William Roberts: Portraiture of the 1920s

Dissertation Abstract

William Roberts, RA (1895 -1980), painted prolifically for seventy years, most notably developing a unique 'English Cubist' style, depicting figurative groups and London urban life. Educated at The Slade under Henry Tonks alongside Stanley Spencer, Dora Carrington, C.R.W. Nevinson, David Bomberg and Edward Wadsworth, Roberts was influenced by European avant-garde art as well as traditional Continental drawing and painting techniques. His early work is often associated with Vorticism and Wyndham Lewis, having joined the New Rebel Art Centre following brief employment in Roger Fry's Omega workshop.

This dissertation examines a sparsely researched aspect of Roberts's oeuvre: *portraiture*, particularly of the 1920s. Roberts served as an artillery gunner in the First World War, was subsequently made an official war artist; and, deeply affected by the experience, returned to London seeking commissions to provide for his young family. This paper covers three aspects of the 1920s portraiture: 1) T.E. Lawrence and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, including commissioned drawings and etchings for the book, and an examination of the Lawrence *Aircraftman Shaw* portrait; 2) Ordinary and Extraordinary People of 1920s London, demonstrating Roberts's keen interest in capturing the diversity and vitality of the interwar capital; and 3) Family: William, Sarah and John Roberts portraits, where the artist consciously developed a portfolio of human expressions and gestures to apply in his group genre paintings, whilst capturing a living record of his wife and son.

Roberts's career in the 1920s, whilst formative and transitional stylistically, placed him in the circles of patrons and artists such as Augustus John, the Sitwells, art critic P.G. Konody, Edward Marsh and John Maynard Keynes, who directly and indirectly contributed to the acquisition, awareness and dissemination of his work throughout collections in the UK, the Commonwealth, and the US. Contemporary art criticism was polarised regarding his emerging style, but consistently praised his extraordinary draughtsmanship, particularly in portraiture. This dissertation strives to place Roberts's portraiture in the context of his entire oeuvre and that of his contemporaries Lewis, Henry Lamb and Spencer – all contributing to a better understanding of the contribution to British Modern art which Roberts made.

William Roberts

Portraiture of the 1920s

Zachary R. Leonard

MA Candidate, History of Art, University of Buckingham

Introduction and Historiography

William Roberts *Portraiture of the 1920s*

Chapter One

The T.E. Lawrence Commissions: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *Aircraftman Shaw*

Chapter Two

Ordinary and Extraordinary People of 1920s London

Chapter Three

Family: William, Sarah and John Roberts

List of Illustrations

Introduction

Coterie No. 3, December 1919, cover and title page image, 19 x 25.5 cm (p. 30)

The Art Critic (P. G. Konody), 1920, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm, private collection (p. 31)

The *Creole* (aka *Portrait of a Negress – Hélène Yelin*), oil on canvas, 60.7 x 50.5 cm, 1923 (p. 32)

The Joke, 1923, oil on canvas, 75 x 62.5 cm, private collection (p. 32)

Fred, 1920–23, oil on canvas, 62.5 x 51 cm, private collection (p. 33)

Esther Lahr, 1925, oil on canvas (50.8 x 40.6 cm), Tate (p.34)

Self-portrait, 1923, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4 cm, private collection (p. 35)

The Red Turban (Sarah), 1921, oil on canvas (103 x 82.2 cm), Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield (p. 36)

Portrait of Sarah, the Artist's Wife (aka *La Femme Tragique*), *c.*1921, oil on canvas, 76 x 51 cm (p. 36)

Sarah, 1925, pencil on red paper, 31.3 x 23.8 cm (p. 37)

Sarah, 1922, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, Manchester City Art Galleries (p. 38)

Portrait of a Boy (aka *John and Boy in a Blue Jersey*), *c.*1929, oil on canvas, 69 x 60 cm, Methyr Tydfil (p. 38)

John, study for etching, *c.*1925, pencil, 11.7 x 7 cm (p. 39)

Chapter One

Augustus John, *T.E. Lawrence*, 1919, oil on canvas, 80 x 59.7 cm, © Tate (p. 56)

Augustus John, *T.E. Lawrence*, 1919, oil on canvas, 45.8 x 38.2 cm, © Yale University Art Gallery (p. 56)

Augustus John, *The Emir Feisal*, 1919, oil on canvas, 72 x 53 cm, © Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum (p. 56)

Eric Henri Kennington, *Ali Ibn El Hussein*, 1921, Pastel, 76.2 x 50.8 cm, © Reading Museum of Art Gallery (p. 57)

Eric Henri Kennington, *Self-Portrait*, 1918, Black chalk, 50 x 36.7 cm, © Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum (p. 58)

Camel March (aka *Camel Corps*), 1923, ink and watercolour, 33 x 57.8 cm, private collection (p. 60)

As-hab ('Companions'), 1925–6, pen and ink, 28 x 20 cm, Houghton Library, Harvard University, (p. 61)

Colonel S. F. Newcombe DSO, 1922, pencil, 35.5 x 33 cm, private collection (p. 62)

Colonel Sir Henry McMahon, 1922, pencil, location of original not known (p. 65)

Captain Robin Buxton, 1922, pencil, location of original not known (p. 68)

General Sir Reginald Wingate, 1922, sanguine, 34.4 cm x 29.9 cm, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin (p. 73)

Lord Winterton, 1923, pencil, present location unknown (p. 75)

George Ambrose Lloyd (1st Baron Lloyd), 1925, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 43.3 cm, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin (p. 77)

Aircraftman Shaw (aka Portrait of T.E. Lawrence), oil on canvas, 92 x 61 cm, 1922, Ashmolean Museum (p. 78)

Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gaugin*, 1888, 61.5 x 50.3 cm, © Harvard University Art Museums (p. 79)

Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of a Member of the Wedigh Family,* 42 x 31.8 cm, © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (p. 80)

Wyndham Lewis, *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a* Tyro, a self-portrait, 1920-21, oil on canvas, 73 x 44 cm, © Ferens Art Gallery, Hull City Museums and Art Gallery (p. 80)

Mark Gertler, *Portrait of Dora Carrington*, 1912, gouache on paper, © Edgar Astaire collection (p. 81)

Henry Lamb, *Henry Lamb*, 1914, oil on panel, 36.8 x 31.8 cm, © National Portrait Gallery (p. 81)

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Self-Portrait*, 1913, © Southampton City Art Gallery (p. 82)

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, 1914, marble, 90.5 x 45.7 x 48.9 cm, © RDN and PRN Foundation, Dallas (p. 83)

Aircraftman Shaw (aka Portrait of T.E. Lawrence) (detail) (p. 84)

Eric Henri Kennington, *T.E. Lawrence*, 1921, Pastel, 44.7 x 32.8 © Adrian Liddell Hart (p. 86)

Chapter Two

The Diners, 1919 (painted for the Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel), oil on canvas, 152.4 x 83.2 cm, Tate, (p. 95)

The Dancers, 1919 (painted for the Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel), oil on canvas, 152 x 116.5 cm, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow (p. 95)

Poster for the Exhibition of French Art 1914–1919 (Mansard Gallery, Heal's), 1919, poster, 75 cm x 48 cm (p. 96)

Wheels 1919 cover design (using *Gun Drill c.*1919) for *Wheels* no. 4, 1919 (p. 97)

Wheels 1919, two endpieces for volume of poetry published by Osbert Sitwell, 1919 (p. 97)

At the House of Mrs Kinfoot (endpaper for the book of the same title by Osbert Sitwell, published by the Favil Press), 1921 (p. 98)

Frank Dobson, *Osbert Sitwell,* 1923, bronze, 31.8 x 17.8 x 22.9 cm, © Tate (p. 99)

Wyndham Lewis, *Edith Sitwell* (1923-35), oil on canvas, 86.4 x 111.8 cm, © Tate (p. 99)

Wyndham Lewis, *Edith Sitwell*, 1921 (study for Tate portrait), approximately 33 x 25 cm, © Sitwell family collection (p. 100)

Wyndham Lewis, *Sacheverell Sitwell* (detail), pencil on paper, 1922, 37.1 x 27 cm, © Sitwell family collection (p. 100)

Coterie No. 3, December 1919, cover and title page image, 19 cm x 25.5 cm (p. 101)

The Interval before Round 10, 1919-1920, oil on canvas, 88.9 cm x 119.4 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (p. 101)

Café Royal Scene (aka *Discussion in a Bar* and *Pimps in a Bar*), *c*.1921, pencil, ink and watercolour, 40.5 cm x 51 cm, private collection (p. 103)

The Art Critic (P. G. Konody) (detail), 1920, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm, private collection (p. 104)

The Art Critic (P. G. Konody), 1920, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm (detail), private collection (p. 105)

Gerald Brockhurst, *Ranunculus* (1914), Oil on panel, 79.5 x 66 cm, © Sheffield Museum, (p. 106)

Dock Gates (aka *Disembarkation*), 1920, oil on canvas, 106.7 x 137.2 cm (p. 107)

The *Creole* (aka *Portrait of a Negress – Hélène Yellin*), oil on canvas, 60.7 x 50.5, 1923, City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent (p. 109)

The Joke, 1923, oil on canvas, 75 x 62.5 cm, private collection (p. 109)

Augustus John, *Woman Smiling*, oil on canvas, 196 x 98.2 cm, 1908-9, © Tate (p. 110)

Augustus John, *Two Jamaican Girls*, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.8 cm, 1937, © Walker Art Gallery Liverpool (p. 111)

Glyn Philpot, *Monsieur Julien Zaire Tom Whiskey,* 1931-32, oil on canvas, private collection. Images above and below reprinted from *Glyn Philpot, 1884-1937* (National Portrait Gallery, 1985) (p. 111)

Glyn Philpot, *Monsieur Julien Zaire Tom Whiskey,* 1931-32, oil on canvas, 44 x 31.8 cm, private collection (p. 111)

Glyn Warren Philpot, *Henry Thomas,* c. 1937, oil on canvas (p. 112)

Glyn Philpot, *Negro in Profile Portrait of Henry Thomas*, 1934-35, oil on canvas, © Pallant House Gallery (p. 112)

W.H. Grove & Son, Philpot at his Landsdowne House studio with *Empty House by Sea, N. Africa* and Henry Thomas, photograph, c.1934 (p. 112)

Dr. Paul de Zoysa, *c.*1931, oil on canvas, 51 x 38 cm, private collection (p. 113)

A Talk About Buddha, 1930, pencil, squared, 33 x 45 cm, private collection, London, (p. 114)

Kumari de Zoysa, 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 38 cm, private collection of sitter (p. 115)

The Chess Players, 1929-30, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 92 cm, private collection (p. 118)

Fred, 1920–23, oil on canvas, 62.5 cm x 51 cm, private collection (p. 120)

Kit, 1923, oil on canvas, 50 cm x 39 cm, Wolverhampton Art Gallery (p. 121)

Elsie (aka Portrait of a Young Woman), 1922–3, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm, York City Art Gallery (p. 122)

Signallers, pencil & watercolour, 31.8 x 51.0 cm, © Imperial War Museum, ART 1167, (p. 122)

Esther Lahr, 1925, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Tate (p. 123)

New Coterie No. 3, summer 1926, Magazine size 19 x 25.5 cm (p. 124)

Esther Lahr, 1920s. Image reprint www.militantesthetix.co.uk/yealm/yealm1.htm, (p. 125)

The Prodigal Sets Out (aka *The Prodigal Son* study), 1927–8, watercolour, 19 x 15 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (p. 127)

H. E. Bates, 1927, pencil, 27.9 cm x 19.1 cm, National Portrait Gallery (p. 128)

Rhys Davies, 1926, Pencil, 31.7 x 19.1 cm, Rhys Davies Trust (p. 128)

