer-Churchill: "Getting that as a farewell gift was like a man's employers kicking him up the backside when he retires."

Lord Hailsham: "I'd throw Mr. Graham Sutherland into the Thames."

Lady Williams, the former Miss Jane Portal: "I was there!"



Sir Winston Churchill making his address before Graham Sutherland's portrait of him at the unveiling, Westminster Hall, November 30, 1954.

On December 12, 1977, Clementine, Baroness Spencer-Churchill, died suddenly of a heart attack, aged ninety-two years. Clemmie as she was affectionately known in the family was so well loved and respected that her passing, (like that of her husband in January 1965), sent shock-waves of sorrow and dismay around the UK, the US, Europe, and the western world. Following her funeral, December 15, at the Anglican Church of the Holy Trinity Brompton, South Kensington, a service of thanksgiving was held at Westminster Abbey, 12 noon January 24, 1978. Representatives of the senior members of the royal family that included Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, and ambassadors from all major countries, were in attendance. The funeral cortege then proceeded to Oxford, and Clementine was buried in the family plot, next Winston at St. Martin's Church, Bladon.

For days, the press filled their front and inside pages with tributes to Clemmie. Every aspect of her life was covered, from her birth April 1, 1885, the daughter of Scottish aristocrats, Lady Blanche Ogilvy and Sir Henry Montague Hozier, to her engagement to Winston at Blenheim Palace, and subsequent marriage in September 1908; their tumultuous years of marriage that spanned two world wars; her greatness; her dedication to her husband; the births and lives of their five children; her public appearances and immense work during two world wars; her fund raising for good causes; unveiling of plaques and opening of new buildings; keeping a stiff upper lip and carrying on, following her husband's death; and her goodness and kindness to others.

The sensational story however, that emerged at the end of these tributes and that would take her place in the front and immediate inside pages of the newspapers was that of the whereabouts of Graham Sutherland's oil painting of Sir Winston Churchill, which had mysteriously vanished, amidst a plethora of stories and

suspensions as to its fate. Interest in it that had dulled during the intervening years was rekindled and the search was on to locate it. The controversy surrounding the painting has rumbled on ever since, and still features in TV and radio documentaries today, in 2019. Here then, is the story as far as it is possible to unravel what happened to the painting.

GRAHAM SUTHERLAND PAINTS SIR WINTON'S PORTRAIT

In 1954, English artist Graham Sutherland, who was considered the most eminent portrait painter of that time, was commissioned by Parliament to paint a full-length portrait of Sir Winston Churchill, that was to be a birthday present. The Committee's Chairman was Labour Member of Parliament (MP), Frank (later Lord) McLeavy, and according to Jennie Lee, Labour MP for Cannock (Staffordshire), he suggested a painting - a 'good likeness' - as an appropriate gift. It was also Jennie Lee who proposed Graham Sutherland as the artist, being as she was a friend of his, and she was also 'deputed to sound him out.' Kenneth, Lord Clark, was also partly responsible for recommending him, and Sutherland *was* the unanimous choice of the Parliamentary Committee. The 1,000 guineas fee for the painting was funded by individual donations from members of all political parties sitting in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and was a good deal of money in those days.

The painting was presented to Churchill by both Houses of Parliament at a public ceremony in Westminster Hall, on his 80th birthday, November 30, 1954. The presentation was carried out by leader of the Labour Party and former Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. Gasps of horror echoed throughout the immense hall as the portrait, measuring five feet by four feet was unveiled, that fortunately were not picked up by the sound recordists during the live filming of the event. Recovering themselves somewhat, members sent a thunder of applause that

echoed around that immense hall. Sir Winston kept his composure in his response which was clearly rehearsed in advance, describing it thus: “The portrait is a great example of modern art. It certainly combines force and candour. These are qualities which no active member of either House can do without or should fear to meet.” Fortunately, the television cameras were trained on him rather than the portrait several yards behind him, high up above the steps. The painting glared out of a stage-like setting, appearing all the more hideous by being surrounded by a huge, floral display that resembled a miniature flower garden of autumnal, brightly-coloured Chrysanthemums. It was before the days of colour television, so viewers saw the portrait on TV in black and white, but regardless of its colour, Winston looked frail, seated hunched and slightly lopsided in a chair, with an expression on his face that made him look ‘out of it’, his nostrils protruding upwards, and showing the signs of having recently suffered a stroke, his mouth slightly to the side, and wads of wrinkles under his chin.



Photo of Graham Sutherland’s portrait of Churchill, 1954, tinted dark brown.

Since Churchill was standing just a few yards away from the painting he was caught in the full glare of the flash-bulb cameras and it is apparent at a glimpse that in any of the photographs taken at that moment and beyond, there is no comparison between the artistic portrayal of an old man, and the fresh as a daisy Churchill, addressing the chamber and the nation. The vision in the portrait is aged by about twenty years, compared with the figure standing in front of it.

The press in those days published only in black and white, but the fashionable and cultural magazines of the day published photographs and paintings in colour. As they used their own colour-effects the painting appeared in a different light, according to how it was presented. Some darkened the background to dark brown so that Winston's figure could hardly be seen, whilst others lifted it with yellow-orange, making his figure stand out, and he, appearing the worse for it. Lord Hailsham said, 'It is disgusting. It is ill-mannered. It is terrible.' No doubt there were many such responses made in private. Winston Churchill would later liken it to him sitting on the lavatory!

The Churchills coyly asked to be allowed to take the painting home, supposedly to be placed on display in one of the rooms. Secretly, the truth was that Winston and Clemmie and all the family loathed and detested this atrocity of supposed modern art. One reviewer even wrote that Sir Winston's flies were undone! A close inspection of clearer photographs of the portrait show what looked like the white of his underpants showing against a very dark brown background.

The Churchills had no intentions of putting this monstrosity on display, their plan was to conceal it as far as possible from the public gaze.



Photograph of Graham Sutherland's portrait of Sir Winston Churchill, high-lighted with a yellow-orange background. Sutherland dubbed it the "nostrils" portrait.

When, later, a group of art students visited to view it at the Churchills' London home, No.28 Hyde Park Gate, they found it hung in the cellar where, apparently, it looked better in subdued light! Following that time, the painting duly disappeared and, in the twenty-three intervening years until Clemmie's death, it was more or less forgot! It was supposed at Sir Winston's death to have been reinstated in the Houses of Parliament and hung on the wall alongside other deceased Prime Ministers and Lords for posterity. That the painting was not placed there could have been explained away at the time of Sir Winston's death, in that Clemmie didn't want to part with it and it could take its place in history at her death. But that was not to be for the portrait was not forthcoming from

Chartwell House, long-since owned by several businessmen, and having been rented from them by the Churchills until the time of Winston's death, was then vacated by Clemmie to the National Trust for the nation. Several Churchill family members were either dead or had not lived there for some years. Only Sarah, The Lady Audley, and Mary, The Lady Soames, had survived their parents, and both lived elsewhere, though Mary visited sometimes. Soon after Winston's death, Clemmie had sold their London home No. 28 Hyde Park Gate and bought Flat 26, No.7 Princes Gate, Exhibition Road, South Kensington.

DEBATE ABOUT THE PAINTING RAGES IN THE BRITISH PRESS

The press loves a secret or a conspiracy to get their teeth into and unravel, and the hunt was on to locate Sutherland's now valuable painting. First to broch the subject was the *London Evening News*, January 3, 1978. The grandson of Winston and Clementine, Winston Churchill MP, had told them that an announcement would be made shortly, following the reading of his grandmother's will.

As Clemmie was short of money in her old age and had sold some paintings to raise cash, there was suspicion that she had secretly sold the painting for a handsome sum to keep going. Mary Soames told the press that her mother had destroyed the painting. Graham Sutherland added fuel to the flames by telling the *Daily Express*, January 13, 1978, "How can we be sure she did it after all?" And later, "It could well be that Lady Spencer-Churchill anticipated enquiries [and] told her daughter it had been destroyed." He had, he said, received a letter from Mary, The Lady Soames, saying the painting had been destroyed, but he went on to state, "There is no proof that it was destroyed; it is *conceivable that it was not*. As an artist I take nothing on trust completely. It is an interesting speculation is it not? It could well be that Lady Spencer-Churchill anticipating inquiries about

the portrait, told her daughter that it had been destroyed.”¹ By inquiries, he presumably meant from the Inland Revenue in relation to the payment of Death Duties on Clemmie’s estate. However, no private owner came forward to own up that they had either bought or acquired it! There was even a rumour talked of by Michael Barsley who had in 1955 hosted a BBC Panorama programme on which appeared Sir Winston’s son Randolph and Malcolm Muggeridge, that when the painting could not be located to be shown on the programme it was “confined to the dungeons of Dover Castle.”² No explanation was given as to how it could have ended up there!

The remaining members of the Churchill family, including the Churchills’ grandson, Winston Churchill, Member of Parliament for Stretford and Urmston Constituency, were contacted by the press, and pummelled as to the whereabouts of the painting. Whilst the Churchill’s eldest surviving daughter Sarah, quite openly described it as “monstrous”, Mary appeared to lay it rest when she was interviewed by Ann Kent of the *Daily Mail*, January 13, 1978 who reported: ‘Lady Churchill destroyed it in 1955 or 1956 – probably without even telling her husband of her intentions.’

The *Daily Mail* (Friday January 13, 1978), published a mock-up of the painting going up in flames, but was careful to show the burning only from the bottom up so that Sir Winston’s face and head and shoulders remained intact. In interview, Sutherland is reported to have said to Nigel Neilson, “Naturally I was sorry it did not please the old boy, but I don’t regret painting it at all.” To Sutherland therefore, Winston was just another ‘old boy’ from whom he could earn his living.



Press photo of Graham Sutherland's portrait of Sir Winston Churchill, going up in flames, having supposedly being burnt by his wife, Clementine.

Dr Roy Strong, Director of both the National Portrait Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, dubbed it “The most star-crossed portrait of the century.” But he thought all was not lost and recalled climbing up the stairs to have dinner with an unnamed art collector on the King’s Road, London, and finding to his astonishment, “there hung Sutherland’s finished study of Churchill’s head. At least we still have that marvellous work to remind us of what has gone.” From that dramatic encounter, we can take it Sutherland was literally selling off artistic bits of Winston, from which earnings he was able to fund his comfortable life-style in the South of France. Strong was, however, at pains to point out that what was missing from the actual portrait was, “the cigar, the Homberg hat, the huge coat, the siren suit, the gestures of fingers to the camera with the V for victory sign.”³ The sketch of Churchill’s head resurfaced again in recent years, and was on sale at auction in 2018, valued at £10,000 sterling.⁴

HIS FINE-ART HOUR RARE £10,000 SKETCH FOR LOST PORTRAIT THAT CHURCHILL HATED GOES UP FOR AUCTION

A "SUPER-RARE" sketch for a lost portrait of Winston Churchill will go under the hammer this month.

The artist Graham Sutherland was commissioned to paint Sir Winston Churchill in 1954 for a portrait paid for by MPs as an 80th birthday present.

The Prime Minister, however, hated the artwork, which showed him as an aging figure. It was never hung and in 2015 Sonia Purnell, the biographer of his wife Clementine, found conclusive evidence it was burnt on her orders.

The story was retold in the first series of Netflix's drama *The Crown*, with John Lithgow as Churchill, Stephen Dillane as Sutherland and Harriet



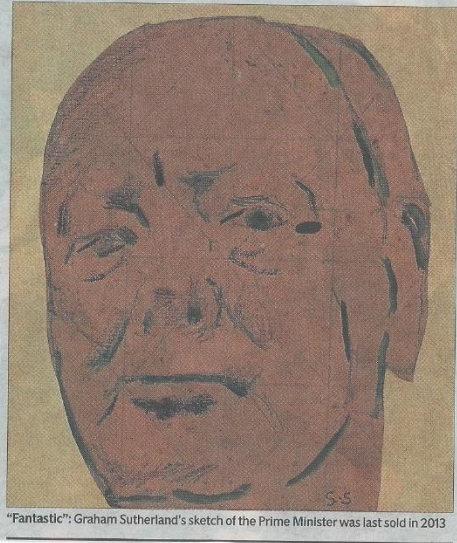
Story: Dillane and Lithgow in *The Crown*

Walter as Clementine. Alice Murray, leading Christie's Modern British and Irish Art sale, said Churchill "struggled with how he was portrayed" in the

painting. She said: "Sutherland himself struggled with how to depict Churchill — he was a very restless sitter, he was smoking a cigar during all the sessions and dictating confidential letters, posing rather than being relaxed. The likeness is absolutely fantastic."

The 9x7ins pencil and chalk sketch is being sold by a private collector. It last changed hands in 2013 for £7,500 and is estimated to fetch £10,000 at the sale on March 21. Ms Murray said: "This is one of 12 known pencil studies Sutherland made for the full-sized portrait of Churchill which was famously destroyed. It is super-rare."

Robert Dex



"Fantastic": Graham Sutherland's sketch of the Prime Minister was last sold in 2013

Sketch of Sir Winston Churchill's head, valued at £10,000 at auction, March 2018. Photo published in the *London Evening Standard*, 12th March 2018.

There were three executors to Clemmie's will; her daughter, Mary, The Lady Soames; Sir John (Jock) Colville, (Churchill's Assistant, wartime Private Secretary 1939-45); and Mr Peregrine Spencer-Churchill, the younger son of Major John (Jack) and Lady Gwendeline Spencer-Churchill, Jack being Sir Winston's only sibling. Peregrine, having been educated at the University of Cambridge, was by profession an engineer and businessman.

Churchill's grandson, referred to as 'young Winston Churchill MP', still, however, insisted that the portrait existed and was 'buried in the cellar' at Chartwell. His parents had separated and divorced soon after their marriage, his mother having gone to live in France. As a boy, youth, teenager, and adult, young Winston had spent much time at Chartwell with his grandparents over the years, so one may assume he saw the portrait or knew of it packed away in a crate. He,

at least, would have clean hands when news of the painting's final fate came about, having had nothing to do with its supposed destruction.

The emergence of Clemmie's Last Will And Testament only deepened the plot, when her executors *confirmed* that Lady Churchill had destroyed the portrait because she and her husband hated it so much.⁵ Peregrine Spencer-Churchill was first to spill the beans, authentically, and publicly, in *The Times*, January 12, 1978, when he told the press:

“Lady Spencer-Churchill ... destroyed the painting on her own initiative and without telling anyone else because she was distressed to see how much the picture, which both she and Sir Winston disliked, preyed on her husband's mind.” He had, he said, no intentions of telling anyone how or when it was done, “unless the Inland Revenue asked for full details.”⁶

There is, however, no record of the Inland Revenue making enquiries, and Peregrine's utterances sounding the death-knell of the portrait would lead to uproar in the newspapers for days and weeks to come. In interview in 2001, Peregrine told Celia Lee, ‘The gardener was burning leaves one day in the garden, and aunt Clemmie cut up the painting and told him to throw it on the fire.’ Peregrine also mentioned that ‘Lord Beaverbrook was around Chartwell at that time.’ Clearly *someone* had told Peregrine this was the fate of the painting, and he, too, was often at Chartwell, including later with his fiancé Yvonne they, having lived together for about a year before their marriage.⁷

Jock Colville told Ann Kent, “she was wrong to have destroyed it!” Kent went on to say that Lady Soames had told her the family knew the painting was destroyed but had agreed not to make it public until after her mother had died. Jock Colville is later quoted as saying: “When I saw it, I turned to the Old Man

and said: ‘The Portrait of Dorian Gray?’ He looked at me and said nothing. He just smiled and turned his back on it.’⁸



Yvonne Jehannin, later the wife of Peregrine Spencer-Churchill, lunching with Sir Winston Churchill in the Pavilion in the grounds of Chartwell House, circa 1956. Note a bottle of wine on the table. Photo Peregrine who was an amateur photographer.

Mary Soames, Peregrine, and Jock Colville, issued a joint statement to the press on the fate of the painting:

“Both she [Clemmie] and Sir Winston had been deeply moved that members of both houses of Parliament and from all parties had joined to show him so much honour, respect and affection.” ... They continued that “afterwards Lady Churchill told her family she had promised her husband ‘that it would never see the light of day’.
Sir Winston had said of the painting: ‘It makes me look half-witted which I ain’t.’ ”

Sutherland hit back with a moot point, worthy of consideration:

“Sir Winston himself was an artist and it is absolutely out of the question that he would have gone so far as to destroy the portrait had the decision been up to him.”⁹



**Peregrine and Yvonne Spencer-Churchill soon after their wedding day,
December 21, 1957.**

Sutherland may well have been correct in that, Winston, despite the ugly portrayal of him, would not have wanted the portrait destroyed.

The relationship between the two men points to their having got off to a bad start that remained rocky throughout. Sutherland and Winston had met only for the first time at Chartwell House, so Sutherland had no prior knowledge of Winston, other than what he read in the newspapers or heard from Labour MPs or his friend Kenneth, Lord Clark. Sutherland accompanied by his wife Katherine referred to in the press as Kathleen, were reported as arriving at Chartwell on August 26,

1954. The artist wanted to paint Winston in his parliamentary clothes: black jacket, waist-coat, pinstripe trousers, and spotted, dickie-bow tie. Winston preferred being presented in his regal, blue, Garter robes, adorned with the chain of office, velvet cap and plumage of a large, white feather. Sutherland is reported to have later said, he viewed Winston as being ‘too volatile to be a good sitter.’ He took photographs to work from and, in the finished portrait, cut off Winston’s feet! The sittings took place in Winston’s artist’s studio that was outside of the main house some yards away down a steep hill in the grounds, and Sutherland said Winston was in the habit of getting up and wandering over to the easel to see how the portrait was progressing. One morning when Sutherland returned to his painting, he found that the portrait had been ‘improved’ during the night, and presumed Winston had tampered with it.

The situation according to Sutherland took on a hint of the dramatics, when he asserted that, “With the main portrait the first hurdle was the head.” He told Churchill’s doctor, Lord Moran, “There are so many Churchills, I have to find the right one.” Moran warned, “Don’t forget that Winston is always acting. Try to see him when he has got the greasepaint off his face.”¹⁰ In 1982, Roger Berthoud published a biography of Sutherland, and in it, he stated that, ‘Graham ... borrowed some Garter robes – possibly Churchill’s own’ Surprisingly, he did not ask Churchill to sit to him in these, instead, he ‘... asked his bulky solicitor, Wilfrid Evill, to sit in them on a visit to Kent on 1st September. The resulting studies were later incorporated into a sketch of Churchill as a Garter Knight, which was only shown to Sir Winston *after* the birthday presentation, [and was later] finished, and sold to Lord Beaverbrook.’¹¹ Sutherland admitted that he made two further ‘oil sketches. One – a minor masterpiece – he later gave to Alfred Hecht; the other he sold to Beaverbrook.’¹² Sutherland had taken his photographer Felix Man along on two occasions to photograph Churchill, “... to

my precise directions from the exact positions from which I was drawing, also from all round the head as if it were to be a piece of sculpture,”¹³ Sutherland all the while was keeping Lord Beaverbrook (whose importance will be discussed later) advised by letter of the progress he was making, painting Churchill’s portrait.

The ever shrewd Clemmie was not taken in. She wrote to her daughter Mary, The Lady Soames, September 1, 1954: “Mr Graham Sutherland is a “WoW.” He really is a most attractive man, and one can hardly believe that the savage cruel designs which he exhibits come from his brush.”¹⁴ Clemmie was here referring to *earlier* of Sutherland’s portraits of different public figures.

Churchill’s body guard, Detective-Sergeant (Edmund) Murray was present throughout, and Churchill and he sat back to back. Churchill would order him, “A little more yellow ochre, please, Sergeant Murray,” and Murray would squeeze a little more onto his palette.’¹⁵

All the while Churchill’s portrait was being painted over several months, out there, in the real world of cut-throat politics, his position as Prime Minister was under threat. Waiting patiently in the wings to take over if he stumbled or fell from grace was Sir Anthony Eden, who, somewhat ironically, was married to Winston’s niece, Anne Clarissa (Clarissa) Spencer-Churchill, the only daughter of Major John (Jack) and Lady Gwendeline *nee* Bertie, born 1920.¹⁶

Now aged seventy-four, Sutherland whose permanent home with his wife was near Menton in the Cote-d’Azur, South of France, found it difficult to accept the criticisms.



**Left to right: John (Jack), Gwendoline and Clarissa Spencer-Churchill
at St. Martin's Church, Bladon.**

He had formerly painted such big names as Dr Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of Germany; Lord Beaverbrook, who was a great friend to Winston; Baron E. de Rothschild; Helena Rubenstein, famous for female cosmetics; the writer Somerset Maugham; and Lord Goodman. Sutherland gave his response to various press interviews, saying that the destruction of his painting was “an act of vandalism.” He went on to say, he knew Winston did not like it and his wife even more so but expressed also, how courteous both Churchills had been to him throughout.

When Sutherland had begun the sittings, Churchill had asked him, “How are you going to paint me? As a bulldog or a cherub?” Sutherland complained, “For weeks I painted in an atmosphere of cigar smoke. The sitter’s cigar would often go out unnoticed. I was plied with gifts from the [cigar] box, and sometimes used to give one to a friend saying: ‘This is one of Winston’s’ and the friend would keep it under the pillow for weeks. But there was no cigar in the portrait – by agreement.”¹⁷ Sutherland found Churchill to be “a very restless sitter, ... dictating letters and posing rather than relaxing.” After lunch, he tended to

become “torpid”, and he felt “that they were really engaged in a duel.”¹⁸ Speaking on ITV’s News At Ten, January 11, Sutherland estimated that the portrait was now worth £100,000.¹⁹ Sutherland would later complain that Churchill, having his secretary Jane Portal (today Lady Williams) permanently to hand, would break off in the middle of sittings and trot over to his desk to dictate letters. Winston was probably accustomed to an afternoon nap. Celia Lee was present at Epping and Woodford ICS branch meeting when Lady Williams gave a talk, and spoke of how, when she arrived to take Churchill’s dictation, she found him still in bed wearing his dressing gown, with his dog Rufus curled up at his feet. Sutherland it would seem chose the wrong time of day to sketch Churchill. Instead of on each occasion driving to Chartwell, he should have put up there for the night, and spent a couple of days viewing Winston in different situations, especially in the morning, and most appropriately, when he was more alert during the early part of the day.



Winston in a contemplative mood, seated by the fish pond at Chartwell.

Sutherland and Winston discussed art, and he asked Winston why he so often painted by the pond to which he said Churchill replied that he could see the image of the face of his deceased daughter Marigold, reflected in its waters. Marigold died in 1921, aged two-and-a-half years, during the Spanish influenza epidemic that followed the First World War. She was not laid to rest in the family plot at St. Martin's Church, Bladon, Oxford, but in Kensal Green Council Cemetery.

THE GREAT PORTRAIT MYSTERY

On learning of the destruction of the painting, Clemmie instantly fell from grace as the British press forgot their pages of praise and roared venomous headlines against her. 'How could she do it?' 'Can you forgive her?' 'Who saw her do it?' In defence of its ugliness, they held, 'It's the thought that counts!' As members of both Houses of Parliament had commissioned and paid for it, Clemmie was viewed as having vandalised - nay stolen - their property! Another headline read, 'The secrecy with which it was done suggests that Lady Churchill knew it a shameful act.' There were those who defended Clemmie's actions, holding that 'Lady Spencer-Churchill acted more like a wife than an art critic.' What her detractors naively missed was that Sir Winston Churchill's entire, adoring nation would gladly have assisted Clemmie in fanning the flames! Lord Hailsham added to his earlier outburst of disgust against the painting with, "It's a filthy colour, Churchill has never had so much ink on his face since he left Harrow" (meaning his old school). Conservative Member of Parliament, Sir Robert Carey said. "It's all right if you like a study in lumbago." Labour MP Aneurin Bevan who had originally supported Sutherland as the artist to paint the portrait, praised it as, "A great work of art."²⁰

The London *Evening Standard*, January 12, printed a variation on the theme that they had obtained from Sutherland, whereby he asserted that ‘at the first sitting’ Winston Churchill had requested: “I want to be painted as a nobleman.” He liked the idea of being portrayed in his full Garter robes.’ Sutherland showed the journalist his initial attempt at painting Winston in his full regalia. It is far more impressive than the wizened object he eventually gave Parliament for their 1,000 guineas! Sutherland’s explanations for not developing this painting are shifty, and one tends not to believe him. He said both to the press and to Mary Soames that those who commissioned the painting asked that the sitter be portrayed in his House of Commons clothes. Writing to her he insisted: “My memory is perfectly clear on two points: 1. I was instructed to paint your father in his normal parliamentary clothes; 2. That the portrait was to be given to your father by both Houses on his 80th birthday *for his lifetime*, and that after his death *it would revert to the House of Commons*. I was even shown places where it might hang.”²¹

Berthoud, however, has contradicted Sutherland, alleging that Charles Doughty, Conservative MP, barrister and secretary of the Parliamentary Committee had written to Sutherland: “Details of it, costume, location and other matters, must of course be arranged between Sir Winston and yourself. We certainly would not attempt to interfere in a technical matter of this kind.” In relation to where it might hang, Berthoud commented: ‘Of this last point, Doughty made no mention. McLeavy said later that the presentation was made with no strings attached.’²² It would appear, however, that it was *assumed* by certain Committee Members that the portrait would be placed in the Commons, although no agreement to that effect was ever entered into or put in writing. It is worth pointing out that other distinguished politicians whose portraits grace the halls of Westminster and who were far less successful or famous than Winston Churchill, had been painted in formal dress, giving them an altogether grandiose appearance. Reading between