John Maynard Keynes and Lydia Lopokova, 1932, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 81.6 cm, National Portrait Gallery (p. 128)

Henry Lamb, *The Anrep Family*, 1920, oil on canvas, 95.3 x 157.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (p. 131)

Henry Lamb, *The Kennedy Family*, 1921, oil on canvas 112.8 x 82.1 cm, private collection (p. 131)

The Restaurant (aka *Discussion in a Café*, *Café Scene* and *Café-bar*), 1929, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 40.5 cm, private collection (p. 132)

Elliott & Fry, *John Maynard Keynes, 1st Baron Keynes of Tilton; Lydia Lopokova,* 1920s © National Portrait Gallery, London (p. 134)

Chapter Three

Studies of the Artist's Father, Brothers and Sister, 1909 (dated), red chalk on paper, 28.6 x 21.6 cm, (held in Tate store, 2014) (p. 136)

Self-portrait, suggest 1909–10 (also dated as 1911), coloured pencil on paper, 23.6 x 18.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (p. 137)

Portrait of a Boy Wearing a Blue Scarf (self-portrait) suggested date 1908–10 (also dated c.1909–12 and c.1911–13 National Portrait Gallery), watercolour, pencil and blue crayon, 27 x 25.8 cm, National Portrait Gallery (p. 138)

Self-portrait, c.1920, charcoal and red chalk, 35.6 x 25.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (p. 140)

Portrait (*Self-portrait*), *c.*1920, drawing, Hampstead Library (p. 140)

*Self-portrait, c.*1919, woodcut for Mansard Gallery 1920 catalogue, 7.5 x 5 cm (p. 141)

E. McKnight-Kauffer, poster for Group X exhibition, 1920 (p. 142)

The Stockbroker's Clerk (aka *The Usurer*), 1920, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 63.5 cm, British Council (p. 143)

Seated Woman (Sarah), 1920, pencil on paper, 33 x 33 cm Arts Council Collection (p. 143)

Stretching Man (aka *Standing Figure*), *c.*1920, charcoal and blue crayon, 47 x 32 cm, private collection (p. 144)

Self-portrait, 1923, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4 cm, private collection (p. 145)

Wyndham Lewis, *Self-portrait*, pencil on paper, 1927, published in © *The Enemy, A journal of Art and Literature* (p. 146)

Henry Lamb, *Henry Lamb*, 1914, oil on panel, 36.8 x 31.8 cm, © National Portrait Gallery (p. 147)

Wyndham Lewis, *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a* Tyro, self-portrait, 1920-21, oil on canvas, 73 x 44 cm, Ferens Art Gallery, Hull City Museums and Art Gallery (p. 148)

Wyndham Lewis, *Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael*, 1921, oil on canvas, 76.3 x 68.6 cm,© Manchester City Galleries (p. 148)

Self-portrait Wearing a Cap, 1928-1931[1], oil on canvas, 55.9 x 35.9 cm, Tate (p. 151)

Self-portrait, *c.*1930, conté crayon, 33.0 cm x 25.4 cm), private collection (p. 152)

[1] Dated as 1931 on Tate website; also dated as 1928 in Roberts, *Paintings and Drawings 1917–1958* and 1929 in Gibbon Williams, *William Roberts*

Woman Standing, c.1920, black and red chalk, location unknown (p. 153)

The Red Turban (Sarah), 1921, oil on canvas (103 x 82.2 cm), Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield (p. 154)

Portrait of Sarah, the Artist's Wife (aka *La Femme Tragique*), *c.*1921, oil on canvas, 76 cm x 51 cm, private collection (p. 154)

Titian, *Man with a Glove*, c. 1520, oil on canvas, © Musée du Louvre, 100 × 89 cm (p. 155)

Sarah (aka *Girl Standing with Arms Folded*), 1922, watercolour, 45 x 33.5 cm, private collection (p. 156)

Sarah, 1925, pencil on red paper, 31.3 x 23.8 cm, Estate of John David Roberts (held in Tate store, 2014) (p. 157)

Sarah, *c.*1925, red chalk, 29.5 x 23.2 cm, Estate of John David Roberts (held in Tate store, 2014) (p. 158)

Sarah, 1922, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, Manchester City Art Galleries (p. 158)

Girl in Mauve Hat (aka *Sarah*), 1923, oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (p. 159)

William Roberts painting Sarah, 1923, photograph, courtesy Mr. & Mrs. Tony Baker[2] (p. 160)

Bath-night (aka *The Wash*), 1929, oil on canvas, 40.5 x 51 cm, Bolton Museum and Art Gallery (p. 161)

Jacob Kramer, *Portrait of Sam Nagley,* 1922, oil on canvas, 75 x 62 cm, © Ben Uri Gallery (p. 163)

Jacob Kramer, *Dorothy Parker*, 1928, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 64.1 cm, © Tate (p. 163)

Jacob Kramer, *Head of Sarah Kramer*, c. 1920, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.5 cm, private collection (p. 164)

Jewish Melody, 1920–21, oil on canvas, 160 x 90 cm (estimated size), mostly destroyed (p. 165)

Head of Woman [Cecilia Kramer] (aka *Head of Old Woman*), detail from *Jewish Melody*, 1920–21, oil on canvas, 33.7 x 28.5 cm, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (p. 166)

Augustus John, *Woman Smiling*, oil on canvas, 196 x 98.2 cm, 1908-9, © Tate (p. 166)

Sarah with Guitar (aka *The Banjo*, Chenil Galleries 1923) - a study for *Jewish Melody*, 1920-21, pencil, 52.5 x 30 cm (p. 167)

A Gypsy Girl, 1925–6, oil on canvas, 41.5 x 31.2 cm (p. 167)

Sarah and John Roberts, c. 1921. Photograph. Image courtesy of Pauline Paucker (p. 168)

---

[2] Andrew Gibbon Williams, *William Roberts: An English Cubist* (London: Lund Humphries, 2004), p. 72.

Sarah (aka *A Woman*), 1927, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, Manchester City Art Galleries (p. 168)

Thoughts (aka *Sarah*), 1929, oil on canvas, 50 x 39.5 cm, private collection (Sir Barnett Stross MP) (p. 169)

Wyndham Lewis, *Froanna (Portrait of the Artist's Wife)*, 1937, oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm, © Glasgow City Council (p. 170)

Wyndham Lewis, *Pensive Woman*, 1938, oil on canvas, 59.4 x 44.5 cm, © Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery (p. 171)

Stanley Spencer, *Nude, Portrait of Patricia Preece*, 1935, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 50.8cm, © Ferens Art Gallery, Hull (p. 172)

Stanley Spencer, *Self-Portrait With Patricia Preece*, 1936, oil on canvas, 61 x 91.5 cm, © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (p. 172)

The Artist and His Wife, 1942–3, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, private collection (p. 173)

The Artist and His Wife, 1975, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 64.2 cm, National Portrait Gallery (p. 173)

John, study for etching, c.1925, pencil, 11.7 x 7 cm, location unknown (p. 175)

John with a Caterpillar (aka *Portrait of John, the Artist's Son*), 1927-30, red chalk on paper, 26.7 x 21, location unknown (p. 175)

Portrait of a Boy (aka John and Boy in a Blue Jersey), c.1929, oil on canvas, 69 x 60 cm, Methyr Tydfil (p. 176)

The Schoolboy (aka Paul Rimmer – Friend of John), 1930, oil on canvas, 43.5 x 33 cm, private collection (p. 176)

Sandro Botticelli, A Young Man, c.1480-5, tempura and oil on wood, 37.5 x 28.3 cm, © National Gallery, London (p. 177)

Portrait of a Schoolboy, c.1930, oil on canvas, 43.2 x 33 cm, private collection (p. 178)

Portrait of a Schoolboy with Braces, c.1930, oil on canvas, 43.2 x 33cm, private collection (p. 178)

Sarah Pregnant (aka Study (Chenil Galleries 1923) and Woman Standing (Tate Gallery 1965)), pre-June 1919, pencil and brown ink, 50.5 x 22 cm, once owned by artist Diana Gurney, present location unknown (p. 179)

John (aka John Roberts), 1938, pencil, 33 x 22.5 cm, © Estate of John David Roberts (held in Tate store, 2014) (p. 180)

Introduction

William Roberts, RA (1895-1980), painted portraits throughout his career; indeed the earliest evidence of his artistic talent and skill was in portrait form. This paper will examine the development of Roberts's portraits particularly through the 1920s – which will be argued as very discrete development from that of his primary body of work, which also evolved fundamentally through this decade. His entire seventy-year oeuvre can be characterized as figurative, the better-known work including groups of people in everyday settings, going about their lives, typically in London. Prior to the 1920s, Roberts's style has been described as geometric abstraction, or specifically Vorticist, owing to his brief association with Wyndham Lewis in 1914-15. During the 1920s, however, Roberts's figures gained more volume and rounder shapes, leading to his familiar illustrative, tubular style of decades to come.

Roberts's portraiture, however, evolved more gradually in the 1920s demonstrating his skilled draughtsmanship, observational technique, and an ability to simplify and translate visual information into a very modern, sophisticated depiction of his sitters. These portraits served important documentary, technical and practical purposes for Roberts in the 1920s, and can be broadly categorized into three sets, including formal commissions of distinguished people; pictures of less important, but no less distinctive personae; and family portraits of himself, his wife Sarah and son John.

Whilst painting people characterises all of Roberts's oeuvre, he excelled in capturing the character of *individuals* in portrait form throughout the inter-war period. This aspect of his career has been insufficiently covered in published scholarship. By focusing on this particular bracket of time, and a selection of pictures, this paper aims to 1) add depth to William Roberts scholarship and research; 2) critically examine his portrait painting technique and stylistic development – relative to his own work and that of contemporary artists; 3) place his portraiture in the context of his overall oeuvre – by explicating the foundations and influences informing his portrait painting – personal / family, artistic, social, historic and practical / financial; and 4) investigate the influence

and role of patronage and portrait commissions on Roberts's career, including figures like T.E. Lawrence, Augustus John, the Sitwell family, and John Maynard Keynes.

By meeting those objectives, the dissertation will aim to argue that 1) portraiture was not only a means to an end for William Roberts in the 1920s to fund his work and expenses, but also a rich expression of his innate talent and acquired skills; 2) stylistically, portraiture provided a medium for Roberts to explore and refine his technique – sharpening observation skills, broadening his palette, testing new brushwork – which was then honed for his better known idiosyncratic genre painting; and 3) selected portraits of the 1920s represent some of the finer examples of Roberts's overall oeuvre, relative to his ability to capture the human form, character, personality and expression – and excel in comparison with other contemporary artists at the time, for example Henry Lamb, Stanley Spencer, Wyndham Lewis, and David Bomberg, and to his own later portraiture.

The structure of the dissertation will be thematic, as opposed to strictly chronological, and is organised into three chapters:

Chapter One: The T.E. Lawrence Commissions: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *Aircraftman Shaw;*

Chapter Two: Ordinary and Extraordinary People of 1920s London;

Chapter Three: Family: William, Sarah and John Roberts.

This structure will allow for the examination of several portraits in each chapter that illustrate each theme, and therefore further our understanding of Roberts's work in context. This introduction will aim therefore to provide sufficient historical background and logic to rationalise the themes of the chapters.