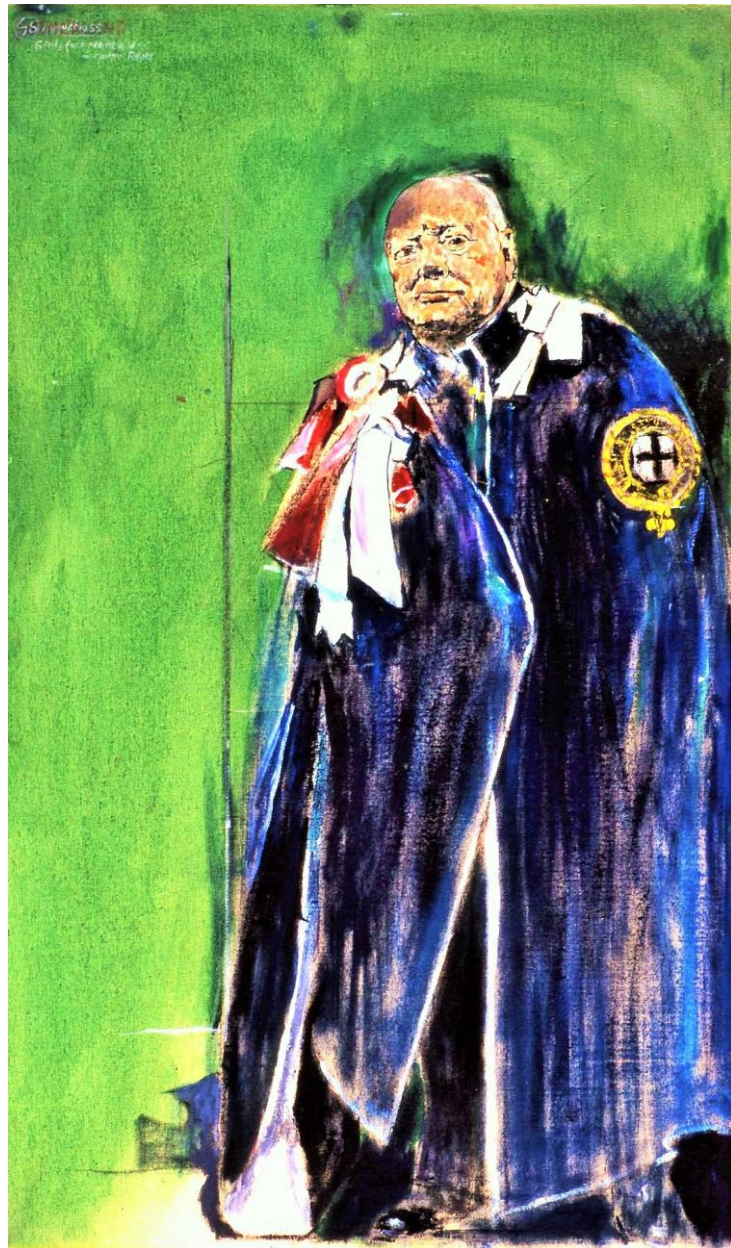
the lines, it is possible that Sutherland mislead Churchill by first making a start on the Garter robes painting and then discarding it for his own, narrow interpretation of Churchill as a man and his achievements. He retorted, ‘cryptically, “It served its purpose” meaning presumably that it created the right atmosphere for him to go ahead and paint the portrait he intended.’²³ Rather than use the Garter painting for the official presentation, Sutherland may have preferred to receive a handsome payment for it from Lord Beaverbrook.



Artist, Graham Sutherland, who painted the “nostrils” portrait of Sir Winston Churchill, here caught in a rather smug pose by a sharp, un-named photographer.

The photographer whose name is not given, and who produced a sharp ‘photo of Sutherland, printed alongside his utterings in the *Evening Standard*, March 12, 1978, has portrayed a conceited individual, face screwed up in disdain, eyes turned to the right, and spectacles perched on the tip of his nose. Somewhat in character and rather smugly, Sutherland referred to his painting of Winston as the “nostrils” portrait. The holes in Winston’s nose are too big for his face, but rather than giving him the appearance of a strong, British bulldog, he was imbued with the face of a frog-like creature. Winston’s first and it would seem subsequent sittings for Sutherland took place after lunch, and as it is known Churchill always

consumed wine with this meal, and that would account for his appearance of having dozed off. The end-product took on more the character of a cartoonist's caricature than that of a work of art. English writer, poet, art critic, curator and broadcaster, Edward Lucie-Smith compared it to a portrait of King Henry VIII, which considering that scoundrel's character, would tend to add injury to insult.



Graham Sutherland's original study for Churchill's Garter robes portrait to be hung in the House of Commons that was scrapped by him for the "nostrils" portrait. The Garter robes portrait is today hung in the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.

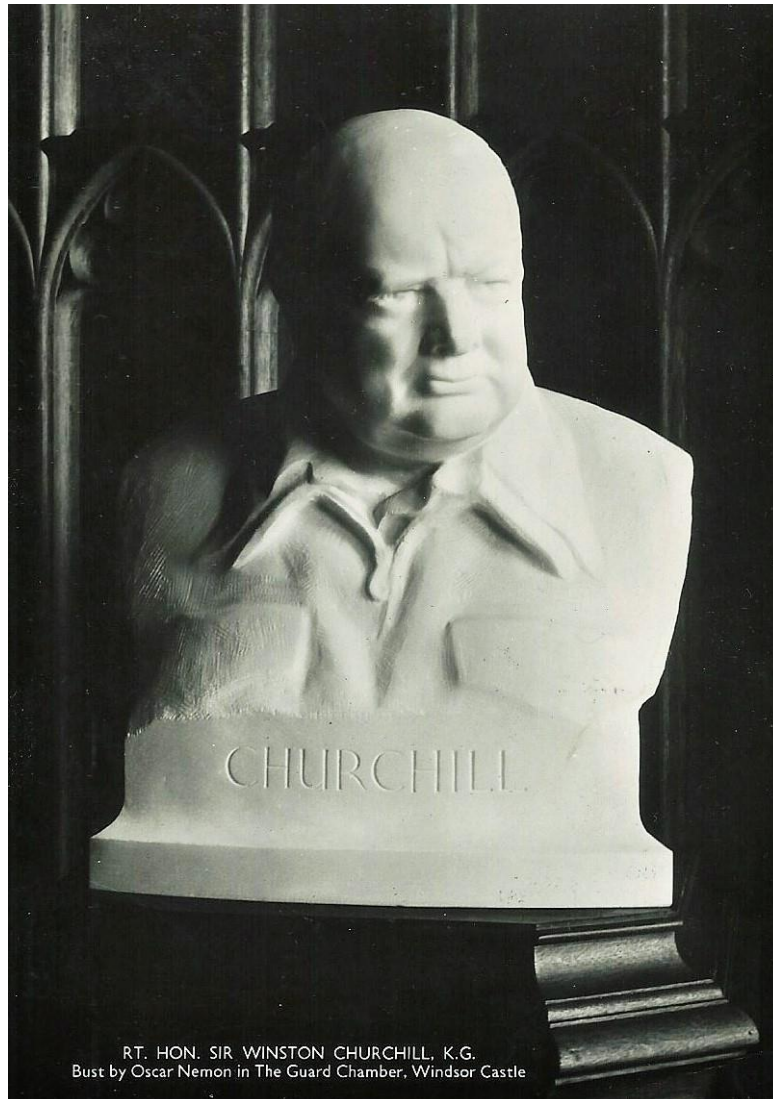
The original painting of the sitter in full robes, portraying Winston's head and Wilfrid Evill's body, that is now referred to as *the Garter painting of Sir Winston Churchill*, belongs to the Beaverbrook Foundation, and hangs - not -as one might have expected - in the UK, but in the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. The cap and feather are missing but even to the untrained eye it is apparent that little effort would have been required to complete the apparel and offer it to Parliament to be hung in the Palace of Westminster.

Sutherland stubbornly refused to acknowledge, let alone accept, his ill-conceived attempt at a portrait, and those who subscribed to a painting of a beloved world-leader that was recognised by all shades of political opinion as having been the saviour of the western world from Fascism, were left empty handed. There was, however, those in the press who attempted to present Sutherland as a victim rather than the culprit, accepting his claim that he painted what he saw.

SCULPTOR OSCAR NEMON'S OPINION OF THE PORTRAIT

Oscar Nemon, who was commissioned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to make a sculptured bust of Winston Churchill, produced *three* before a perfect form could be agreed upon. Nemon now joined the discussion about the painting and said that Sutherland would not let Winston see the portrait until it was completed and that when he eventually saw it, he said: "Here sits an old man on his stool pressing and pressing." That Winston and Clemmie were eventually allowed to view the completed portrait in advance of the presentation meant Winston could exercise restraint at the unveiling, and it gave Clemmie, who was somewhat foresighted, time to plan how to deal with the disappointment of this apparition. Nemon, who had talked to Winston whilst staying with him at his official Government residence in the country, Chequers Court, Buckinghamshire,

asserted that, "... both artist and sitter had strong ideas of what the portrait should convey."



Oscar Nemon's grand bust of Sir Winston Churchill that was commissioned by HM The Queen, on display in the Guards Chamber, Windsor Castle.

Oscar Nemon held that Sir Winston had expressed to him that he "was too often presented as a bulldog, a public image that he resented as a gimmick." 'Sir Winston' he said, 'told me, "A portrait by a painter of a person should be 75 per cent the story of the sitter and 25 per cent the story of the artist. I think Mr Sutherland wanted to do a sensational painting, but it tells the story of Mr Sutherland, not of Sir Winston Churchill." ... He knew that Churchill could not like that portrait. Sir Winston loved his country and wanted the portrayal to be

“in a loving way” showing his wit and humour, not a personal expression by the artist.’ According to Nemon, the only response Winston could get out of Sutherland when he asked him about his portrayal of him was, “You are sitting in an armchair and having your head looking up.” Sir Winston had expressed concern that such a pose would expose the “fleshy” part under his chin and was worried that he could not see the portrait. Winston was angry, and Nemon continued, “They had very few sittings and Cezanne needed 100 sittings to make a masterpiece. Even Raphael would have needed 20 sittings to do a portrait of a man with his head in the air like that.” Sutherland had presented Winston with a *fait accompli*. Nemon held, “The artist is the spiritual owner of the painting, but it was up to Mr Sutherland to meet Sir Winston’s feelings or refuse. It would have been gracious of Mr Sutherland to show it to Mr Churchill. If my sitter disliked a portrait, I did of him, I would destroy it. It is an intrusion into his life.” Of the three sculptures Nemon had done of Sir Winston, who was very cross when he saw two of them depicting him in a mood that he felt was private, he told Nemon, “It is not your business how I look naked in the street. Fifty per cent of my nature is wit.” Sir Winston had preferred Nemon’s third attempt, which sculptor was at the Queen’s command, permanently on display at Windsor Castle. Nemon, however, insisted that Winston was *not* vain, and he considered him to be very humble and respected the artist. Nemon exposed an important aspect of the relationship between sitter and artist, when he revealed that the reason that Winston had not seen the painting was greatly due to Sutherland painting it in his own studio, ‘studies drawings and details’ meaning sketches and photographs, rather than observing the live subject. He confirmed however, that Sir Winston had seen the painting for a full fortnight before the presentation. The reason Sutherland preferred to work from studies was undoubtedly due to the lengthy drive to Chartwell, along narrow, windy roads, that in those days would have been inhabited by farm carts and grain vehicles, both tractor and horse-drawn. It was autumn, and being that Chartwell is situated in a heavily wooded area the

roads would also have been coated in leaves making for dangerous driving conditions.

Returning to Sutherland's opinion, he insisted: "I told him [Winston] it depended on what he showed me. He showed me a bulldog, so I painted a bulldog. There was no sign of the younger, jovial Churchill, although we laughed a lot. He was fascinating but he was a defeated person, old and he did not like getting old. I painted what I saw." Sutherland also said Winston was concerned that the painting would show the physical signs of his stroke, but that he could "detect none." Yet they are apparent even to the eye of the untrained artist as his mouth is to the side and he is lopsided in the chair. Sutherland actually admitted that he painted the portrait in his study and Sir Winston did not see it until it was finished and that was two weeks before it went on display.²⁴

Other opinions were expressed in the newspapers, hailing Sutherland as an artist genius, and the painting as a masterpiece, that had been tragically destroyed. What the holders of these informed artistic, if somewhat pedantic opinions, failed to recognise was what Clemmie saw on behalf of the nation: that it was a let-down not just to those of his family but to those who gave their lives in two world wars, the second of which was spear-headed to victory by her husband's and her own hard work and sacrifice, along with the British army, navy, air force, nursing services, factory workers, catering staff, train and bus drivers, millions of women working in factories as well as caring for their children and running their own homes. The nation wanted to see a portrait of their hero, not a broken-down old man who could apparently not tie his own shoe laces.

Sutherland gave different statements to different newspapers. On the same day as his utterings to *The Times* reporter, at his hotel in Pembrokeshire (as he was now staying in Wales), he was interviewed by Francis Gibb of *The Daily*

Telegraph, January 12, 1978, who commented ‘that it would be perfectly possible to repaint the portrait because all the studies and original sketches existed but added that Sutherland had told him, “I don’t feel particularly inclined to do that at present it would look a bit mean; like tit for tat.” In the future he might consider - it dependant on his mood! “It would depend on who asked me; but then I might just do it for myself. It would be like painting a posthumous portrait, but there are extenuating circumstances.” There is a sting in the tail of his response for Sutherland clearly did not like and could not deal with criticism. One fact *is certain*, however, he would never be commissioned by any member of the Churchill family. Sutherland went on to boast that he had one sketch in his possession and between 40 and 50 had been acquired by the late Lord Beaverbrook, that were also housed at the Beaverbrook Foundation art gallery in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. (‘Acquired’ clearly meant he had been paid handsomely for them.) Further revelations were made as to Winston’s view of his portrait, ‘Churchill himself is known to have said that some painters painted from the neck downwards, some from the waist downwards, and some the rest, and his portrait came into the last category.’ It was ‘felt by those who knew him that the painting foreshortened the legs and showed the hands to be clumsy and far larger than they were.’ Sutherland said that during the first sitting Winston showed him the sculpture of his mother’s hands and told him, “he thought his mother’s hands were very much like his own.”²⁵ Celia Lee, on several occasions, actually saw the bronze sculpture of the hands of Jennie, Lady Randolph Spencer-Churchill, as Mrs Yvonne Spencer-Churchill the widow of Peregrine, had them on display in her flat off Sloane Avenue for eight years, until shortly before her death in 2010. The hands Sutherland produced on his portrait of Winston do bear a close resemblance to the long, slim, nimble, elegant fingers of Churchill’s mother, who was also an artist and a celebrated concert pianist.



Sir Winston Churchill's hand as sketched by Graham Sutherland, 1954.



A view of the hands and nimble fingers of Jennie, Lady Randolph Spencer-Churchill, photographed 1877, during the time the Churchills lived in Dublin, Ireland.

Terence Mullaly for *The Daily Telegraph*, attempted a stout defence of Sutherland's painting techniques, holding that 'Sutherland is one of the greatest artists at work today. For many of us the exhibition of his portraits at the National Portrait Gallery last year confirmed that he is the finest portrait painter alive. ...

He does, however, explore each of his sitters with the same searching powers of analysis he has brought to bear upon so many aspects of nature. It comes as no surprise that many of Sutherland's sitters have been disconcerted by his portraits of them. In fact, Mrs Sutherland dislikes her husband's own self-portrait.' Friends and acquaintances of Churchill alike had different views. Arthur Bottomley, Labour MP for Teesside, Middlesbrough, said it was "rather an affront to those who subscribed to it." Former Conservative Chancellor Reginald Maudling said he shared Lady Churchill's sentiments. Robert Mellish, former Labour Chief Whip didn't mince his words when he called it "bloody awful."

Understandably, art directors shed crocodile tears that they could not get their hands on it to display in their art galleries. Clemmie too, is said to have cried when she first saw it whilst accompanied by Mary Soames was staying, during Christmas, at Saltwood Castle the home of Kenneth, Lord Clark, in Hythe Kent, (Clark being a former Director of the National Gallery and close friend of Sutherland). The portrait undoubtedly shows, compared with photographs of him down through the years, a man who is only a shadow of his former self. Sir Maurice Bowra who had invited the two Churchill women to see the painting had also been staying at Saltwood Castle, and said, "It made him look like a tired old man." There would therefore seem little context for Clemmie to be happy about it. Sutherland seemed to think he should have the last word on the subject, holding that Sir Winston chose the position in which he would sit, "although he had no right to give instructions because he was not the person who commissioned me." ²⁶ There is an element here of 'I was obliged to obey my pay-masters' but his utterances would later be contradicted by none other than they! Francis Gibb reported that Lord Clarke had told him: "It was only later, when it [the painting] came to Sir Winston himself that any great empathy arose, and I must say with all respect that it was a question of vanity." His image had been that of a fighting bull-dog figure and when he saw himself as a wonderful

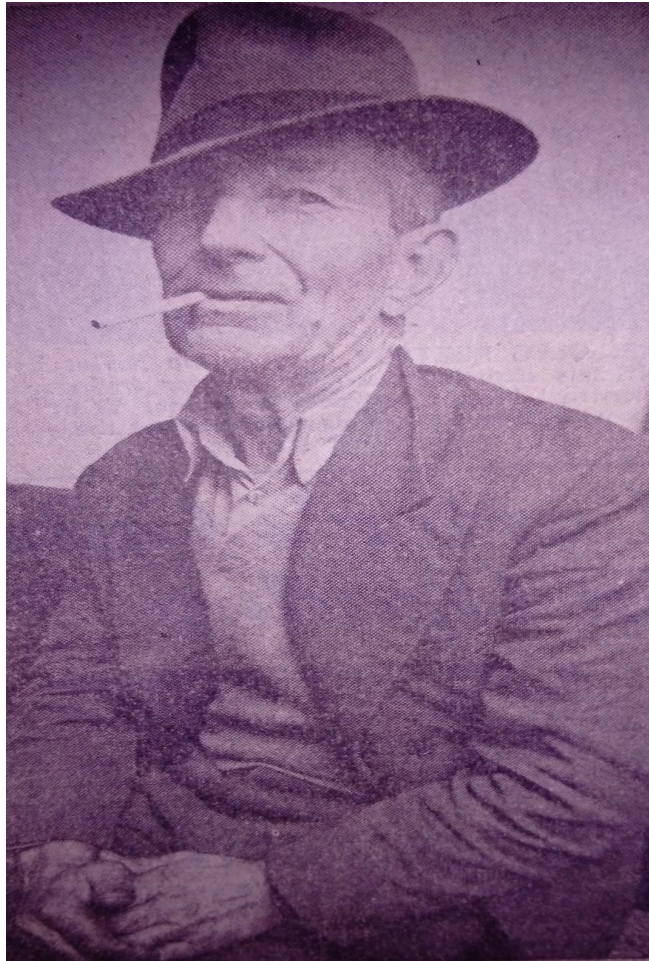
tired old warrior, it was a shock to him'. Sutherland continued the conversation, saying that when Lady Churchill arrived, 'Somerset Maughan had taken her upstairs to see the painting, saying he would 'whistle down' if she liked it. When Sutherland joined them, he found Lady Churchill in tears and she said, "I can't thank you enough." ' There is, however, no one reliable to corroborate these matters and one tends not to believe them. What the press *did not know* of that time was that the portrait had been photographed, and Clemmie showed the photograph to Winston, a fact unearthed by Andrew Roberts in his recent biography of Churchill, 2018. The effect was earth shattering! To his solicitor, Anthony Forbes Moir, Churchill bellowed, "Is it or is it not libel? I won't accept it. I won't go down in history looking like that."²⁷ To Anthony Montague-Browne, who was Churchill's private secretary for the last ten years of his life, Churchill said: "I look like a down-and-out drunk who has been picked out of the gutter in the Strand."²⁸ The most telling evidence of all is the photograph taken at the unveiling in 1954, in Westminster Hall where, in the background is the figure of Sir Winston in the portrait, who was then standing a few feet away in person, giving his response to Parliament. There is no comparison between the faded twisted image in the portrait and the actual, full-of-life witty man, who appears a good twenty years younger.

TED MILES CLAIMS HE BURNT THE SUTHERLAND PORTRAIT

The *Sunday Times*, January 15, 1978, published a full-page spread about Graham Sutherland and his art and the Churchill painting for which interview he must have been paid as handsomely as if the painting were hung in Parliament in full public view. The press was now running out of steam, the story had been told and retold, and worked to destruction, showing copies of Sutherland's sketches

of various parts of Winston's anatomy, the most popular being those strong hands.

Just when it would seem the last word had been produced on the subject a rather shabbily dressed man who years earlier had worked on the Chartwell estate, entered the fray.



Former Churchill estate worker, Ted Miles, featured in the *Sunday Telegraph*; he 'admitted' that in the autumn of 1955, he burnt Graham Sutherland's painting of Sir Winston Churchill.

Wearing a crumpled old working-class suit, soft hat, cocked precariously on the side of his head, open-neck shirt, curled up collar, one Ted Miles, father of a handsome family of fourteen children, stepped from the shadows. Puffing a lighted fag protruding casually from the side of his mouth, clasping his large, dirty, withered, work-worn hands, and sporting a sly grin, he 'confessed' to

having burnt the painting. Let's hope the *Sunday Telegraph* that broke the story, February 12, 1978, paid the sixty-two-year-old Ted handsomely for he looked so ragged as to need the money to support his wife and children. He would have made a good subject himself for Sutherland's particular, artistic genre - of painting what he saw! His only draw-back might have been that he was from the wrong social class, and certainly could not have afforded to pay one thousand guineas for the privilege.

According to Ted's statement to two *Sunday Telegraph* journalists, Charles Laurence and Richard Holliday, he had been all the while sitting on the truth of the secret of the missing painting:

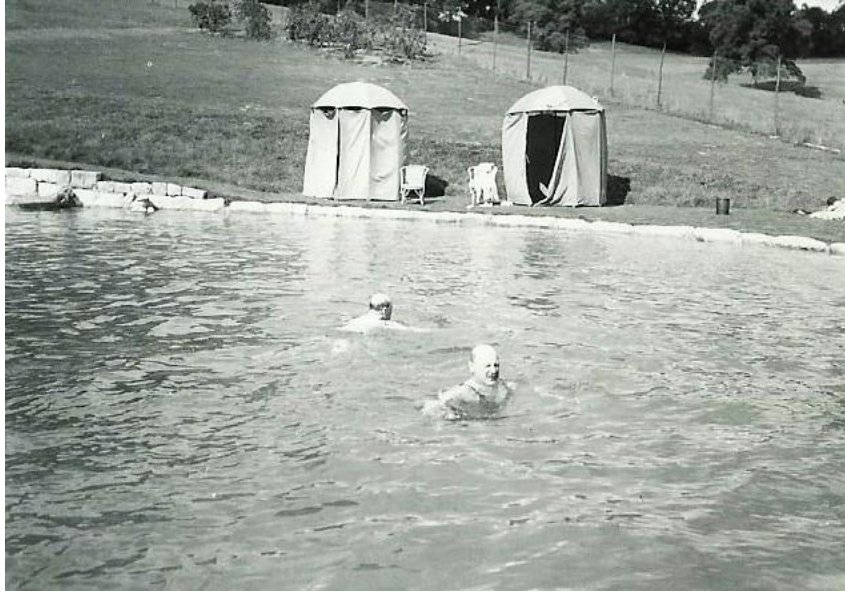
"I burnt the portrait of Sir Winston" Ted announced to the astonished journalists, the British public, Europe, the US and the world! The deed, he said, had taken place twenty-three years earlier at Chartwell House. The destruction of the painting took place just "eleven months" after its presentation to Sir Winston at Westminster Hall. He was, he said, "called to the cellar in the autumn of 1955, to help clear out some rubbish. ... I already knew that the painting was kept in the cellar behind the boiler." Ted continued: "Lady Churchill and another member of the family were there in the cellar. They had already put aside a big pile of rubbish. They both reached behind the boiler and pulled out the painting. Lady Churchill then smashed it to the floor. The frame broke up and they threw it on the pile. I was told to take the whole lot out and burn it immediately. I put it all on the trailer of my tractor and took it down to the incinerator pit behind the house. I tipped it all in and set fire to it immediately. The whole lot burnt quickly as it always did." Ted chuckled: "There was a lot of thick, black, smoke this time." He was, he said "pleased to help the family destroy the painting which they hated. "It was a horrible painting, I told Sir Winston as much. They all hated it they really did. They never walked past it without expressing their dislike." If Sutherland any longer harboured thoughts that the painting would turn up in a private collection, his hopes had gone up in smoke! Ted confirmed that at that time his daughter Margaret worked in the house and she was told of the fate of the painting 'by the same family member that had been in the cellar.' Ted was cautious not to reveal the name.

Ted Miles had spent his years working on the idyllic landscape of Chartwell estate. He was presented in the press report as a loyal employee and a hard worker and was said to be able to ‘turn his hand to anything.’ One of his jobs was ‘to stoke the boiler!’ Laurence and Holliday were able to establish that: ‘He was the complete countryman. He could shoot straight, snare a rabbit, track a fox, thatch a roof, build a hayrick, drive a tractor, and breed anything from ferrets to pigs. When Winston ordered a bath to be fitted in the cottage, he insisted on witnessing the first bath for the children. He came over from the big house clutching his camera.’ Speaking of his relationship with Churchill Ted said:

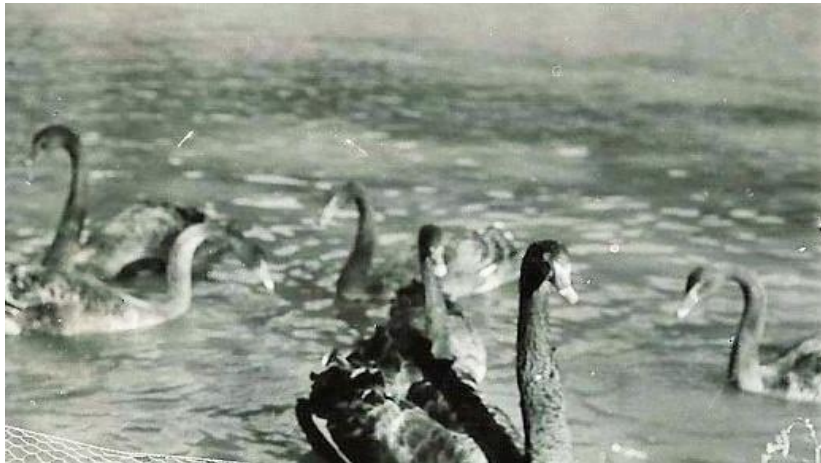
“I knew that man so well, I had seen him in every way and every light. I even saw him naked, like the times he used to stroll across the terrace with nothing but his dressing gown and his 10-gallon hat. He would slip off his dressing gown, keep his hat on, and bathe in the swimming pool. And when I saw the painting, I said to him: ‘I’ve seen you in every way it’s possible to see a man, and I have never seen you look like that.’”

Sutherland’s biographer, Roger Berthoud, mentioned previously, wrote that after the formal presentation in Westminster Hall the portrait was hung at the Churchills’ London home, 28 Hyde Park Gate for a few weeks, after which it was ‘crated by Messrs Boulet, sent to Chartwell ... but never hung.’²⁹ This claim will later be shown not to have been correct!

Further researches by the journalists Charles Laurence and Richard Holliday, found that the painting was originally left for a time standing on an easel in the Chartwell House library. Once removed from the library it was said to have been stored in a crate with some of Winston’s own paintings, that were housed in Orchard Cottage, attached to Winston’s studio.