Family portrait sketches from 1909 provide the earliest evidence of William Roberts's exceptional draughtsmanship, which earned the Hackney boy an apprenticeship in the commercial art department of Sir Joseph Causton Ltd., in

Eastcheap.[3] To hone his innate skill, Roberts developed from an early age a work ethic that saw him through to his death, aged 85, at his Primrose Hill studio in 1980. Whilst at Caustons, a firm that designed posters and advertisements, Roberts developed a practical appreciation for composition and printing processes; and in the evenings, he attended classes at St Martin's School of Art. His lifelong habit of walking and observing the life and characters of London started at this time, as the impressionable Roberts traversed miles each day from home in Hackney to Eastcheap to Holborn and home again.[4]

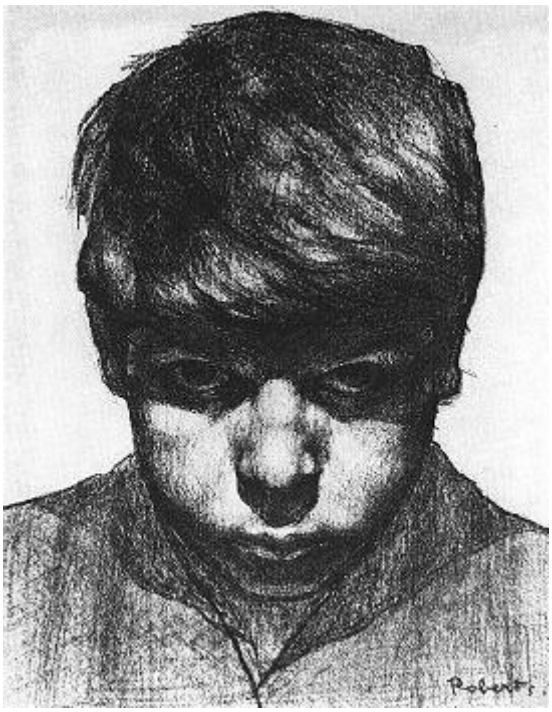
Studies of the Artist's Father, Brothers and Sister, 1909 (dated), red chalk on paper, 28.6 x 21.6, Tate

In 1910, at the age of 15, he won a London County Council scholarship to the Slade School of Art, thus ending his commercial art apprenticeship. The pre-war years of the Slade have been referred to as the school's golden age - well documented in David Boyd-Haycock's *A Crisis of Brilliance*, and the subject of the 2013 show of the same name at the Dulwich Picture Gallery. The greatest British artists of the first half of the twentieth century attended the Slade at this time, including Stanley Spencer, CRW Nevinson, Dora Carrington, Mark Gertler, Jacob

[3] Andrew Heard, *William Roberts (1895-1980)* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle, 2004), p. 16.
[4] Andrew Gibbon Williams, *William Roberts: An English Cubist* (London: Lund Humphries, 2004), p. 11.

Kramer, David Bomberg, and Edward Wadsworth. Charles Harrison describes the Slade at this time as educating 'as heterogeneous a generation of students, in terms of origin, class and previous experience as had ever assembled together in an English art school.'[5] This disparate class and cultural exposure, we shall see, figures in Roberts's portraiture in the decades ahead.

Wyndham Lewis – a seminal character throughout Roberts's career - had previously attended the Slade, as had others who feature less directly, yet are well known for their association with Roger Fry - Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. Nevinson, Wadsworth, Bomberg and Kramer were most influential in and close to Roberts in these years leading up to the First World War; and it is Jacob Kramer's sister Sarah whom Roberts married and formed his richest lifelong relationship. Roberts's earliest development in the sphere of portraiture can be traced from the studies of his family to an early self-portrait executed around 1911.'[6]



Self-portrait, suggest 1909–10 (also dated as 1911), coloured pencil on paper, 23.6 cm x 18.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

[5] Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*, (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 1981), p. 66.
[6] Heard, p. 19.

At the Slade, Roberts was under the influential training of Professor Henry Tonks, a champion of the European tradition of disciplined, life drawing and draughtsmanship. Tonks was also a member of the New English Art Club, and thus a conscientious objector to the perceived autocracy and artistic constraints of the Royal Academy. Through Tonks's and fellow professor Philip Wilson Steer's (a founder of the NEAC) direction, Roberts built his multi-staged discipline, derived from the Continent, of drawing, followed by intermediate watercolour, and squaring up toward the finished oil – a practice he repeated through the rest of his career. He and Dora Carrington received the Slade Scholarship for their proven draughtsmanship skills in 1913.

But Roberts, along with his fellow students, looked beyond the Slade for inspiration, and was keenly aware of the European avant-garde. Roberts attended the lectures on Post-Impressionism given by Roger Fry, who was largely responsible for introducing modern art to England through the seminal show, *Manet and Post-Impressionism* which he had organised in 1910, at the Grafton Galleries, premiering in England the work of Gauguin, van Gogh and Cézanne.[7]

Roberts's formal training - at the Slade, St Martin's and even the abbreviated apprenticeship at Caustons - can be grouped as one significant strand of technical development to inform the work of the 1920s. The second formative strand encompasses the 'external' influences that inspired Roberts from the end of his Slade years up to and upon his return from service during the First World War.

This second strand of influence includes artists, patrons and exhibitions, as well as the emerging Bohemian life of London. Roberts travelled to France and Italy during the summer after completing his Slade studies: 'I became an abstract painter through the influence of the French Cubists; this influence was further strengthened by a stay in France and Italy during summer of 1913,' [8] notes

[7] Gibbon Williams, p. 16.
[8] Ibid., p. 19.

Roberts's biographer Andrew Gibbon Williams, where it is most likely that Roberts was able to observe first hand the work of Picasso, Matisse and Leger, the last of whose tubular and mechanical figures very likely inspired Roberts's mature figurative style.

Upon his return to London, Roberts, penniless, moved in with fellow artists Bernard Meninsky, John Flannigan, Colin Gill and Geoffrey Nelson, together forming a makeshift artist colony in Cumberland Market. Here Roberts commenced his first body of abstract painting. Whist searching for a source of income to fund his work, he was befriended by poet and oriental art expert, Laurence Binyon, who provided a letter of introduction to Roger Fry, who was recruiting artists for the Omega workshop he'd set up at 33 Fitzroy Square. The Omega Workshop, which became closely aligned with the Bloomsbury Group, sought to fuse art and design through visually graphic, functional domestic products such as rugs, screens, furniture and textiles (whilst officially liquidated in 1919, Omega's aesthetic and ethos continue today in the fabric, lampshade and scarf designs of Cressida Bell, granddaughter of Vanessa Bell and grandniece of Virginia Wolf).

> For Roberts, this job at the Omega not only represented regular income, it meant he was attaching himself to what amounted to London's avant-garde powerhouse. Fry, through his advocacy of "significant form" which he identified in Post-Impressionism, was acknowledged as the prime champion of modern art in England.[9]

In later years Roberts, as did other artists, notably Wyndham Lewis, distanced themselves from Fry and his association with intellectual elitism and the Bloomsbury Group; however, at this time, Fry was an influential means to an end, and source of a widening network of patrons and opportunities which Roberts was to benefit from going forward. This evidence of work ethic, opportunistic pragmatism – making introductions, aligning with people of influence – characterised this early phase of Roberts's career and directly led to gainful employment, inclusion in exhibitions and future portrait commissions.

[9] Ibid., p. 20.

Fellow Slade artists, Bomberg, Wadsworth, Kramer and Nevinson – and particularly the last's fascination with Italian Futurism, are of note. Roberts attended an Italian Futurist art exhibition at the Sackville Gallery in 1912, which included work by its primary proponent Filippo Marinetti, who had been visiting England since 1910. Both Futurist and Cubist influences from the Continent informed Roberts's more angular, abstracted figurative drawing and painting from 1913 to 1920.

Bomberg – along with Meninsky and Kramer – were Roberts's closest friends at the Slade, and despite the school's commitment to diversity, it is posited that Roberts related to them as Jews, and thus of a different 'other' nature like him, an Irish East Ender, relative to the majority of middle class English students. Bomberg in particular developed a highly individualistic style primarily influenced by continental Cubism, and his 'fiercely independent artistic personality synchronised with Roberts's own.'[10] It is during this period that Roberts produced *The Return of Ulysses* which, owing to Roberts's association with Fry, was accepted for the December 1913 New English Art Club exhibition, and in January 1915, Fry invited him to exhibit with his Grafton Group at the Alpine Club Gallery.

[10] Ibid., p. 22.

The Return of Ulysses, *c.*1913, oil on canvas, 30 cm x 45 cm, Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham.

Wyndham Lewis, twelve years Roberts's senior, had also graduated from the Slade, and had ties with Fry, including a fractious break-up when he walked out of the Omega workshops, fed up with the prescribed, insubstantial and decorative aspects of the studio's work. He created a rival establishment at 38 Great Ormond Street under the moniker of the Rebel Art Centre. Throughout 1914, Lewis worked his influence on Roberts, eventually convincing him to exhibit two works at the Centre, and thus co-opting Roberts involuntarily into his band of 'Modernist revolutionaries.'[11]

Thus we enter the well-documented 'Vorticist Year' 1914-15, whereby Roberts was unwittingly associated with the 'revolutionary' activities of the Rebel Art Centre led by Lewis.

> Lewis had come to the view that the visual arts as merely one element in a larger cultural war [sic] that might overturn all of the tired nostrums, prejudices and conventions that persisted into the new century from Victorian times. For him, art possessed the potential to transform society itself; the entirety of western culture needed to be wrenched out of the doldrums of

[11] Ibid., p. 22.

> bourgeois passivity and forced to correspond with the new violent age of the machine.[12]

Lewis enlisted others such as American born poet Ezra Pound, and sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska to the effort.

In contrast to Nevinson's passionate alignment with Marinetti and the Futurists, Roberts found himself a somewhat 'accidental' Vorticist, when in 1914, the two works lent to Lewis were published in the first of two editions of *BLAST* and his name added as signatory to its manifesto. He was 'blissfully ignorant' of the Vorticist movement he'd been co-opted into[13]. Roberts's well-documented reluctant association with, and argumentation against the legitimacy of, Vorticism as a movement, is the worthy topic of a dissertation itself. However, suffice to say, it is important in understanding the formative influences of his avant-garde, cubistic style of the 1910s and early 1920s, glimmers of which flicker in selected portraits to be discussed in this paper. This association – whether welcome or not – was manifest again with Roberts's inclusion in the 'Group X' show at The Mansard Gallery in 1920, along with Lewis, Wadsworth, Bomberg, Charles Ginner, Charles Hamilton, Frank Dobson, John Turnbull, Jessica Dismorr, Helen Saunders and the American photographer and graphic artist, E. McKnight-Kauffer.[14]

Whilst the Lewis-Roberts relationship is typically referred to in the context of Vorticism, this paper will compare the portraiture of the two artists where there are both strong parallels and stark contrasts. Lewis's dual career as artist and writer, and his both intimate and fractious relationships with his sitters and London's intelligentsia are very disparate from Roberts's more distanced and introverted aspect. What they share is an appreciation for and comfort with the inherent tension between modernist abstraction and the naturalism required to capture a sitter's likeness. It is important - and curious - to note that Lewis took nearly a decade hiatus from oil painting during most of the 1920s to concentrate

[12] Ibid., p. 23.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., p. 55.

on his writing (explaining the duration of 1923-35 dating of his famous portrait of Edith Sitwell), and thus Roberts's own advancements in modernist portraiture during this time are by definition singular in comparison to Lewis.

The third strand of pre-1920s influence is The Great War itself, which had a fundamental developmental effect on the man that Roberts became entering the 1920s. The brutality and tedium of his experience at the Front – recorded in his own memoir, *4.5 Howitzer Gunner Royal Field Artillery 1916–1918; Memories of the War to End War 1914–1918,* published in 1974, and in letters to his future wife Sarah Kramer – certainly affected and enriched his appreciation of human character, whilst reinforcing through the relentless routine of service the workmanlike approach to painting for which he is known – even from such a young age.