John (Jack) Spencer-Churchill in the foreground, Winston in the centre, swimming in the lake at Chartwell, circa mid-1930s. Photo Peregrine Churchill's collection.



Rare photograph of Winston Churchill's original black swans swimming in the lake at Chartwell, circa mid-1930s, taken at the same time as the above. Photo Peregrine Churchill's collection.

When the cottage was later needed to house weekend guests, the contents were transferred to the cellar of the main house where the portrait was rehoused as far out of sight as possible and never seen again. The German Government asked to borrow the painting to be displayed in a series of Sutherland exhibitions in Munich, Cologne, and Berlin, in the early 1960s. In a gesture of post-war good will, West German Chancellor, Dr Konrad Adenauer had asked that the painting should hang beside his own in these exhibitions. The request which was made through the British Embassy in Bonn was turned down.

It was believed by members of the Chartwell staff that the painting was safely in storage which version was told to enquiring journalists at the time of Clemmie's death. This belief was confirmed by fellow-artist and Special Branch Detective-Sergeant, (Edmund) Murray, who was Churchill's bodyguard for more than fifteen years, and who was also trying to trace the whereabouts or fate of the painting. Presumably he may have been concerned that it might have been stolen during the war years, when Chartwell House was shut up and no one lived there. The picture framers were tracked down, Messrs Bourlet, Nassau Street, London.



Photograph of the portrait of Sir Winston Churchill already most suitably framed and shown as it was at the unveiling at Westminster Hall, November 30, 1954.

Fred Bail had been the frame-maker and Bert Jones remembered the portrait being handled by a late colleague, Eddie Read. However, like the story of the

portrait of Dorian Grey, there was yet *another* portrait of Winston and those of the staff at Chartwell House who did not know, possibly mistook it for Sutherland's portrait. It would seem unlikely that the Churchills who were always short of money had gone to the trouble and expense of putting a new frame on a picture that was already handsomely framed! Berthoud wrote (page 181), 'On 30 October [1954] Alfred Hecht came to measure the canvas for framing.' And again, (page 195), 'The next morning, Monday, the portrait went to London to be framed by Hecht, who gave a small dinner party that evening to celebrate.' The existing photographs of the portrait taken *in situ* at Westminster Hall, November 30, 1954, most distinctly show that it had *already* been handsomely framed, and one would think that Sutherland ensured it was of fine and appropriate quality. The painting was therefore framed when it was taken to Chartwell House.

WALTER SICKERT, CLEMMIE AND THE 'OTHER' PAINTING

The painting that members of the Churchill staff at Chartwell House would have seen and which they possibly mistook for Sutherland's portrait, was almost certainly a much handsomer, grander painting, by the famous artist Walter Richard Sickert, (31 May 1860 – 22 January 1942). Here, our story takes on yet another twist.

Clementine Churchill had known Walter Sickert well, in her childhood days when, as Clementine Hozier, she lived for a time with her mother and elder sister Kitty in France, Kitty having died during that time, aged fifteen. Clemmie was a favourite of Sickert, who was a friend of her mother, and a frequent visitor to their homes both in London and in France, and during those latter years he lived near the Hoziers. But once Clemmie returned to be educated at a school in England the contact between them was eventually lost. One day many years later, long after she was married, Clemmie was knocked down by a bus on the Fulham Road,

London, and the story was published in the newspapers. Sickert, having read it turned up on the Churchills' doorstep to ask about his friend. It was a most convenient meeting for Sickert and his wife then went out to Chartwell, and Sickert began giving Winston painting lessons. Mrs Wendy Baron who listed Sickert's paintings in a catalogue said: 'Sickert and Therese went out to Chartwell a number of times to give him art lessons in 1927-29. ... Many of Sickert's portraits were painted from photographs and newspaper cuttings Sickert introduced Churchill to the "Panafieu Technique" of painting in oils on the image of a black and white photograph projected onto a canvas.'" The authors of this press story, Laurence and Holliday, go on to state that the painting of Winston by Sutherland 'was thought to have been destroyed sometime during the 1930s.'³⁰

Confusion here arises as during his visits to Chartwell, Sickert painted *another* portrait of Winston that did survive. (Yet a third and different painting by Winston Churchill of the visiting party that included the Sickerts, dining together with the Churchills, today hangs in Chartwell House dining-room. It was copied as a sketch that is on display in the Mulberry Room which part of the commercial premises.) In 2001, Peregrine Spencer-Churchill told Celia Lee that one day Clemmie had been out, and when she returned home, she saw Sickert's first effort at a portrait of Winston standing in the hall, leaning against the wall, and thought it didn't do her husband justice and put her foot through it. It has been suggested by Denys Sutton, Sickert's biographer, that Sickert, (being quite eccentric), actually suggested to Clemmie, 'If you don't care for it you can put your foot through it.'³¹ Perhaps Sickert and Clemmie had some previous experience of this game, when Clemmie as a little girl visited Sickert at his home in France. On one occasion, he had left the skeleton of a fish he'd ate lying on a plate in his kitchen and which he had intended as a subject to paint. Clemmie during a tidy up of his lodgings thought it disgusting and threw it out of the window. Sickert's later portrait of Winston Churchill *is a masterpiece of modern art*, and clearly it met

with Clemmie's approval. It could therefore have been mistaken by later staff at Chartwell House to be Sutherland's painting. Detective-Sergeant Murray gave the press the 'name of framers he thought had crated the [Sutherland] painting.' When asked about it by the press reporters, 'They [the framers] denied it.'³² Their denial would perhaps indicate that it was the Sickert portrait they had framed as they would have been able to tell the difference between the two separate artists' work. Sickert was always short of money and it is unlikely he went to the expense of framing his portrait of Winston.



The dining room at Chartwell House much as it was when Winston painted the picture of the dinner guests, including Walter Sickert and his wife Therese.

Peregrine Spencer-Churchill was interviewed by Laurence and Holliday 'in his offices above a Chinese restaurant off Sloane Square, Chelsea.' Peregrine 'admitted that the rumours [about the Sutherland painting] had bothered him too. He had thought that the Inland Revenue might want proof that the painting had indeed been destroyed. And at the next executors' meeting he had demanded that proof.' Following the executors meeting, Peregrine told the two journalists, "I

was assured by our solicitors that there was proof in the form of a witness who could be brought forward if need be.” Peregrine then went on to say:

“The picture was ghastly. It was not Sir Winston, it was Graham Sutherland simply putting his own personality on canvas. Getting that as a farewell gift was like a man’s employers kicking him up the backside when he retires. It makes no difference to him that they have arranged for George Best to do the kicking and that the same right boot that strikes him has scored numerous goals in cup finals. To him it is an insult, as the painting was to Sir Winston.”



Peregrine Spencer-Churchill, nephew of Winston and Clemmie was and an executor of the will of Clementine, Lady Spencer-Churchill.

Laurence and Holliday interviewed Grace Hamblin who had been Clemmie’s secretary and confidant of many years having entered her employ in 1932, and was then, and still is today, held in very high regard. Grace, who was living in a terraced house in Westerham Green, overlooking one of Oscar Nemon’s statues of Winston, would not be drawn on the subject of the painting. All she would add was: “I do know all about it, but I cannot tell you. I have old loyalties to the family and to Lady Churchill. You will have to accept the executors’ announcement as that is all we are going to say. Other people are involved. What right has the public to know anyway?”



Portrait of Sir Winston Churchill by Walter Richard Sickert, painted 1927.

Grace Hamblin's statement left gaps to be filled in by the imagination! Perhaps that was deliberate to tease the press and keep them guessing. Richard Langworth CBE says:

“Lady Soames revealed the fate of the Sutherland painting in her Clementine biography in 1979, though a recent slapdash biography treated it as a revelation. In the 1980s, long-time Chartwell secretary and administrator Grace Hamblin told me she and her brother had actually done the deed with a bonfire, back in the Fifties. I don't think Sutherland intended any malice—it was his style. But his image was certainly

repulsive, not the warm old man his family and friends knew. Sir Winston's distress over the painting was great. I volunteered to Lady Soames that the Sutherland portrait would never appear in *Finest Hour* during my editorship (1982-2014). I am proud to say it never did.”³³

Being as the Sickert portrait was painted in 1927, and Sickert had died in 1942, and if as the staff told the press the paintings were kept in crates as they would have done throughout the Second World War, the present-day staff who were new would not have known of this early portrait and could easily have thought it was the 1954 portrait painted by Sutherland.

Sickert's portrait is quite brilliant, portraying a vibrant, colourful man, full of life with a successful career ahead of him, and puffing his legendary cigar. Sickert had also been a war artist but by now the scandal of Winston's involvement in the First World War failure at Gallipoli was in the past. Sickert's portrait was only presented to the National Portrait Gallery in 1965, the year of Churchill's death, so until that time it would have remained crated at Chartwell House in the cellar. Peregrine Spencer-Churchill in conversation with Celia Lee, talked of the cache of paintings including Winston's being kept in the cellar.

As to the Sutherland painting, Churchill thought he had found a way out of its ever been unveiled or presented to him and that it could be made to disappear. Prior to the presentation Winston wrote to Sutherland a letter that was for many years kept secret, telling him what he thought of the portrait:

“I am of the opinion that the painting, however masterly in execution, is not suitable as a Presentation from both Houses of Parliament. I hope therefore that a statement can be agreed between us which will be accepted by the Committee. ... they have a beautiful book which they have nearly all signed, to present to me, so that the ceremony will be complete in itself.”³⁴

Following a visit from the Doughtys, Winston was persuaded to change his mind. The presentation must go ahead due to Parliament having paid so much money for the portrait. Clemmie is reported to have told friends that on the morning of his 80th birthday, Winston ‘awoke in a black mood and did not want to go to the presentation. The only way [she] could persuade him to get out of bed ... was by giving him a promise that the portrait would be destroyed.’³⁵ This claim however has never been corroborated and it is unlikely that a woman as discreet as Clemmie would have been so loose tongued or that friends would have betrayed a confidence. Mary Soames in her biography of her mother said, “Clementine, who at first sight had thought it [the painting] remarkable also came to be repelled by the work.”³⁶ Mary recalled how her mother had put in an upsetting time over it:

“I was in and out of the house a lot, but I do know my mother was having a most harassing time of it. I do remember her saying: “It’s too awful. I don’t know if your father is going to turn up. He’s so upset about it.” I think it was during those days that her own hatred worked up. ... I now see that they did both deeply feel that they ought to have been able to see the picture sooner than they did. ... They did feel a fast one had been pulled on them, and that they had been taken for a ride. I think they didn’t have the slightest idea it was going to be like what it was.”³⁷

Towards the end of their extensive researches, Laurence and Holliday admitted, ‘But gradually the persistent reports and rumours began to look more like a cover up than the trail to a stored painting.’ The ‘cover up’ clearly refers to the destruction of the painting. It would now seem that a line could be drawn under the fate of the painting – or could it?

On Monday the *Daily Telegraph* continued with a reduced version of the same story from Ted Miles, February 13, 1978. It was printed alongside another photograph of crumpled Ted, who in this instance was hatless, hair standing on

end, photographed outside his council house in Edenbridge, Kent. He was holding a large photograph of the Sutherland painting, that would have been expensive for him to buy so someone must have gifted it to him. Ted's signed statement to the *Sunday Telegraph* was affirmed, and to his many talents was added 'one-time game-keeper' and that he had been 'born a Kent gipsy – a Pyke.' Lady Soames had not been available for comment on this occasion!

Confusion now set in! Jock Colville said: "I am quite sure that Lady Soames was not present when the painting was destroyed. I thought it was somebody quite different that destroyed the portrait, but I don't know. I didn't know anything until after the event." We now learn that Colville had been led to believe someone else destroyed the painting. That '*somebody quite different*' may prove to be interesting later as the story develops even further. Referring to Ted Miles' statement, Peregrine Spencer-Churchill said, "I have been given an entirely different version of what happened, by Lady Soames, and it would be completely out of character for her to have told me anything but the truth." He refused to say what Lady Soames had told him but continued, "The whole story is completely at variance with what Lady Soames told me."

TED MILES DENIES THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH STORY

Somewhat astonishingly, Ted Miles chucked yet another hand grenade into the fray when, on Monday, February 13, a further story about him was published. He had been interviewed by two *Daily Mail* journalists, Donald Young and Nigel Nelson, to who he denied the entire *Sunday Telegraph* story. He said he never claimed that he witnessed Lady Churchill smashing the painting or that he had even been in the cellar, let alone having burnt the work of art. Here is the contradictory story Miles told the two journalists:

“Absolute nonsense, I have no idea whether or not I burned the picture and I was most certainly not ordered to do so by Lady Churchill. It could have been amongst the debris cleared out of the cellar, which I was asked to burn by Lady Churchill, but if the picture was among the rubbish, I did not see it.” Ted went on to say he had been called to the house in 1955 to burn rubbish but he had not actually entered the cellar. “I have no idea what was in the rubbish as a lot of it was in sacks. I did not go into the cellar as the rubbish had already been brought out. I did not see Lady Churchill break the picture frame and I have no way of knowing if the picture was in the rubbish I burned.” Sources close to the Soames family are cited as confirming ‘Mr Miles did not destroy it. The family know but are not prepared to reveal the names.’ Referring to the *Sunday Telegraph* version of what he was *supposed* to have said, Ted Miles revealed: “I haven’t read it. I’ve great difficulty in reading. I can read mind you, but I’m an outdoors man mainly.”