The *Howitzer* memoir includes several vignettes and observations from training at Woolwich and Weedon barracks and the Front which leave an impression of Roberts's disillusionment, if not disdain, for the trappings of authority and class which are paradoxically integral to the hierarchy of military structure - when set against the stark and brutal equivalence of all soldiers' vulnerability in war.

> Toward the end of 1916, our battery moved to the Ypres sector. At the same time we took on a new commander, Major Morrison. He was a tall, handsome, square-jawed man, very alert, every inch a regular soldier. It was the rule that the Major should be with the guns while the second-in-command, the Captain, would have control of the wagon lines. In our battery this position was held by Captain Logan, an officer who was very particular as to the smartness of his personal appearance. Due to the skill of his batman the Captain's Sam-Browne and jackboots always had a mirror-like sparkle and brilliance that was the envy of the other officers and their batmen. It was true he seldom had need to put his feet to the ground, preferring as a rule to be mounted, seated well above the mire, upon a horse whose saddle and harness were as brilliant as his own equipment.[15]

[15] William Roberts, *4.5 Howitzer Gunner Royal Field Artillery 1916–1918; Memories of the War to End War 1914–1918.* This was first published (London, 1974) as *Memories of the War to End War 1914–18* (on the title page) or *4.5 Howitzer Gunner R.F.A. 1916–1918* (on the cover). Text and title are from William Roberts, *Five Posthumous Essays and Other Writings* (London: Valencia, 1990). Available at http://englishcubist.co.uk/howitzer.html [accessed 26 September 2015].

Roberts's keen observational skills, and physical experiences - mending communication wires under fire in deep mud and torrential rain; handling, loading and transporting the heavy guns - would have built a rich mental archive of human character types, emotions, gestures, etc., from which to draw for the

Tommies Filling Their Water Bottles with Rain from a Shell Hole, Aug. 1918, ink, pencil, chalk and watercolour, 50.8 cm x 38.1 cm. Imperial War Museum

The Germans First Gas Attack at Ypres 1918 (commissioned by the Canadian War Records Office), 1918, oil on canvas, 304.8 x 365.8, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

rest of his life. This is particularly evident in Roberts's official war artist commission for the Canadians, *The Germans First Gas Attack at Ypres 1918*, which

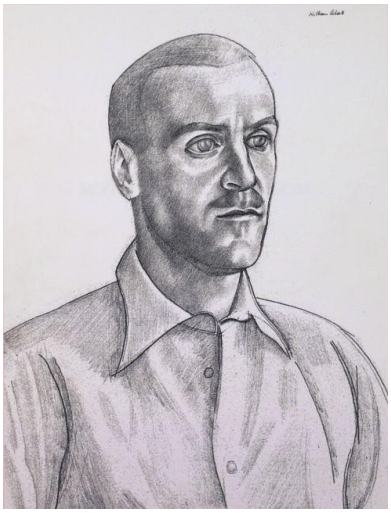
includes many 'portraits' of soldiers' faces, and horrific expressions in the heat of battle.

Viewing Roberts's 1920s portraits – and early London genre paintings – through the prism of his war experience helps to interpret their meaning and significance.

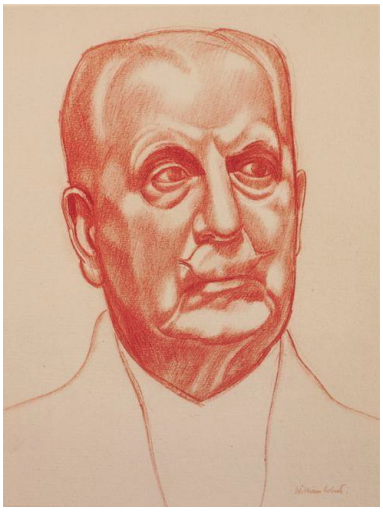
To illustrate the influence of war on Roberts's ability to capture a range of human character in portrait form, the First Chapter will examine a body of work commissioned by T.E. Lawrence. Together, these drawings and paintings represent Roberts's most significant commission during the 1920s: a set of portraits commissioned to illustrate Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), published in 1926 (and again in 1935), leading to the chapter's main focus - a portrait painting in oil of T.E. Lawrence himself - the well-known *Aircraftman Shaw (aka Portrait of T.E. Lawrence),* 1922 (92 x 61 cm), gifted to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford by A.W. Lawrence in 1946.

Colonel S. F. Newcombe DSO, 1922, pencil, 35.5 x 33 cm, private collection

Colonel Sir Henry McMahon, 1922, pencil (original lost); annotated proof plate (25.5 x 19 cm), Bodleian Library, Oxford



Captain Robin Buxton, 1922, pencil (original lost); annotated proof plate (25.5 x 19 cm), Bodleian Library, Oxford



General Sir Reginald Wingate, 1922, sanguine, 34.4 x 29.9 cm, Harry Ramsden Humanities Research Center, University of Texas

The initial *Seven Pillars* portrait commissions by Roberts include four in total; three done in pencil on paper of 1) Colonel S.F. Newcombe DSO, 1922 (35.5 x 33 cm), 2) Colonel Sir Henry McMahon, 1922, and 3) Major Robin Buxton, 1922 (collotype proof, 25.5 x 19 cm); and one in 'sanguine' or red chalk of 4) General Sir Reginald Wingate, 1922 (34.4 x 29.9 cm). Each will be presented with background notes on the sitters, as contemporary context to the primary examination of the T.E. Lawrence portrait.

Aircraftman Shaw (aka Portrait of T.E. Lawrence), oil on canvas, 92 x 61 cm, 1922, Ashmolean Museum

The significance of this portrait - beyond the obvious significance of its sitter - is its deceptive simplicity and historic context. Lawrence commissioned Roberts to paint this picture in 1922, which Roberts completed in his rented rooms in Earl's Court. In August that year, Lawrence, seeking the welcome camaraderie, structure and routine of military service, had enlisted in the Royal Air Force as John Hume Ross (the portrait is also referred to as *Aircraftman Ross*), a pseudonym chosen to avoid his 'Lawrence of Arabia' notoriety; he was found out, however, and forced to stand down. Following a short, unhappy enlistment with the Tank Corps as T.E. Shaw, in August 1925, Lawrence was allowed to re-enlist with the R.A.F. as Aircraftman Shaw.

Roberts thus has captured a decorated war hero, international diplomat, and man of deep cultural sophistication and learning, purposely masquerading as a stalwart serviceman. But the strength of Lawrence's character – expressed in the focus and animation of the eyes and powerful stance – conveys a true connection between painter and sitter, soldier to soldier. Lawrence is known to have appreciated the work, as expressed in a letter to Roberts's mentor and fellow war artist, Eric Kennington:

> Dear Kennington
> […]
> I'm very glad you are helping Roberts. He makes help difficult sometimes, and yet I feel that I would like the oyster if I had any tool strong enough to pry it open. Tell me sometime what you think of his considered effort of me. He painted with astonishing certainty: not like John who put a new expression in [my] eyes and mouth on each sitting: but as though there was a fixity in my appearance and mood.
> […][16]

Moving beyond the Lawrence project, Chapter Two of this dissertation will demonstrate the broader range of portraiture that Roberts produced in the 1920s by examining a selection of works capturing 'real people' in Roberts's life – from the elite to the everyday to the exotic.

Roberts was well positioned given his training and contacts from the Slade for portrait commission referral. Moreover, he found himself in the heart of Bohemian London during and after the War, where his network and nightlife in the circle of Augustus John, Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell, and art critic P.G. Konody, meant that a rich portfolio of interesting faces and personalities populated his life in these years. He also needed to earn money; portraiture was therefore a means to a financial end, as well as a useful way to market his abilities and gain greater exposure.

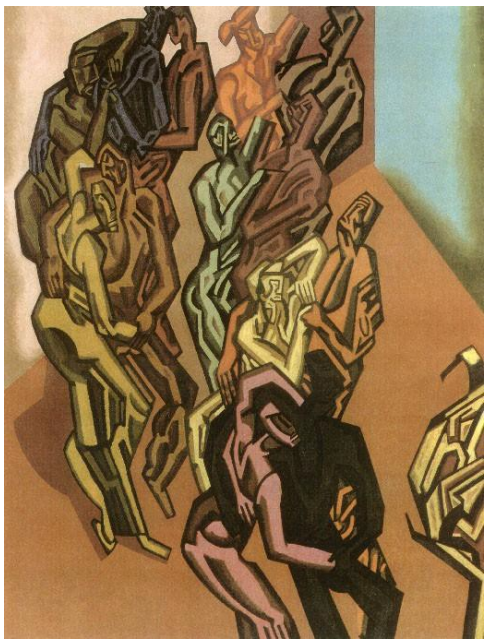
It is uncertain how Roberts first came into contact with Osbert Sitwell, but they most possibly met at Rudolf Stulik's popular Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel in Percy Street, frequented by Lewis, Augustus John and the Sitwells. Roberts had been

---

[16] Malcolm Brown, *The Letters of T.E. Lawrence* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1988), T.E. Lawrence to Eric Kennington (27.06.23), p. 240.

commissioned by Stulik to paint two panels to decorate the establishment's private dining room: *The Diners* and *The Dancers*, both 1919. That year, Osbert

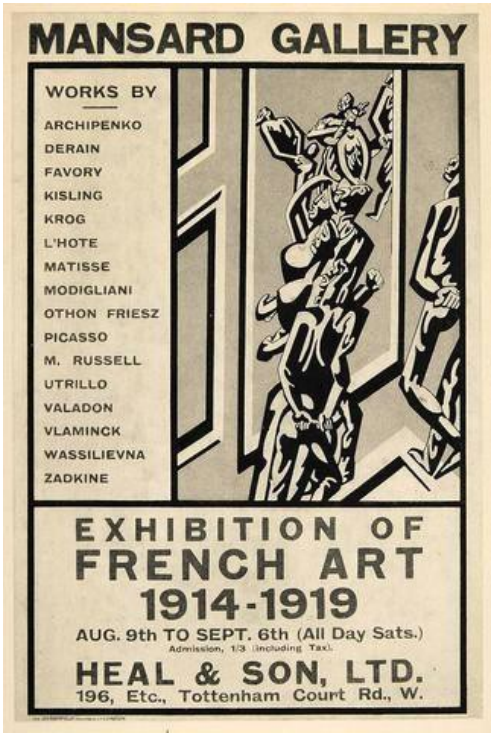
The Diners, 1919 (painted for the Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel), oil on canvas, 152.4 x 83.2 cm, Tate



The Dancers, 1919 (painted for the Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel), oil on canvas, 152 x 116.5 cm, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow

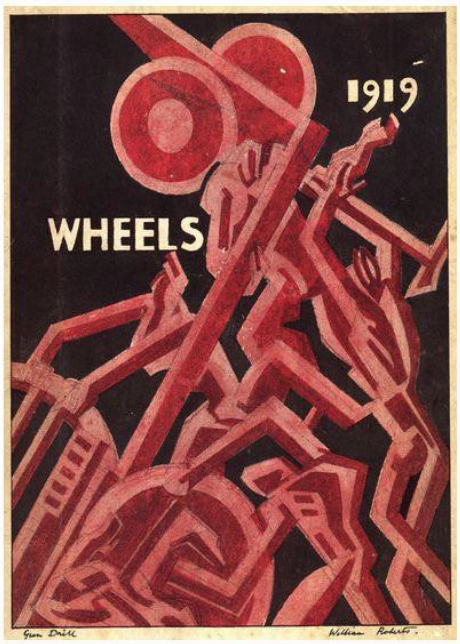
commissioned Roberts to design a poster for an exhibition of French avant-garde art which the Sitwells mounted at the Mansard Gallery at Heals on Tottenham Court Road. This show famously introduced Modigliani for the first time to an English audience – and also included works by Picasso, Leger, Derain and Dufy.[17]

This project led to further commissions from Edith, Sacheverell and Osbert who were actively progressing and promoting their literary projects through the late 1910s and 1920s; Roberts illustrated *Wheels,* a literary journal Edith edited, as well as designed end papers for *At the House of Mrs Kinfoot*, Osbert's novel of 1921. For these projects, Roberts returned to his pre-war Cubist / Vorticist style of angular, abstracted figures and sharp diagonal compositions.

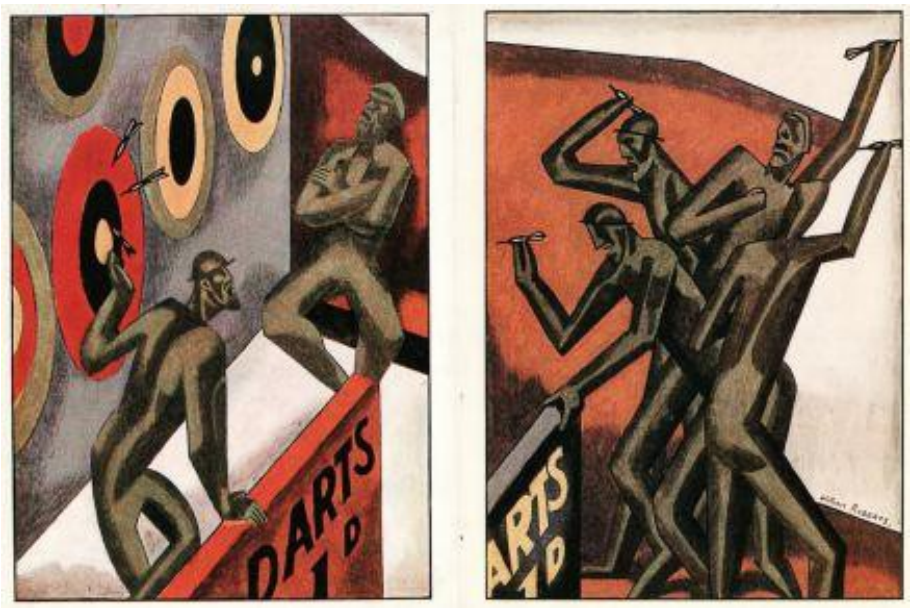


Poster for the Exhibition of French Art 1914–1919 (Mansard Gallery, Heal's), 1919, poster, 75 cm x 48 cm

[17] Gibbon Williams, p. 52.



Wheels 1919 cover design (using *Gun Drill c.*1919) for *Wheels* no. 4, 1919



Wheels 1919, two endpieces for volume of poetry published by Osbert Sitwell, 1919

At the House of Mrs Kinfoot (endpaper for the book of the same title by Osbert Sitwell, published by the Favil Press), 1921

Known for their own prolific creativity, the Sitwell family were also great patrons of the arts, and were variously captured in portraits by Frank Dobson (*Osbert Sitwell*, bronze, Tate, 1923), and Wyndham Lewis (*Edith Sitwell*, Tate, 1921-35). Ironically, there are no known formal portraits of the Sitwells executed by Roberts himself.

Frank Dobson, *Osbert Sitwell,* 1923, bronze, 31.8 x 17.8 x 22.9 cm, © Tate

Wyndham Lewis, *Edith Sitwell* (1923-35), oil on canvas, 86.4 x 111.8 cm, © Tate

Whilst it is conjectured by Roberts's biographers that he, like Lewis, may have despised his patrons' intellectual elitist tendencies, he conscientiously completed his commissions and benefited from the ongoing work and referrals. Indeed, for another project, Roberts depicted the Sitwells leading an avant-garde charge for the cover of *Coterie* – another literary journal they supported and contributed to in 1919 - hoisting a battering ram against philistinism.[18]

Coterie No. 3, December 1919, cover and title page image, 19 x 25.5 cm

Osbert became one of Roberts's most active early collectors, acquiring several watercolours Roberts reluctantly parted with in 1919, and also commissioned him to paint two pictures, the subject matter of which to be Roberts's own

[18] Ibid., p. 52.

choosing. Only one was completed: *The Interval before Round 10*, 1919, is the best of Roberts's paintings depicting boxing, and has been noted for its brighter palette and more volumetric figures,[19] relative to his earlier work.

The first portrait to be examined in Chapter Two is that or P.G. Konody, an influential art critic for both *The Observer* and the *Daily Mail* before the First World War, and one of three critics to be 'blessed' by Wyndham Lewis in *BLAST* No. 1.[20] Konody was influential in securing Roberts's commission for *The First German Gas Attack at Ypres* in 1918. This portrait – like many others in this paper -- was exhibited at Roberts's first solo exhibition at the Chenil Galleries in 1923, priced £35. Whilst considered lost for decades, the picture has been found to be in the Konody family possession since that date.

The Art Critic (P. G. Konody), 1920, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm, private collection

The second picture in this chapter is *The Creole (aka Portrait of a Negress - Helène Yellin)*, 1923. This oil – which has been exhibited more than ten times since its execution - depicts the wife of musician W. Yellin, both of whom performed in Soho clubs in the 1920s, including the Harlequin Café in Beak Street, frequented by Augustus John, Jacob Epstein, and Sarah and William Roberts. Helène posed for Roberts as well as Jacob Epstein, a bronze cast by

[19] Ibid., p. 52.
[20] David Cleall, ed., William Roberts catalogue raisonné, http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 26 September 2015].

whom is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. This picture was purchased from the Chenil show in 1923 by the Contemporary Art Society, and gifted to the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent in 1937.

The *Creole* (aka *Portrait of a Negress – Hélène Yelin*), oil on canvas, 60.7 x 50.5, 1923, City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

Of particular note is the fact that Roberts often used his portrait sitters as dramatis personae for group figurative works; for example, Helène and Jacob Kramer recognizably appear in *The Joke*, 1923. *The Creole* portrait and this related café scene in tandem also demonstrate a significant *leitmotif* in Roberts's work to be examined in Chapter Two - that of observing, capturing and celebrating London's diversity of race, religion, class and culture – well in advance of such objectives becoming fashionable or politically correct.

The Joke, 1923, oil on canvas, 75 x 62.5 cm, private collection

The third picture is far lesser known than *The Creole*, and depicts Frederick Knewstub, *Fred*, 1920–23, oil on canvas (62.5 cm x 51 cm). This picture, which

Fred, 1920–23, oil on canvas, 62.5 x 51 cm, private collection

was also exhibited in the Chenil show, is significant not only for important details of its execution, but for its place and resonance in the context of Roberts's career. Frederick Knewstub (1909–2001) was a nephew of John Knewstub, proprietor of the Chenil Galleries. Two related works will be referenced for context: *Kit*, 1923, which portrays Fred's sister Kate (Kit) Knewstub, now at Wolverhampton, and *Elsie* (*Portrait of a Young Woman*), 1922-23 at York City Art Gallery, portraying the nanny of John Knewstub's daughter, Deirdre, cousin to Fred and Kit. Executionally, *Fred* is significant owing to Roberts's vibrant, modern palette, and range of brushwork. The treatment of the shirt returns to the jagged shading characteristic of Roberts's sketches and watercolours of Tommies from First World War and earlier Vorticist works, whilst the more defined volume and facets of the face confer a very contemporary, sculptural approach to modelling the boy's head.

The fourth portrait to be examined is that of Esther Lahr. Building on the Sitwell projects and references, Roberts continued to pursue publishing illustration

Esther Lahr, 1925, oil on canvas (50.8 x 40.6 cm), Tate.

work and related portrait commissions. Charles and Esther owned the Progressive Bookshop in Holborn. Alongside this commissioned portrait of Esther, Roberts designed covers for *The New Coterie,* the Lahr's leftwing publication that combined poetry and prose and was published between 1925-27. (The title referenced its pre-curser, *Coterie*, for which Roberts had illustrated the 'Sitwell' cover in 1919). Other illustrators of *The New Coterie* included Jacob Kramer (including a sketch of Esther Lahr), Bernard Meninsky and Frank Dobson. Roberts's work for the Lahrs led to further literary projects including a portrait of H.E. Bates and two book covers for Rhys Davies.[21, 22]

Roberts painted portraits nearly every year of his career. Chapter Three will examine a body of 'family' portraits – those of himself, Sarah (whom he had married in 1922) and John (born in 1919) during the 1920s.

There are an estimated 22 works by Roberts which feature Sarah as portrait sitter or as recognisable figure in his London life 'genre' scenes. She was a willing and experienced sitter, and the range of gestures and expressions she was able to effect through the decades reveal not only her own depth of

[21] Ibid.
[22] *William Roberts & Jacob Kramer, The Tortoise & The Hare* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2003), p. 30.

character and confidence but the trust and connection between subject and artist.

There is a high concentration of 'Sarah' works in the 1920s, partially driven by the practicalities for an emerging artist only just establishing a commissioned portrait business, and the experimentation of an artist in stylistic transition, where the availability of an in-house model provided invaluable material to work through particular situations, expressions and subjects.

> When Sarah asked WR 'whether he didn't get bored with her as a subject, he replied that her face changed all the time and there was always enough interest in the face alone.' [23]

Several works will be examined in detail – three in the context of eight known 1920s self-portraits of Roberts; four of fourteen of Sarah from the decade; and three of John. Roberts's startling and captivating self-portrait of 1923, for example, presents the artist in an honest, clinical light, his right eye centred on the horizontal axis of the composition with riveting focus. There is a modernist

Self-portrait, 1923, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4 cm, private collection

simplicity and softness to the use of colour and shading, rather than hard lines, to define the planes and volume of the face. But this reduction of detail belies the complexity and ambivalence of the expression, which is at once confident yet suspicious, pleasant yet annoyed, engaged yet withdrawn. This painting will be

[23] Ibid., p. 14.

compared to later decade self-portraits, and to that of contemporaries Lewis, Lamb and Spencer.

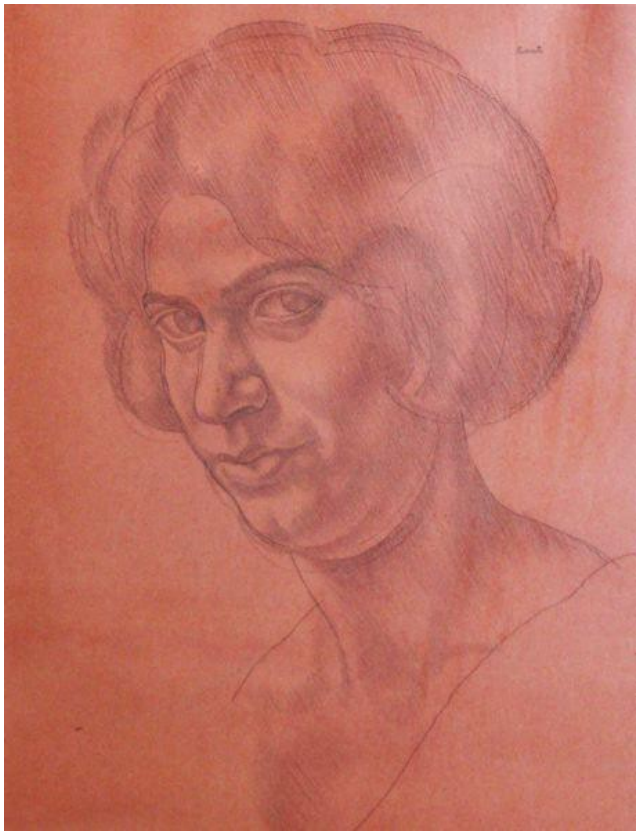
The first known oil painting of Sarah, *The Red Turban* (Sheffield) was completed in 1921. This painting should also be compared to another work of the same

The Red Turban (Sarah), 1921, oil on canvas (103 x 82.2 cm), Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield

year, which draws more directly from classical antecedents, but is no less modern in its execution. *Portrait of Sarah, the Artist's Wife* (aka *La Femme Tragique*), *c.*1921, oil on canvas, 76 cm x 51 cm, has been suggested to draw directly from Titian's *Man with a Glove*, 1520, in the Louvre.