With the revelation that Ted was a gipsy it is likely he could neither read or write. However, the story he gave the two reputable *Sunday Telegraph* journalists cannot be dismissed, not least in that it is far too detailed to have been a misinterpretation of what he told them.



Ted Miles, Monday February 13, 1978, photographed by the *Daily Telegraph*, holding a print or photograph of Graham Sutherland’s painting of Sir Winston Churchill.

Finding it to be a way to make some easy money, Miles probably did embellish the story to the *Sunday Telegraph* so that he was paid handsomely.

One wonders however, if he received a late-night visit from a furious member of the Churchill family or more likely someone sent on their behalf! It is noteworthy that his retraction, sensational though it was, did not feature on the front page, but was buried on page 15 of the *Daily Mail*. It would also appear to be the end of the saga of the disappearance of the portrait where the tabloid press was concerned. The story had run out of steam, the press had been made to look stupid. It would not have been so today, but in 1978, Ted Miles was only a gipsy, odd-jobs man, a nobody, mirrored against the powerful Churchill family, their associates, and worse still the might of the press. That the painting had supposedly been destroyed, albeit under spurious circumstances was accepted, and the subject was closed for the foreseeable future. However, it now seemed that more than one person may have been involved in its destruction.

IS THE PAINTING STILL OUT THERE?

What can we, today, make of the disappearance of the Sutherland painting? There has never been any real proof that Clemmie either burnt it herself or had someone else do it for her. Who was the mystery *witness* whose identity had not been revealed? There were rumblings that it was Grace Hamblin! But would Lady Churchill and Grace Hamblin be grovelling about in a dirty cellar, piling up rubbish, and stuffing it into sacks? The answer is definitely, no, they would not! Such a circumstance would not have happened in a time when the lines between the social classes were still heavily drawn and observed. These were tasks for the paid, outdoor staff, and would not even have been assigned to the kitchen staff who worked in the level above the cellar. The kitchen is in the basement of the main house and the cellar is at a level below the kitchen.³⁸ The entrance to the

cellar is from the outside, down steps, and it is inconceivable that Lady Churchill entered such a place.

Everyone connected to the disappearance of the portrait is long since dead. A crucial question is however, why would Winston and Clemmie have the portrait reframed in an expensive frame if its fate to be destroyed had already been decided upon from the outset? They certainly had no intentions of hanging it in Chartwell House to be viewed by their important visitors and worse still, a permanent and painful eye-sore to themselves. Could it be that it was reframed for someone else – someone very important perhaps?

WILLIAM MAXWELL AITKEN, 1st BARON LORD BEAVERBROOK

One person apart from Sutherland himself, felt strongly enough about his paintings and drawings of Sir Winston Churchill to preserve them, and that person, mentioned previously, was one Canadian-British, William Maxwell Aitken, 1st Baron Lord Beaverbrook, PC, ONB, (25 May 1879 – 9 June 1964). Known as Max, he was innovative in the employment of artists, photographers, and film makers, who recorded life on the Western Front during the First World War. Churchill and Beaverbrook were close friends, going back a long way. Having been politically influential during the First World War, (1914-18), and during the Second World War, (1939-45), Churchill, when he was wartime Prime Minister made Beaverbrook Minister of Aircraft Production from May 1940. Later in the war he was appointed Lord Privy Seal. Beaverbrook was credited with having increased production targets by fifteen per cent across the board; he took control of aircraft repairs and RAF storage units; he replaced the management of plants that were underperforming; and he released German Jewish engineers from internment in the UK to work in the factories. Under Beaverbrook, fighter and bomber production increased so much that Churchill

said of him: "His personal force and genius made this Aitken's finest hour." These were powerful words of praise, and Churchill in 1941, appointed Beaverbrook to the post of Minister of Supply.

Beaverbrook was a very rich businessman and press baron, owning the *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express*, *Scottish Daily Express*, and the *London Evening Standard*. Circulation of the *Daily Express* rocketed from under 40,000 a day to 2,329,000 a day in 1937, making it the most successful of all British newspapers. During the war the *Daily Express* became the largest-selling newspaper in the world, with a circulation of 3,706,000. Sales across Britain reached a mass-circulation figure of 2.25 million daily. It was estimated that each newspaper bought was read by an average of five persons, and there would have been one copy per family household that could afford to buy it.

Known as the first baron of Fleet Street, Beaverbrook purchased The Vineyard, that was a small, Tudor house in Hurlingham Road, Fulham, south west London. The political conferences that were held there were considered to be safe from interruption. Powerful friends and acquaintances such as Asquith, Lloyd George, and Winston Churchill, were guests at both Beaverbrook's Vineyard and his country home Cherkley Court, south east of Leatherhead, Surrey, that was a late, Victorian, neo-classical mansion and estate of 375 acres. Beaverbrook remained a close confidant of Churchill throughout the war, and there were many late nights and early morning get togethers.

Beaverbrook headed the Anglo-American Combined Raw Materials Board from 1942 to 1945, and accompanied Churchill to several wartime meetings with President Roosevelt in the US.



Cherkley Court, Lord Beaverbrook's English country home

Beaverbrook devoted himself to Churchill's 1945 General Election campaign, but following a huge gaff by Winston, made in a radio broadcast, when he likened the opposition, Socialist Labour Party to the 'Gestapo' and which was followed up in the *Daily Express* with the headline that a Labour victory would amount to the 'Gestapo in Britain', the negative publicity backfired and Churchill lost the election to the Labour Party.

Beaverbrook renounced his British citizenship and left the Conservative Party in 1951 but remained a close friend of Churchill. In 1953, he became Chancellor-for-life of the University of New Brunswick. Providing additional buildings for the university, he supported the scholarship funds for the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. Beaverbrook was therefore something of a 'culture vulture' having established the Canadian War Memorials Fund that evolved into a collection of

art works by the premier artists and sculptors in Britain and Canada. His closeness to Churchill and his protection of cultural heritages begs the question: Could he have allowed the Sutherland painting of Churchill to have been destroyed? He was bound to have viewed it and talked to Churchill about it and he could not have resisted making suggestions. Could it be, therefore, that he took it away under some pretext; that he would perhaps either destroy it or hide it? Sutherland claimed he said of the painting of Churchill to Beaverbrook, “Consistently ... he showed me the Bull Dog. For better or for worse, I am the kind of painter who is governed entirely by what he sees; I am at the mercy of my sitter. What he feels or shows at the time, I try to record.”³⁹ Sutherland made these remarks, December 3, 1954, in interview with Honor Balfour, during a BBC Home Service radio programme, just a few days after the unveiling of the portrait at Westminster so presumably what he recounted that he had told Beaverbrook was still clear in his memory. Berthoud commented:

‘The drawings and sketches which Graham [Sutherland] did at these sittings were sometimes worked up into a more finished form: the process helped him to gain insights for the large canvas. Some were re-done later, he told Beaverbrook, who at the end of November contracted to buy everything available. One of the studies of Churchill’s hands included a cigar with a spiral of smoke’⁴⁰

So, there we have it! Beaverbrook was buying up Sutherland’s sketches of Winston as fast as the artist could turn them out.

Sutherland came to believe that his portrayal of Churchill was viewed as conspiratorial. He was a Labour Party supporter and admitted he ‘always voted Labour’ he [Churchill] ‘knew I was a friend of Nye [Bevan] and Jenny [Lee]. I think he probably thought I was employed to undermine his image.’⁴¹ Quoting Kenneth Clark’s theory, Berthoud wrote, ‘Probably, Graham subsequently believed, Churchill saw the portrait as part of a plot to get rid of him.’ Referring

to Winston, Clarke said, ‘Though it is supposition, I think probably the view is correct that he thought depicting him in his feebleness was a malicious conspiracy to do him down’⁴² Sutherland denied this, replying, ‘*No one*, I can say categorically, influences me in my renderings.’⁴³ Berthoud does not let him get away with it, pointing out that, ‘The answer is perhaps that Graham was not, for all his protestations, just painting what he saw; he was also recording a conception he had of Churchill – as a rock, not a charmer.’⁴⁴

Despite Berthoud’s intervention (and he is a well-respected writer and biographer), he had to admit that whilst the portrait rested in a locked room at the House of Commons to be inspected only by Committee members and members of the Cabinet, ‘On 25 November the Bevans rang Graham to say how much they liked it. It was also officially photographed by *The Times* for the rest of the press. Graham [Sutherland] was appalled by the result and had a terrible time, trying to get newspapers to use ones taken by John Underwood and Elsbeth Juda.’ Sutherland was quoted, November 30, 1954: “I expect criticism of this painting, because my idea of Sir Winston is probably nothing like the idea of the ordinary man in the street,” he told the *Daily Mail* in pre-emptive strike. “I don’t paint pretty pictures just to win applause.”’ If that was what he felt the decent thing, surely, would have been to have refused the commission, but possibly the temptation to paint the most important man on the earth at that time which would bring him big publicity as an artist, and the thousand guineas payment, along with keeping in with Beaverbrook, were too much to resist.

The presentation ceremony was televised throughout the country but fewer people in those days had TV sets although as many as could afford it had bought one to see the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, June 2, 1953. As well as the rich, viewership would certainly have included the middle-classes and skilled and

semi-skilled, well-paid working classes. When Winston spoke the historic words ‘... it is a striking example of modern art’, there was both laughter and applause in Westminster Hall. Clemmie was present and having had time to digest the content of the portrait in advance was able to keep her composure. Labour MPs and Lords crowded around it afterwards, praising it mildly, but Kathleen Sutherland wrote in her diary, “I felt sick with disgust.”⁴⁵ The Conservatives however saw it for what it was and were furious. Lord Hailsham declared, “If I had my way, I’d throw Mr Graham Sutherland into the Thames. The portrait is a complete disgrace. ... I have wasted my money – we have all wasted our money.”⁴⁶ Berthoud, points out, (p.198), ‘Socialists liked it – thus fueling Churchill’s conspiracy theory.’ At the unveiling, Sutherland had been taken to task on the spot with some onlookers telling him, ‘Look, Sir Winston’s got a dirty face,’ and ‘What a terrible tribute to our greatest man.’ Sutherland and Kathleen then, ‘went off to lunch given by members of the presentation committee, who were all reported to be in favour of the portrait.’⁴⁷ Was Churchill, the ‘young man in a hurry’ as he had alluded to himself in his youth, to go out as ‘an old man on a stool’?

In the Commons the next day, Labour MP Emrys Hughes who sat on the bench opposite Churchill, was greeted with gales of laughter when he ‘said it was “an excellent portrait of a depressed-looking old man thinking of the atom-bomb” ’⁴⁸ an allusion to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

On December 1, there was a reception at No.10 Downing Street, where Graham and Kathleen Sutherland were guests. Churchill was polite to them, but the portrait was not on display. They were told (no doubt to their dismay) that it was ‘to avoid spoiling the occasion.’ They were under the impression that ‘Since

seeing it, ... Churchill 'looks in the glass all day at his neck.'⁴⁹ He had earlier voiced his concerns about being shown to have a double chin and wrinkles. No doubt the lashings of *Pol Roger* his favourite champagne, caviar, and cigars, said to have been served at the reception, momentarily drowned his sorrows!

On December 3, a group of artists were invited to the Churchills' London home, No.28 Hyde Park Gate for a private viewing of the portrait that had now been consigned to the basement where it was temporarily hung on the wall. It was agreed it looked much better in the subdued light! Artist Ben Nicholson who attended, added insult to injury, when he wrote in the *New Statesman*, December 11, that, 'The public had grown so used to flashy elegant portraits that it was shocked by the representation of the loose stomach, scraggy necks and pudding cheeks old gentlemen were apt to develop.' As a peace offering Sutherland had the audacity to send Clemmie a sketch he had done of Winston's hand. She replied to him politely but dismissed his letter in a couple of lines.⁵⁰ It should be clarified however that the Churchills' remained friendly and polite to the Sutherlands wherever they met them which in the event probably was not often. Since no indisputable or concrete proof has been produced to show that Graham Sutherland's portrait of Sir Winston Churchill was ever destroyed, as an historian, one would have to remain optimistic that it may one day turn up. If it has survived the most likely candidate to have been its saviour would have been Lord Beaverbrook. His dedication to the arts cannot be disputed, he was a big admirer of Sutherland's work, and he would not have wished a portrait of his close friend Churchill, no matter how odd, to have been destroyed. Could it be therefore, that Beaverbrook reached some arrangement with Winston that only Winston and Clemmie knew about? Perhaps he gave Winston some much-needed cash, rather than entering into a commercial exchange? Or perhaps he just offered to take the portrait away and hide it in his personal collection, since it was causing the

Churchills so much grief. Lord Moran who was Churchill's personal physician wrote in his memoirs that the portrait "prayed on his [Churchill's] mind."⁵¹ As is well known, Churchill was prone to what he called his 'black dogs' of depression.

Lord Beaverbrook was as close to Churchill as if he had been a brother. Winston was a frequent visitor to Beaverbrook's home the fabulous Villa La Capponcina, Cap D'ail, near Niece, in the South of France. It was whilst he was there in 1949, that Churchill suffered his first stroke.⁵² Several of Churchill's visits were filmed by Pathe News, showing Winston and Clementine disembarking from the 'plane and being met by hundreds of well-wishers. The news-reel was shown in British cinemas and on television at that time, in the early and mid to late 1950s. The filmed visits were, in 1953, when Mary accompanied her father, Clemmie being reported ill; 1955, when Clemmie was presented with a bouquet as she left the 'plane; and the Churchills celebrated their golden wedding anniversary there, September 1958. Two photographs exist of Winston whilst spending time at the Villa La Capponcina.



Winston Churchill photographed (probably by Lord Beaverbrook hence the vacant chair) at La Capponcina, Beaverbrook's villa in the south of France, circa 1960. The second figure is believed to be a Beaverbrook aide as he appears also in the Pathe News documentaries. Photo Peregrine Churchill's collection.



The second figure in the photograph appears in several Pathe News films, standing in the background as Sir Winston and Clementine, Lady Spencer-Churchill disembark from a BEA flight. Aides were not identified for security reasons.



La Capponcina Garden in the grounds of Lord Beaverbrook's villa, painted by Sir Winston Churchill. Photo courtesy of Richard Langworth CBE.



Lord Beaverbrook and Sir Winston Churchill photographed at Beaverbrook's villa La Capponcina, circa 1960. Photo courtesy of Richard Langworth CBE.

The location of the photographs has been identified by Richard Langworth, who is recognised as a foremost expert on Churchill's life.

Beaverbrook had helped keep secret Churchill's stroke by imposing a press black-out on the subject in his newspapers. The Chartwell visitors' house-book shows that Beaverbrook was much in evidence then, having signed in for the first time after the war, June 5, 1947, by which time the house had been got back to something resembling normal, following having been shut up for five years during the war. Beaverbrook's visits were recorded: May, 28, 1954; May 31, July 11, and September 2, 1955; May 6, and June 24, 1956.⁵³ Chartwell in Westerham, Kent, was not exactly on Beaverbrook's doorstep, and it was then, and still is today, a considerable car journey from Fulham, south west London, and he would have been chauffeur-driven along the same difficult journey as Southerland once trod. The difference was he undoubtedly stayed overnight for several days.

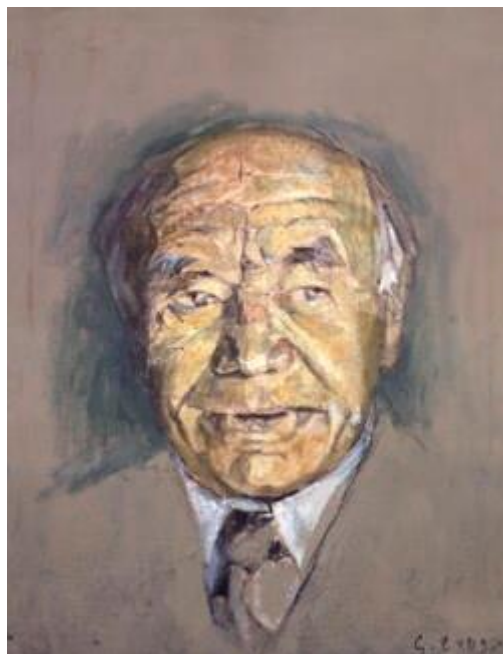
The evidence that Clemmie had the Sutherland portrait destroyed is flimsy. Clearly, no Churchill family member was present when it was supposed to have happened. Mary Soames' commentary on it in her biography of her mother (page 549) was that following her father's death, January 24, 1965, three of them, Mary, her husband Christopher Soames and Clemmie, left Southampton, February 24, to sail on holiday to Barbados. During the voyage to New York, her mother told Mary and Christopher that the portrait was 'no longer in existence'. Mary's only other commentary on its disposal was that 'sometime in 1955 or 1956 she [Clemmie] gave instructions for the picture to be destroyed.'



Funeral cortege of Sir Winston Churchill, the coffin is about to be placed on board a barge on the Thames, 1965. The London dock workers stopped work and dipped their cranes (in the background) in unison in respect. Some of them would have served in the Second World War or kept the docks running throughout the war amidst the German bombing raids on London.

Whilst they were on the ship or thereafter, no conversation appears to have been entered into between Clemmie and Mary as to who destroyed the portrait or how it was got rid of, and that casts doubt over its actual fate. Mary did, however, establish and clarify one important point; that it was *not* the intention of the Parliamentary Committee to have the portrait hung in the Palace of Westminster, and she wrote: ‘... there exists a document drawn up and signed on behalf of the Members’ Parliamentary Committee assigning the “sole and exclusive copyright” of the portrait to Winston Churchill.’ This document is dated November 30, 1954.⁵⁴

Sutherland had already painted Lord Beaverbrook’s portrait in 1952. Portraying him as a man with strong features, there appears to be two Dracula-like teeth protruding out of either side of his open mouth! Was there perhaps a veiled political message painted into this work of art also?



Portrait of Lord Beaverbrook by Graham Sutherland, 1952.

Beaverbrook in his later years suffered from cancer but had recently attended a birthday banquet, organised by fellow Canadian press baron, Lord Thomson of Fleet, where he was seen to be on his usual good form. He died unexpectedly in Surrey, June 9, 1964, aged 85, less than six months before Churchill, who passed away on January 24, 1965. Could it be that in the event of Winston's death any enquiries being made about the painting by the Inland Revenue would have been expected to have been dealt with by Beaverbrook, who would have acted as the witness who would attest to its whereabouts? All he would have had to say was that Winston had gifted it to him and therefore no death duties would have been incurred. Beaverbrook was five years younger than Winston and probably expected to outlive him. Dying as he did before Churchill meant he escaped the furore over the missing painting and its supposed fate. Could it be that his passing left Clemmie with an unsolved Inland Revenue problem? Was the story Clemmie told Mary of the painting being destroyed hastily put together? Could it be that when Winston was still alive husband and wife made up the story, due to the alay, Beaverbrook, having predeceased him? In the event, 'dead men tell no tales!'

GRACE HAMBLIN'S VERSION OF THE PORTRAIT'S END



Grace Hamblin, Secretary to both Winston and Clementine Spencer-Churchill.

Tape recordings have in recent years surfaced at the Churchill Archives, University of Cambridge, made in 1985, by Grace Hamblin, who died aged 94, in 2002. These are referred to as her *Churchill Oral History interview*, which remained closed during the lifetime of Lady Soames, and were only opened and made available after her death, May 31, 2014.⁵⁵ In the recordings, Grace claimed that the Sutherland painting had been kept in the cellar at Chartwell House, and that it upset Clementine so much that she, Grace, got her brother to drive her to Chartwell in his van in the dead night and the two of them removed it in the van. They then drove it to his house several miles away and there, she helped him build a bonfire in his back garden, and they threw the painting on the top and burnt it. The next time Grace saw Lady Churchill she told her what she had done. Alluding to a supposed pact the two women had made, Clementine was supposed to have said: "We'll never tell anyone about this because after I go, I don't want anyone blaming you. But believe me, you did exactly as I would have wanted." From this we are to understand that Grace brought about the end of the painting without telling Clemmie or Winston what she was going to do it? That would seem unlikely for as close as she may have felt to the Churchill family with a depth of loyalty to them, she was a paid employee, and for years she was obliged to enter Chartwell House via the servants' entrance. Grace was known to be a highly efficient private secretary to Winston and Clemmie for more than 40 years. She went on to run Chartwell House and became a curator when it passed to the National Trust. Can Grace's statement however be trusted?

Another tape recording was found at Cambridge in recent years, made by Sir John (Jock) Colville, in which he alleged that Sir Winston Churchill had an affair with Lady Castlerosse, when in fact it was his son Randolph who was her lover.

Clemmie herself was accused by an author in recent years of having an extra-marital affair, having gone on a lengthy boating holiday with wealthy art dealer, Terence Philip. It has since been shown, pretty conclusively, that Philip was in fact homosexual. He was therefore a safe companion to whom Clemmie could relate to as a friend and could trust to perform the duties of an escort during her extended holiday, at a time when women were still so unliberated that they were vulnerable when travelling alone.

Can we therefore believe the Grace Hamblin story? It may be that Grace, without ever knowing that the painting was still intact and in the possession of another, made this statement out of loyalty, in order to finally clear Clementine Churchill's name of having destroyed it. Grace was clearly acutely aware of the deluge of abuse aimed in Clemmie's direction by the press. Could she allow her beloved former friend and employer to be remembered for ever as the woman who destroyed Graham Sutherland's masterpiece? Loyalty to the Churchills had built up over the years to practically cult level. In terms of publishing, Churchill subject matter was fast becoming an industry, with hundreds of books on Winston being published yearly. Celia Lee can recall someone from that time who lived in the Churchills' home village of Westerham telling her, that when word went around that Winston had arrived at Chartwell from their London home, the local newsagents removed the socialist *Daily Worker* from sale on the counter in case it would offend him.

Grace Hamblin was formerly assistant secretary to Winston Churchill, (1932-38), secretary to Clementine Churchill (1939-45), and secretary and administrator at Chartwell (1945-65). Did she decide in her old age to 'fall on her sword' in order to protect Clementine Churchill's reputation and remove from her the smear that she, personally burnt Sutherland's portrait? It is a theory worthy of consideration.

Sutherland had died February 17, 1980, so she no longer had to be concerned about his feelings or his reaction to the press. Grace placed an embargo on the two tape recordings until after Mary Soames' death, clearly in order not to make her appear to have been misled by her mother, since she had repeated to several newspapers, and in her biography of her mother, that Clemmie destroyed the painting around 1955 or 1956. Mary would have been far too proud and noble to have allowed an employee to take the blame for destroying the painting. It is also noteworthy that throughout, Mary held that she did not know how her mother destroyed the painting.

Picture the scene at Chartwell in the dead of night! It is an isolated estate shrouded in trees and the place would have been in pitch darkness, when Grace Hamblin and her brother supposedly drove there in his van. As the cellar is accessed down steps from the exterior, it would have been a pitch-black descent. They would have been there illegally and without the permission of Winston and Clemmie, who would have been asleep upstairs. What if they awoke and thought it was burglars and phoned for the police? There are too many loose ends to this story. It is worth again considering Grace Hamblin's statement of 1978, quoted earlier to the press: "I do know all about it, but I cannot tell you. I have old loyalties to the family and to Lady Churchill. You will have to accept the executors' announcement as that is all we are going to say. Other people are involved." Why would Grace have spoken of 'old loyalties' to the Churchills, if *she and her brother* had destroyed the painting? Why also would she have said, "Other people are involved." We are left with the unanswered question, who are these people to whom she is referring? Her reply to the press then does not really correspond to the testimony she left thirty years later on a tape recording.

It is noteworthy that in the accompanying press article in the *London Evening Standard* featuring the sketch of Churchill's head that came up for sale in March 2018, the Sutherland painting is *not* referred to as burnt or destroyed, but simply as 'the lost portrait.'⁵⁶ Like so many works of art before it that have been believed lost or destroyed, the portrait might one day reappear in a sealed crate in some bank vault, basement, attic or hidden away in a billionaire's private collection. Paintings and other artefacts, long since believed lost or destroyed, turn up frequently on BBC1's televised Antiques Road Show.

Interview with Lady Williams, (16th March 2019), who as Miss Jane Portal, was Secretary to Sir Winston Churchill.



Miss Jane Portal, walking with Sir Winston Churchill at Sandown Park Racecourse, mid-1950s.

Celia Lee interviewed Jane, Lady Williams, March 16, 2019, at her London home, South Kensington. The observation of Jane, then as the young, Miss Portal, aged 24 years, Secretary to Sir Winston Churchill, at the time Winston was sitting to Graham Sutherland to have his portrait painted was:

‘Graham Sutherland was good looking and charming. Clemmie liked him. I liked him. Sutherland never visited No.28 Hyde Park Gate, that was the Churchill’s London home, for at that time it was rented out and the Churchills therefore did not stay there.’

Today, as Lady Williams of Elvel, aged 90 years, Jane can recall it all as if it took place yesterday, and she says it ‘began in September 1954’:

‘Being Prime Minister, Winston had to deal with the ministerial boxes every day, and these were delivered to the Chartwell home by motorbike. They were piled up in the corner. Churchill never sat doing nothing, he was always writing and reading throughout the sittings for Sutherland, that took place in the studio in the garden at Chartwell. There were between ten and twelve sittings in total for the portrait, each of about two hours duration. Churchill would be dictating letters to me at my typewriter.

‘What made me suspicious from the start was he wouldn’t allow Winston to see the portrait before it was finished. When Winston asked Sutherland, “May I look”, meaning at the painting in progress, Sutherland replied, “No, I have this rule, I never permit my work to be seen until it is finished.” ’

In relation to Sutherland’s wife’s attendances at Chartwell, some details of which Kathleen has been elsewhere reported to have recorded in her diary, Lady Williams had this to say:

‘I don’t remember Kathleen Sutherland at all, she was not at Chartwell. I don’t remember meeting her and I was there every day. She was never near the studio. The Sutherlands were staying with Kenneth Clark. Graham Sutherland always stayed there as the two were great friends. Sutherland would travel to Chartwell and back on the same day.’

Kenneth, Lord Clark lived at Saltwood Castle, Saltwood Village, one mile (2 km) north of Hythe, Kent. The distance from Saltwood to Chartwell is 64 miles. The driving time in the days before the motorway would have been in the region of two hours, which meant four hours driving for Sutherland each time he visited. The distance along with Winston's restlessness would account for Sutherland resorting to taking photographs and working from these and sketches of Churchill, instead of employing sittings.



Saltwood Castle, Hythe Kent, home of Kenneth, Lord Clark, where Clementine Churchill and Mary Soames first viewed Graham Sutherland's portrait of Sir Winston Churchill.