Portrait of Sarah, the Artist's Wife (aka *La Femme Tragique*), *c.*1921, oil on canvas, 76 x 51 cm

A brilliant pencil sketch of *Sarah* from 1925, which was included in the 1984 National Portrait Gallery exhibition has featured in several shows through the decades as 'a virtuoso example of Slade drawing' and similar to many portrait drawings of John, Lamb, and Gertler. Unusually for this date it betrays very little of the cubist or Vorticist influences which had characterised Roberts's[24] pre-war work.



Sarah, 1925, pencil on red paper, 31.3 x 23.8 cm

Another portrait of Sarah, 1922, will be compared to the above drawing, and to later oils which took on more of a caricature nature in the 1940s and onward.

[24] Robin Gibson, *William Roberts 1895 – 1980 – An Artist and His Family* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1984), p. 14.

Sarah, 1922, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, Manchester City Art Galleries

Last, John Roberts portrait of 1929 will be compared to earlier studies of the artist's son from 1922, to other contemporary 'schoolboy' portraits by Roberts, and in turn to images of Sarah, and later pictures of the family.

Portrait of a Boy (aka *John and Boy in a Blue Jersey*), *c.*1929, oil on canvas, 69 x 60 cm, Methyr Tydfil

John, study for etching, *c.*1925, pencil, 11.7 x 7 cm

Before moving to an examination of Roberts's portraits in the next three chapters, it will be useful to set some context for the development of portraiture at this time. Portraiture as a genre evolved fundamentally through the twentieth century. In Britain, as in America, and other highly industrialised nations, portraits were no longer the preserve of the nobility or the governing or military elite. In Britain specifically, bracketing the century for example from Sargent and Whistler (both 'adopted British' artists, as émigrés who spent significant periods in London), to Francis Bacon, Hockney or Freud, this radical shift in the purpose, meaning and execution of portraiture is starkly evident.

This shift is, in essence, a move from documenting or immortalising only the 'important' personae of the day to capturing the personalities of contemporary life, be they significant figures or not - with equal attention, quality and finish. Elizabeth Cayzer, whilst referring to the portraiture of Roberts's fellow Slade student, Mark Gertler, describes this development as 'the examination of the individual's place in the world, the significance of that individual, and what being an individual, and alive, could mean to the sitter.'[25]

[25] Elizabeth Cayzer, *Changing Perceptions: Milestones in Twentieth-Century British Portraiture* (London: The Alpha Press, Ltd., 1998), p. 12.

In the broader context of British art, the portrait played a pivotal role in the establishment of a truly British School argues art historian Robin Simon. His assertion - that William Hogarth's *Captain Coram*, 1740, broke with the traditions of French salon and European court painting by portraying an individual in a less formal, but by no means less impressive way than the established techniques of Van Dyck or Gainsborough – is harmonic with equivalent challenges to the establishment of Modernist portrait painters including Wyndham Lewis, Stanley Spencer or William Roberts, I shall argue, nearly two centuries later. Simon also addresses the fundamental shift in the role and significance of painted portraits in the twentieth century,

> The acceptance of portraiture as a genuinely interesting branch of artistic endeavour, was, paradoxically, decisively reinforced by the advent of photography in the middle years of the nineteenth century, for photography rendered obsolete the hitherto paramount function of the portrait in recording the sitter's appearance. In future, the more personally expressive qualities of paint and brushwork were bound to assume a greater significance…[26]

This celebration of the 'real' or everyday individual in portraiture is of course not peculiar to British art, as evidenced in the brilliant series of portraits by Paul Cézanne of Madame Cézanne, or Van Gogh's insightful works depicting Paul and Marguerite Gachet, or the Postman, or his prolific self-portraits of the 1880s; these echo compositionally and stylistically in Roberts's pictures four decades later, to be discussed in subsequent chapters.

In the 1910s and 1920s, British portraiture seems to have advanced significantly in an avant-garde and 'Modern' direction, with flatter spacial arrangements, more abstracted representation of figures, and brighter, unexpected ranges of colour. Roberts, it can be argued, was at the forefront of that evolution, without necessarily thinking of himself leading the charge. In subsequent chapters, we shall look at parallel or antecedent developments of his contemporaries, particularly Stanley Spencer, Wyndham Lewis and Jacob Kramer. All were taught

[26] Robin Simon, *The Portrait in Britain and America: With a Biographical Dictionary of Portrait Painters 1680-1914* (New York: MacMillan, 1987), p. 19.

in the European tradition at the Slade, but all were influenced to greater of lesser degrees by the European avant-garde, and by each other's work. But it is Roberts, in volume, range and quality of portraiture - particularly in the 1920s - who achieved the highest standard of capturing the character and inner strength of the prolific range of individuals he painted.

In 1920, Roberts was 25 years old. His artistic gift had been enriched through formal training at the Slade and close association with many of the most significant artists, teachers and patrons of the early twentieth century. He was a young father to one-year-old son John, and devoted husband if not reliant partner to Sarah Kramer. He was a stalwart soldier and dutiful war artist, having gained recognition through his commissions, *The Germans First Gas Attack at Ypres* and *Munitions Dump*, both exhibited in 1919 at the Royal Academy. With the youthful energy and proven work-ethic he threw himself into the Bohemian life of London, whilst maintaining a characteristic distance by documenting its people, cultural diversity, cognoscenti and working classes.
By the end of the decade, Roberts developed and refined a style of painting figurative groups in volume and curves that radically departed from the flatter, edgier angles of his pre-War abstractions. In parallel, however, Roberts developed his portraiture skills, steering a more naturalistic, but no less Modern course to capture faces, expressions and characters, most often in refreshing his range of palette and brush technique. These portraits - in quality and quantity - are really without peer, or only by exception during this period, even in the fine work of Spencer or Lewis.

Historiography

The current state of William Roberts scholarship - particularly that focusing on his portraiture - is limited.

Secondary sources

There are two significant surveys - both published in 2004 - which provide comprehensive sources to understand Roberts's biographical history, training and technique, as well as influences throughout his nearly seventy-year career.

The first, ***William Roberts, An English Cubist*****,** by Andrew Gibbon Williams is currently considered the standard monograph for the artist. Fully illustrated, the book is organised chronologically, and includes useful lists of public collections holding Roberts's work, exhibitions and a thorough bibliography. Gibbon Williams fairly redresses the common mislabeling of Roberts as a mere Vorticist acolyte of Wyndham Lewis, by explicating Roberts's own prolific pamphleteering in the mid-1950s, for example, to set the record straight on the state of avant-garde art in England before the First World War. Roberts's self-publishing struggled to overcome the established views of Sir John Rothenstein and the curators of the Tate, but his views were appreciated and incorporated in the scholar Richard Cork's ***Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age***. Gibbon Williams does include several of Roberts's portraits in the book, and captures the Bohemian culture of London in the 1910s and 1920s, but without significant critical depth; indeed, the main text of the book extends to only 144 pages, a fraction of what a typical museum catalogue would offer today for any comprehensive retrospective exhibition.

The second survey, ***William Roberts (1895 – 1980),*** by Andrew Heard, is an exhibition catalogue to accompany a retrospective show of the same title at the Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle and Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, held in the spring and summer of 2004. There were 67 works in the retrospective, of which only seven could be considered portraits. Despite that low percentage, the text does cover the significance of portraiture in Roberts's oeuvre, as evidence of

his keen observation and draughtsmanship skills, and as a foil to the more documentary, illustrative process of Roberts's better known figurative group genre painting, which was more formulaically developed in studio from preliminary sketches, blocking and enlargement - from sketch to watercolour to oil. The contrasting direct observation and painting technique applied to Roberts's portraiture – for which there is scarce evidence of preliminary studies - will be referenced in successive chapters of this paper. The depth of research and contribution from curatorial staff at the Hatton and Graves adds real depth and credibility to this catalogue; and in that context, is a more assiduous reference for this dissertation than the Gibbon Williams. The exhibition included *The Red Turban*, 1921 and *Aircraftman Ross (aka Portrait of T.E. Lawrence)*, 1922, which will be examined in Chapters Three and One, respectively. Heard well synthesizes chronology and theme, examining satire and humour in Roberts's painting for example, whilst including voluminous footnotes, and a range of sources including personal reflections from those who knew Roberts, Sarah and John. The reader and researcher get a true sense of the artist as painter, soldier, writer, family member – along with comprehensive resources for further reference.

Perhaps fitting for this truly Modern artist of the Twentieth Century is the fact that **William Roberts catalogue raisonné** exists wholly online at http://englishcubist.co.uk/ -- the product of the William Roberts Society, a charity established in 1998 to protect the copyright of his work and images there for, as well as to promote knowledge and appreciation of the artist - on behalf of the Estate of John David Roberts. Most images in this paper have been reproduced with permission of the William Roberts Society. The catalogue text has been largely authored and edited by **David Cleall**, with significant contributions from **Pauline Paucker**, a friend of Sarah Roberts, and **Bob Davenport**, all members of the Society. All three have provided invaluable input to this research. As a raisonné, there are comprehensive notes for all known Roberts work, and images for the majority. I have relied on the detailed biographical notes for each of Roberts's *Seven Pillars* sitters, for example, and have attempted to sensitively maintain the integrity of those notes with some

modification for brevity and relevance to my arguments, but not unnecessarily recreated the wheel of the raisonné's thorough research. Soft copies of ***The Vorticist Pamphlets*** and other self-published texts by the artist, including Roberts's memoir of the First World War, ***4.5 Howitzer Gunner Royal Field Artillery 1916–1918; Memories of the War to End War 1914–1918*** have facilitated my research, particularly in bracketing and sourcing images and references to the 1920s. There is also a comprehensive bibliography organised into two categories - works written about or referencing Roberts, and those written by him.

Beyond the above general sources, this paper has been informed by several exhibition catalogues, which provide in-depth provenance of individual works, as well as useful context, according to the focus of the individual show. One uniquely examined Roberts's portraiture: ***William Roberts, An Artist and His Family (1895-1980),*** composed to accompany a show of forty-three works, mostly portraits, and a number of small figurative groups of Roberts and Sarah, or both plus John, produced by the National Portrait Gallery during the summer of 1984. Robin Gibson's introduction surveys the artist's portraiture over seven decades, with particular emphasis on self-portraits and those of Sarah, and the couple together. Gibson makes several useful references to Roberts's composition, meticulous brushwork and symbolic propping - for example the use of caps and braces to convey Roberts's Cockney working class or scarves to refer to Sarah's Jewish ethnicity. Curiously, although a few examples of 1920s portrait paintings are referenced in the text, none were included in the show itself. Moreover, the catalogue entries are sparsely illustrated, and with the exception of a handful of examples, all works for the exhibition were lent by the Roberts's family – underscoring the parochial nature of this one-off show, and suggesting a brilliant opportunity for a more comprehensive exhibition of Roberts's portraiture to be mounted.