As to the relationship between Sutherland and the Churchills, Lady Williams said:

‘Clemmie liked Sutherland until she saw the painting. Clemmie went to Clark's and collected the painting and brought it home to Chartwell. When she arrived, she was white in the face and looked stunned and said, “This is a disaster.” That was the first time Winston saw the painting. When I saw the painting, I was horrified! One of the things I noticed was he hadn't done his trousers up! That would not have happened as he had a valet.

‘I remember the painting disappearing. It was crated and other than that, I was never aware of its existence.’

As to Winston's reaction, Lady Williams said:

'Churchill was attending to something else, he wasn't thinking about the portrait. He dictated all the time, including even in the car on the way to the races and I accompanied him.'

Referring to Winston's daily routine, Lady Williams provided intimate knowledge of the workings of Chartwell:

'Churchill stayed in bed till 11 o'clock each morning, working. He drank half a bottle of Claret to his lunch. I did not join the party for lunch, I stayed at my typewriter. He didn't sleep in the afternoon at which time he was sitting to Sutherland. He always went to sleep at around 5 - 5.30pm to get fresh for the night's work.'

In relation to the alleged destruction of the painting, Lady Williams said:

'Mr. Vincent was the gardener and had been Winston's employee from the 1930s.'

Lady Williams remembers:

'Lord Beaverbrook was certainly around at the time of Winston's stroke. I can recall him constantly walking up and down the lawn.'

As to the significance of the painting, Lady Williams felt:

'It was not a big feature in Churchill's life. He thought it was a marvellous gesture from Parliament. Jenny Lee was the main person behind it.'

In answer to my question as to whether the cruel presentation of Winston may have had a political motive, in so far as Sutherland was a Labour Party supporter and may have wished to damage Churchill's image, Lady Williams said:

'It was not political. Jenny Lee was the main person. Clement Attlee was a great friend of Churchill. The Attlees used to talk to Winston at Chequers. There was no political element unless it came from Sutherland himself. Clark, however, who was a Tory, was one of Sutherland's best friends.'

In relation to the storage of the painting (along with other paintings and stored items), I asked if there was electric light in the cellar:

‘There was electric light in the cellar. The wine was kept down there. Grace Hamblin would have been responsible for getting the painting crated and placed in the cellar. Grace’s word is reliable. There was no security.’

Lady Williams affirmed her eye-witness account of the sittings and relationship of Graham Sutherland to Churchill with the words:

‘I was there! Mary Soames visited. The Soames, Mary and Christopher, lived down the road at Chartwell Farm.’

Lady Williams’ husband, Charles, Lord Williams of Elvel, CBE PC, confirmed that Lord Beaverbrook’s reputable biographers, Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie wrote: ‘Beaverbrook tried to buy the Westminster painting.’⁵⁷



Lady Williams, the former Miss Jane Portal, today.

COMMENTARY: Jane Portal was present throughout Graham Sutherland’s visits to Chartwell House, whilst he was painting, sketching, and photographing, Sir Winston Churchill, and her word is totally reliable and of paramount importance in establishing the truth of the matter in this discussion. Jane has

confirmed that Kathleen Sutherland was not present at Chartwell so one has to ask, where did the information come from that she wrote in her diary? It must have been given to her by her husband, after he returned home. That Clemmie was horrified by the portrait means the other reports of her being happy with it have either been misinterpreted or simply falsified. Crucially, in relation to Sir Winston Churchill's standing for posterity, Jane has confirmed that the original portrait distinctly showed his trousers not done up. It is a quite shocking revelation for it is only *barely* noticeable in the black and white photographs of the portrait. As I pointed out earlier, the glossy magazines of the day published in colour, and they, quite clearly, decently air-brushed this embarrassing feature out of their photographic reproductions of the painting. One has to assume that, in presenting the Prime Minister in such a manner, Sutherland was relegating Winston to the level of a cartoonist's joke, so absent-minded he forgot when he went to the lavatory to button up his trousers properly.

Lady Williams confirmed the name of the gardener at Chartwell was Mr Vincent. It means that the earlier mentioned Ted Miles was not employed in gardening. If leaves were being burnt in the autumn it would have been the charge of Mr Vincent, who was in fact, for nearly twenty years, Lady Churchill's head gardener.

Between 1963-64, Graham Sutherland painted Kenneth, Lord Clark's portrait. Despite the Sutherlands having lived with Clark and his wife Jane over the years in several of their homes, the artist showed his sitter no favour either. Clark's biographer James Stourton, wrote that, 'Clark was a bad sitter' and 'he was unhappy with the result which he thought made him look like a snooty dictator.' Intimacy with the Clarke's had been such that Sutherland's wife was referred to

in their family as ‘Kathy’, but beneath the surface the two women did not like each other. ‘Kathy’ had the audacity to bill Clark for her husband’s ‘standard fee.’



Graham Sutherland’s portrait of Kenneth, Lord Clark.

It was a cheek, considering the Sutherlands had for years parked themselves in the Clark’s homes. The Clark’s son, Colin said: “My mother ... wrote to her in considerable rage, offering only half the sum which had been asked. Kathy ... accepted but made it clear that this would not include any of Graham’s sketches for the portrait.” Relations were only ever partially patched up.⁵⁸ No doubt Sutherland justified his ugly portrayal of Clark by claiming he had painted what he saw! It was a sad ending to their first meeting in the early 1930s, when Clark felt that ‘In Sutherland ... he had found an artist in the tradition of Blake, Samuel Palmer and Turner, who showed him “a way out of the virtuous fog of Bloomsbury art.”’ Clark had, “immediately bought all the pictures he had brought with him to show us.”⁵⁹ No doubt, Lord Clark’s generosity to Sutherland aided his financial situation for artists are almost always known to

struggle economically, which probably explains why for some time the Sutherlands lived with the Clarks.

That ‘Beaverbrook tried to buy the Westminster painting’, begs the question, did he in fact acquire it and if he did, what did he do with it? Did he pass it on to some billionaire collector in whose archive it still languishes?

The information relating to the painting and practically everything surrounding it remains open to question. The disappearance of the Graham Sutherland portrait of Sir Winston Churchill (1954), will no doubt continue to be the subject of discussion and speculation for years to come.

Whatever the fate of the painting, Winston Churchill’s adoring public who heralded him as the hero who won the Second World War, would *not* have wished an image of a crumpled, defeated, old man to represent him and the nation, hung in Westminster Hall, to be viewed by the public, least the opposition political parties who could poke fun at it. They would have expected something that presented Churchill in the light of Joseph Mallord William Turner’s *Fighting Temeraire*, an old warrior at the end of his days, going out bathed in glory!

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Jane, Lady Williams, the former Miss Jane Portal, Interviewed by Celia Lee, 16th March 2019.

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Andrew Roberts, *CHURCHILL Walking With Destiny*, pub. Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books, 2018.

Endnotes:

¹ *Daily Express*, January 13, 1978.

² Letter, 12th January, published in *The Times*, Saturday, 14, 1978.

³ Dr Roy Strong, quoted in the *Daily Mail*, Friday January 13, 1978.

⁴ Article published, *London Evening Standard*, March 12, 2018.

⁵ *The Times*, Ian Bradley, January 12, 1978.

⁶ Reports in *The Times*, Ian Bradley, January 12, 1978; and *The Daily Express* Friday 13, January 1978.

⁷ Peregrine Spencer-Churchill married 1st Patricia March. He and his wife employed Yvonne Jennan who was from Paris to teach them French. When Patricia was struck down with cancer, Yvonne cared for her until her death.

Yvonne then returned home to Paris. Shortly afterwards, Peregrine visited Yvonne and fell in love with her and brought her back with him to London, where she set up in a flat off Sloane Avenue.

⁸ Sir John (Jock) Colville, quoted by journalists Charles Laurence and Richard Holliday, *Sunday Telegraph*, February 12, 1978.

⁹ Quotations from the *Daily Mail*, January 4, 1978.

¹⁰ Berthoud, p.188, citing Graham Sutherland's interview with the *Daily Express*, September 3, 1954.

¹¹ Berthoud, p.188, citing a letter from Graham Sutherland to Lord Beaverbrook, September 9, 1955.

¹² Berthoud, pp.188-9, citing a letter from Graham Sutherland to Lord Beaverbrook, March 21, 1961.

¹³ Berthoud quoting Sutherland, pp.188-9.

¹⁴ Berthoud, p.187, quoting from Mary Soames' biography of her mother, *Clementine Churchill*, pub. Cassell, 1979, p.632.

¹⁵ Berthoud, p.187, quoting from Kathleen Sutherland's notes.

¹⁶ Berthoud, p.187, quoting from the earlier interview with McLeavy by Susan Barnes, for the *Radio Times*, November 28, 1974.

¹⁷ Graham Sutherland quoted in the *Daily Mail*, January 12, 1978.

¹⁸ Berthoud, p.187, quoting Kathleen Sutherland's notes.

¹⁹ Report in *The Times* by journalist Ian Bradley, January 12, 1978.

²⁰ Quotes from the *Daily Mail*, January 12, 1978.

²¹ Roger Berthoud, quoting Graham Sutherland in a letter to Mary, The Lady Soames, January 1, 1978.

²² Roger Berthoud, p.184, cited in relation to an interview with McLeavy by Susan Barnes, for the *Radio Times*, November 28, 1974.

²³ Article published, *London Evening Standard*, March 12, 1978.

²⁴ Source for above quotes, journalist, Craig Seton, *The Times*, Friday, January 13, 1978.

²⁵ Roger Berthoud, p.185, quoting from an interview between Graham Sutherland and journalist Donald McLachlan, *Sunday Telegraph*, January 20, 1965.

²⁶ Craig Seaton, *The Times*, January 13, 1978.

²⁷ Andrew Roberts, *CHURCHILL Walking With Destiny*, pub. Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books, 2018; p.946, quoting from Fladgate LLP Law Firm Archives, London, the correspondence of Anthony Forbes Moir, Doc. Ch. 111.

²⁸ Andrew Roberts, *CHURCHILL Walking With Destiny*, pub. 2018, Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books; p.946, quoting Anthony Montague-Browne, *Long Sunset*, pub. Cassell London, 1995; p171.

²⁹ Letter to Berthoud from Mary, The Lady Soames, June 25, 1981, quoted by Berthoud, p.200.

³⁰ Quotes from Laurence and Holliday, *Sunday Telegraph*, February 12, 1978.

³¹ Quoted by Charles Laurence and Richard Holliday, *Sunday Telegraph*, February 12, 1978.

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- ³² Report by Charles Laurence and Richard Holliday, *Sunday Telegraph*, February 12, 1978.
- ³³ Richard Langworth in correspondence with Celia Lee, March 4, 2019.
- ³⁴ Quoted by Berthoud, page 193.
- ³⁵ Charles Laurence and Richard Holliday, *Sunday Telegraph*, February 12, 1978.
- ³⁶ Mary Soames, *Clementine Churchill*, pub. Cassell, 1979, p488.
- ³⁷ Quoted by Berthoud, page 195; *Clementine Churchill*, pub. Cassell, 1979.
- ³⁸ Celia Lee knows the kitchen well having been filmed in it in recent years by the BBC for a documentary about cooking. Celia has never been in the cellar!
- ³⁹ Cited Berthoud, p.186, Graham Sutherland in interview with Honor Balfour, BBC Home Service, December 3, 1954.
- ⁴⁰ Berthoud, p.190.
- ⁴¹ Berthoud, p.196, quoting Graham Sutherland in interview with Susan Barnes, November 28, 1974.
- ⁴² Berthoud, p.196, quoting Graham Sutherland to Susan Barnes, *Radio Times*, November 28, 1974.
- ⁴³ Berthoud, p.196, quoting from a letter from Graham Sutherland to Beaverbrook, March 21, 1961.
- ⁴⁴ Berthoud, p.196.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted by Berthoud, p.197.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted by Berthoud, p.197-8.
- ⁴⁷ Berthoud, p.198.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted by Berthoud, p.198.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted by Berthoud, p.198-9.
- ⁵⁰ Berthoud, p.199.
- ⁵¹ Lord Moran, *Churchill at War, 1940-1945: The Memoirs of Churchill's Physician*; pub. Robinson, 2002, quoted by Berthoud.
- ⁵² See article by Michael Wardell on Churchill's stroke, published *Finest Hour* No.87, Summer 1995.
- ⁵³ Research courtesy of Mrs Beryl Nicholson, present day guide at Chartwell House; February 21, 2019.
- ⁵⁴ Mary Soames, *Clementine Churchill*, pub. Doubleday 2002, p.550.
- ⁵⁵ Reference CHOH 1/HMBL, tape recorded interview (comprising two cassettes 1985) with Grace Hamblin, former assistant secretary to Winston Churchill, (1932-38), and secretary to Clementine Churchill (1939-45), secretary and administrator at Chartwell (1945-65).
- ⁵⁶ Article published, *London Evening Standard*, Monday, March 12, 2018.
- ⁵⁷ Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Lord Beaverbrook: A Life*; hardcover; pub. Ramboro Books PLC, 1993; ISBN-10: 0394568796; ISBN-13: 978-0394568799; p486. The source for this claim is not quoted.
- ⁵⁸ James Stourton, *Kenneth Clark; Life, Art and Civilisation*; pub. William Collins, 2016; p.309; quoting Colin Clark *Younger Brother Younger Son*, p.171.
- ⁵⁹ Quoted Stourton, p.152.