Two more recent histories bring to life many or Roberts's contemporaries, friends and colleagues, as well as provide rich contextual material for the period of 1910s and early 1920s, the Slade School and life in England before during and

immediately following the First World War. These are: David Boyd Haycock's ***A Crisis Of Brilliance -- Five Young British Artists and The Great War***, (Old Street Publishing, 2009); and Alexandra Harris's ***Romantic Moderns*** (Thames & Hudson, 2010). As well, these books lead to further references and sources of investigation - particularly primary. There are two limitations of both books in terms of this dissertation: a) the authors concentrate on periods before and after the 1920s, and b) William Roberts is not a primary character in either text.

In 2002, art writer and historian Elizabeth Cayzer -- who has contributed periodically to Roberts scholarship -- delivered a lecture at the National Portrait Gallery, **'William Roberts Portraits'**, as a survey of his portraiture, but with limited critical depth, perhaps due to its format. Her introduction to the catalogue more than two decades earlier: ***William Roberts, R.A., 1895-1980: A Retrospective Exhibition*** (London: Maclean Gallery, 1980), offers a concise digest of Roberts's career. Cayzer's more recent book, ***Changing Perceptions: Milestones in Twentieth-century British Portraiture*** (The Alpha Press, Ltd., London, 1998) provides an abridged history through useful examples of British portrait-making, though conspicuously omits Roberts from her selection of artists.

Along the same lines, this paper includes references to Robin Simon's ***The Portrait in Britain and America: With a Biographical Dictionary of Portrait Painters 1680-1914*** (MacMillan, New York, 1987), in an effort to provide a broader context of the portrait in British art history as well as social satirical painting. These two genres Simon argues well are both part of a truly British tradition stemming back to the Eighteenth Century and Hogarth – which this paper will argue are expertly carried on through Roberts in the 1920s and the rest of his career.

Sources for comparative study of Roberts's contemporaries are many, but most useful for reference purposes are:

***Stanley Spencer, Catalogue* Raisonné,** by Keith Bell (Phaidon, 1992). Spencer, like Roberts is known more for his characteristic 'imaginary' figure groups and landscapes than for his portraiture. Bell addresses this head-on by devoting a thorough chapter on Spencer's portraiture, with detailed reference to the exchange of influences between Spencer, Henry Lamb, Richard Carline and to an extent, Roberts. His 1920s portraiture, as with Roberts's, was more often of friends and colleagues, rather than formal commissions, which came much later in the 1950s – when Spencer was again 'acceptable' in the eyes of the RA. He is known to have admired the work of Roberts, and both shared keen skills of observation and drafting techniques honed under Tonks et al at the Slade. Spencer's most provocative and progressive portraits were largely done in the 1930s: intimate and erotic portraits of Patricia Preece; these echo the intimacy of Roberts's Sarah portraits in the sense of intense character studies, and trust between sitter and artist.

Henry Lamb, The Artist and His Friends, by Keith Clements (Redcliffe, 1985). There is very little evidence of direct contact between Lamb and Roberts; however the parallels in their war experiences, career paths and circles of friends and patrons are remarkable, not to mention the significance of portraiture in their overall oeuvre. Lamb, though of higher formal education and class than Roberts, shared his scepticism of the 'Bloomsberries' and all they stood for. Like Roberts, he had for a period an admiration for and dependency on Augustus John, but was similarly a determined individual in pursuing his talent. In terms of portraiture, whilst Lamb's most famous work, the Tate's *Lytton Strachey*, 1914, falls too early for direct contemporary comparison, two other group portraits are worthy of examination: *The Kennedy Family*, 1921 (private collection), and *The Anrep Family*, 1920 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) - relative to Roberts's own family portrayals, or his portrait of John Maynard Keynes and wife Lydia Lopokova., discussed in Chapter Two.

Paul Edwards's, ***Wyndham Lewis Portraits*** (National Portrait Gallery, London, 2008), succeeds in explicating the role of portraiture in Lewis's dual career as artist and writer, and provides evidence of the stark contrasts between Lewis's

relationships to his sitters and London's intelligentsia and that of Roberts. Edwards addresses the inherent tension between modernist abstraction and the naturalism required to capture a sitter's likeness in Lewis's work, but references Lewis's own views on and comfort with these contradictions.

Wyndham Lewis on Art, Collected Writings 1915-1956, edited by Walter Michel and C.J. Fox (Funk & Wagnalls, 1969) is also a useful companion reference for contemporary art theory and criticism for the first half of the twentieth century. In terms of portraiture, there are some excellent passages with regard to the Lewis's views on the conflict between the required naturalism to capture an individual's likeness and character, and the drive to be true to avant-garde modernist aesthetic principles. Roberts is referenced (unsurprisingly) sparsely, but generally in a positive vein.

Vision and Design, (Chatto & Windus, 1920) a series of lectures and papers by Roger Fry, communicates with a 'direct voice' the vision of this seminal character in British Modern art, champion of Post-Impressionism, founder of Omega and the Contemporary Art Society who employed Roberts, and saw to his early inclusion in group exhibitions.

In 1925, Roberts began teaching drawing at the Central School, which he continued to do until 1960. ***Making Their Mark: Art, Craft and Design at the Central School***, edited by Sylvia Backemeyer (Herbert Press, 2000) describes how Roberts's 'drawing demonstrations were remarked upon by many students, including (Morris) Kestelman for their logic, clarity and confident technique. Students learned a great deal just by watching him.'[27]

As an on- and off-again member of The London Group for the four decades of 1920s through the 1950s, Roberts was included in a recent exhibition and catalogue of the same name: ***Uproar, The First Fifty Years of the London Group, 1913-63***, mounted by Ben Uri Gallery in 2013-14. The references to Roberts are

[27] Sylvia Backemeyer, ed., *Making Their Mark: Art, Craft and Design at the Central School* (London: Herbert Press, 2000), p. 59.

valuable, but the history and significance of the group and of Roberts's contemporaries is even better for context.

Resources for T.E. Lawrence scholarship are rich and varied. For this paper, five secondary sources are of note:

T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, by Jeremy Wilson to accompany an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in 1988-89 is well illustrated and researched, and has facilitated my primary research at the Bodleian Library and the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford;

Malcolm Brown's celebrated edit of the ***Letters of T.E. Lawrence*** (J.M. Dent & Sons, 1988) is an invaluable reference and body of non-fiction correspondence encompassing three decades of military and cultural history;

John Mack, ***A Prince of our Disorder, The Life of T.E. Lawrence*** (Harvard, 1976, 1988) is a fascinating read and profile into the psychological and emotional life of Lawrence;

Seven Pillars of Wisdom, T.E. Lawrence (privately printed, 1926; first published for general circulation, 1935 (Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.); deluxe edition, 1938). The copy I used was produced by Garden City Publishing, 1938).

The TEL Studies website www.telstudies.org is also maintained by Wilson and offers access to helpful chronologies, supplementary essays by Wilson, and others reference material.

Primary sources

Primary sources include exhibition catalogues from the 1920s, art criticism of those exhibitions, Roberts and Lawrence correspondence, and several interviews with people who had known Roberts and Sarah, and with members of the Sitwell family.

The Robertses were assiduous editors of personal correspondence and papers, carefully editing and purging documents throughout their lives. Thus, little correspondence remains with the exception of Roberts's letters to Sarah from the First World War, which he published in 1990 as part of ***Five Posthumous Essays and Other Writings*** (London: Valencia, 1990), edited by John David Roberts. There is, however, evidence of **correspondence between T.E. Lawrence and Roberts**, given the significant body of research and scholarship on Lawrence. Copies and originals are held by the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and have been fully surveyed for this paper. These are referenced primarily in the First Chapter on the Lawrence and *Seven Pillars* commission.

William Roberts & Jacob Kramer, The Tortoise And The Hare, was the exhibition and catalogue title for a show put together by the Ben Uri Gallery and The University Gallery, Leeds in 2003. As the title suggests, the contrasting natures and careers of these brother-in-law artists provides an interesting structure to tell their story. Essays by Andrew Gibbon Williams, Ruth Artmonsky, Rachel Dickson, and Pauline Paucker are well researched and illustrated. Several portraits by both artists are included (as well as archival photography), which are cross-referenced in this paper.

Roberts's first solo exhibition at the **Chenil Galleries** in Chelsea features significantly throughout this paper, and the catalogue for which, introduced by Muirhead Bone, as well as reviews of art critics at the time (*The Times, Observer, Daily Mail*), provide real insight and reaction to Roberts's work through this transition period. Of the 58 works exhibited in the Chenil show, more than a third were, or could be considered, portraits, and include several of the works which are examined in depth in each of this paper's three chapters. The art critic, P.G. Konody, writing about the exhibition in *The Daily Mail* (9 November 1923) outlined the great strength underlying the artist's style, namely:

> . . . Mr. Roberts proves triumphantly that his Weird Vorticist designs, with all their geometric distortion and grim caricaturist humour, are based on powerful draughtsmanship and knowledge of form.[28]

The **Contemporary Art Society** (for which I have served as a Trustee since 2010) archive held by Tate is a rich resource of commissioning and purchase information, given the charity's critical role in the support and dissemination of Roberts work, particularly through the 1920s. Founded in 1909 by a group including Roger Fry and Lady Ottoline Morrell, the then Members of the society paid a subscription of at least one guinea (plus discretionary donations). A rotating nominator had free reign for six months over what was purchased, and works of art then donated to a regional or metropolitan Art Gallery.

David Cleall, author / keeper of the WR catalogue raisonné, cites an essay of 1991, where Edward Lucie-Smith is critical of the Bloomsbury ethos that dominated the purchasing decisions of the CAS' early years and members of what he describes as "the awkward squad" such as Wyndham Lewis and Bomberg were avoided. "The artist whom buyers forgave most readily for his associations with Vorticism was William Roberts." A brilliant reference for the CAS and its influence is ***British Contemporary Art 1910-1990, Eighty Years of Collecting by the Contemporary Art Society***, (Herbert Press, 1991)

Twelve of Roberts's paintings were purchased by the CAS in the four years between 1923 and 1928. These were largely selected by artists and patrons that had previously supported Roberts such as Edward Wadsworth, Edward Marsh, Muirhead Bone, Samuel Courtauld and Michael Sadler. Beneficiary galleries of these Roberts paintings include Leeds, Wakefield, Sheffield, Manchester, Stoke, Bournemouth, Barnsley, Bradford, Swansea and Sydney. There is an argument that Roberts's relatively diffused notoriety today may ironically be a product of his early success at being collected and disseminated by the CAS throughout the nation and the commonwealth, leaving fewer London collections to hold his work.

---

[28] P.G. Konody, *The Daily Mail*, 9 November, 1923, p. 32 (also noted in Elizabeth Cayzer, *William Roberts, R.A., 1895–1980* catalogue of an exhibition held at the Maclean Gallery, London, 24 September to 31 October 1980).

Roberts was a prolific pamphleteer later in life, self-publishing in a quest to both set the record straight – most famously about his association with Vorticism and Wyndham Lewis - and to document his perspective on life in London, and his experience in the First World War.

On the matter of Wyndham Lewis, Roberts well argued his perspective in his self-published *Vorticist Pamphlets*. These included five separate papers released over 2 years: 1) *The Resurrection of Vorticism and the Apotheosis of Wyndham Lewis* (1956); 2) *Cometism and Vorticism – A Tate Gallery Catalogue Revised* (1956); *A Press View at the Tate Gallery* (1956); 4) *A Reply to My Biographer, Sir John Rothenstein* (1957); and 5) *Vorticism and the Politics of Belles Lettres-ism* (1958).[29] These pamphlets make fascinating reading, both building a rational, art historical case, whilst exuding Roberts's polemic logic and humour, with brilliant turns of phrase. As such, they read as a literary self-portrait and potted history of early British Modernism. Subsequently reading John Rothenstein's ***Modern English Painters, Lewis to Moore*** (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956) confirmed the superficiality of research and personal bias against Roberts of the then Tate Director. It is hard to gauge the damage that the mere six pages of an 8 volume series did for Roberts's reputation, but it casts a poor reflection on the author and raises questions about the rest of the series' credibility and thoroughness.

Roberts's ***4.5 Howitzer Gunner Royal Field Artillery 1916–1918; Memories of the War to End War 1914–1918*** was first published (London, 1974) as *Memories of the War to End War 1914–18* (on the title page) or *4.5 Howitzer Gunner R.F.A. 1916–1918* (on the cover). The text I have consulted and title are from William Roberts, *Five Posthumous Essays and Other Writings* (Valencia, 1990).

[29] William Roberts catalogue raisonné. In the fourth of *The Vorticist Pamphlets*, *A Reply to My Biographer, Sir John Rothenstein* (1957), Roberts explicates inaccuracies and inadequacies of research on the part of Rothenstein. http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 26 September 2015].

Primary research and interviews

William Sitwell. Grandson of Sacheverell Sitwell, and literary executor of copyright for Edith Sitwell. Interviewed regarding Roberts's many Sitwell projects and commissions, including a visit to Weston, country home of Sir Sacheverell, which holds significant Wyndham Lewis contemporary works.

Alexandra Hayward (nee Sitwell), cousin to William and owner of Renishaw Hall, home of Osbert, and **Christine Beevers**, Renishaw Hall archivist, were courteous to share what information they could on the Sitwell's patronage of Roberts - but confirmed there is no existing correspondence or evidence other than that which has been published. Christine raised the possibility that there may have been a link between T.E. Lawrence, Frank Dobson and Roberts. Dobson's bust of Osbert Sitwell 1921-2 is referenced in the Introduction and Chapter Two. Lawrence was a neighbour of Dobson's, living on Manresa Road, and often called whilst Dobson was creating Osbert's bust. Lawrence was so fascinated by the process and sitter that he bought a cast of the bust from Dobson, which is now in the Tate. So, perhaps there was a possible link between Roberts and the Sitwells via Dobson and Lawrence.

Dr. Kumari Jayawardena, the last living known sitter for Roberts, who lives in Sri Lanka. She has passionately shared her reflections on the experience of being painted by Roberts in 1946, as had her father in 1931.

Pauline Paucker. Friend to Sarah Roberts, and contributor to William Roberts catalogue raisonné. Pauline's first-hand experience with the Robertses, and insight into their family dynamic, have been invaluable in completing Chapter Three. She has published essays on Sarah, including one in *The Tortoise and The Hare* catalogue.

Chapter One:

T.E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *Aircraftman Shaw*

C**hapter One: T.E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *Aircraftman Shaw***

This chapter will examine Roberts's most significant commission during the early 1920s: a group of portraits to illustrate T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), published in 1926 (and again in 1935), leading to the chapter's main focus - a portrait painting in oil of Lawrence himself - the well-known *Aircraftman Shaw* (*Portrait of T.E. Lawrence*), 1922, which was gifted to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford by A.W. Lawrence in 1946.

Seven Pillars, Lawrence's autobiographical account of the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks, is considered a masterpiece of historical non-fiction. Its creation and editioning spanned more than a decade, through multiple drafts, abridgements, redesigns and hiatuses – governed by Lawrence's finances, advice from friends and publishers, and vacillating state of mind through the post-war period. Lawrence's pseudonymous enlistment - successively in the R.A.F. as John Hume Ross, then with the Army Tank Corps as Pte. T.E. Shaw (a name chosen randomly from a directory),[30] and back to the R.A.F. as Aircraftman Shaw - contributes to the romantic lore; but is significant in understanding the enigmatic and layered persona of Roberts's sitter at the time of this multi-part commission. The portrait is indeed the only one of Lawrence during his abbreviated Uxbridge service to capture him in R.A.F. blue uniform – but is thus anachronistically known as *Aircraftman Shaw*, when at that time of his sitting, he was enlisted as Aircraftman Ross.

The first phase of *Seven Pillars* portrait commissions by Roberts include four in total; three done in pencil on paper of 1) Colonel S.F. Newcombe DSO, 1922 (35.5 cm x 33 cm), 2) Colonel Sir Henry McMahon, 1922, and 3) Major Robin Buxton, 1922 (collotype proof, 25.5 x 19 cm); and one in 'sanguine' or red chalk of 4) General Sir Reginald Wingate, 1922 (34.4 cm x 29.9 cm). Each will be presented with background profiles of the sitters, as contemporary context to the primary examination of the T.E. Lawrence portrait. These four works demonstrate

[30] Jeremy Wilson, *T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1988), p. 183.

Roberts's brilliant draughtsmanship, and gift in capturing the unique character of each individual.

It should be noted that decades of comprehensive scholarship exist on the topic of T.E. Lawrence, led with distinction by Jeremy Wilson, Malcolm Brown, John Mack, among other writers and historians. It would be naïve to think this dissertation will materially contribute to that scholarship; however, examining Roberts's role in the historiography of Lawrence, his contribution to both the vision and reality of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* and personal relationship with Lawrence, may add new perspective to the appreciation of both men, and their mutual contribution to British Modern art in the 1920s.

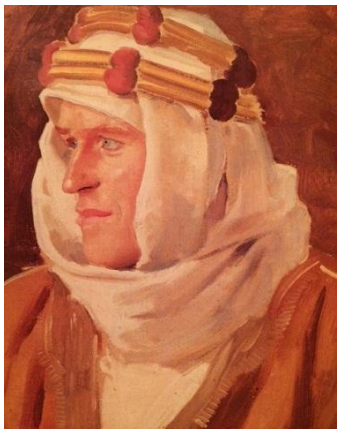
Before examining the portraits in detail, a brief resume of the creation and evolution of *Seven Pillars* will help to place Roberts's contribution in context. Lawrence's original concept for the book was to profile seven cities of the East, according to Lawrence expert, Jeremy Wilson; but with time and circumstance, the focus understandably centred on the topic of the Arab Revolt, evidenced in correspondence as early as 1917.[31] Through the final months of the war, Lawrence drafted notes and drew maps on message pads he could port with him.

Following the war, most of the initial draft was completed in France in the spring of 1919, and as Lawrence prepared to seek criticism of the text that autumn, notoriously lost the original manuscript whilst changing trains in Reading. Despite this tragic mishap, fortunately, a copied portion of the preliminary draft was being read by a friend; working from that, Lawrence busily recreated the text as best he could, working from 14 Barton Street, Westminster; and the 'new' manuscript rapidly grew to 200,000 words. In parallel to drafting, Lawrence began plans to build a small private press for *Seven Pillars* and other literary project publications, on land he had purchased in Chingford. As this required funding, Lawrence began exploring the opportunity to create a popular abridged edition of *Seven Pillars* with F.N. Doubleday, for the American market; he commenced the abridgment but in August 1920, abruptly abandoned the project

[31] Wilson, p. 142.

as he reached 40,000 words, most likely due to lack of funds. By the end of that year, all the collected efforts to date to realise *Seven Pillars* publication added up to nothing tangible. Despite these setbacks and frustrations, Lawrence's ambitions for the project ran high, and whilst developing the text, he began envisioning the overall art direction and illustration for the book. Augustus John

Augustus John, *T.E. Lawrence*, 1919, oil on canvas, 80 x 59.7 cm, © Tate

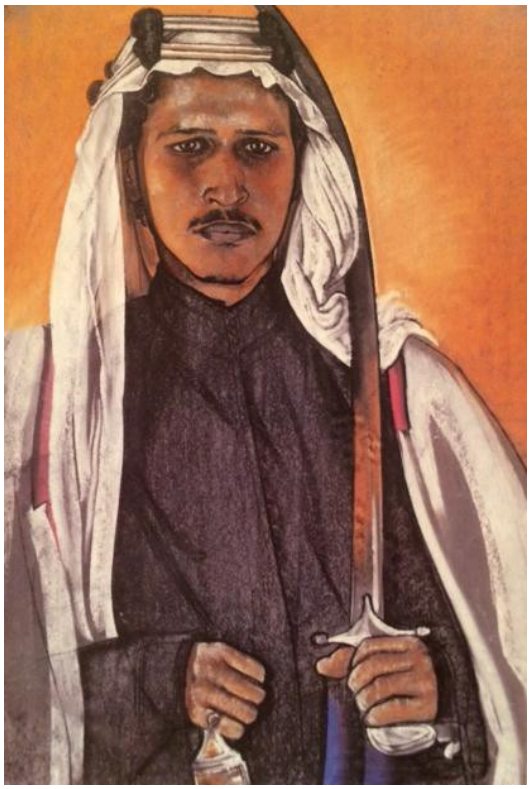


Augustus John, *T.E. Lawrence*, 1919, oil on canvas, 45.8 x 38.2 cm, © Yale University Art Gallery

Augustus John, *The Emir Feisal*, 1919, oil on canvas, 72 x 53 cm, © Ashmolean Museum

had completed two sketches of Lawrence at the Peace Conference at Versailles, and Lawrence had acquired one of these in addition to one of The Emir Feisal, who was also in attendance. The larger John portrait of Lawrence and that of Feisal, formed the nucleus of the *Seven Pillars* illustration; to build on these two pictures, Lawrence visited London art shows through 1920, and approached Eric Kennington to advise. Kennington, who like Roberts, had served as an official war artist, was very interested and agreed to travel with Lawrence to Arabia in March 1921; he returned in June with a collection of pastel drawings of Arabs who had played significant roles in the Revolt.

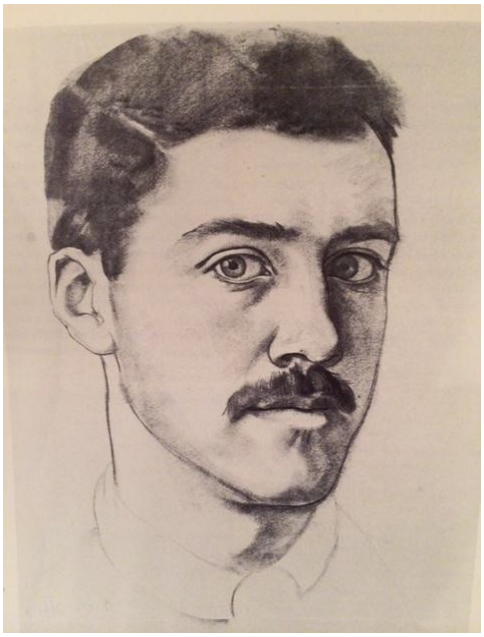
> From this time on, 'Kennington's Arabs' were to dominate all Lawrence's plans for an edition of *Seven Pillars*. As a first step, he saw the need to balance the Arabs by commissioning portraits of British participants in the Revolt. During the next five years, he organised artists and sitters, until he could put twenty Europeans against the twenty best Arabian portraits. The additional portraits included work by Frank Dobson, Colin Gill, John, Kennington, Henry Lamb, William Nicholson, William Roberts, William Rothenstein, John Singer Sargent and Gilbert Spencer.[32]



Eric Henri Kennington, *Ali Ibn El Hussein*, 1921, Pastel, 76.2 x 50.8 cm, © Reading Museum of Art Gallery

[32] Wilson, p. 143.

Thus by association, Roberts was amidst a British artistic elite, and was to contribute, next only to Kennington, more works than the others to the project.



Eric Henri Kennington, *Self-Portrait*, 1918, Black chalk, 50 x 36.7 cm © Ashmolean Museum

Lawrence engaged Whittingham & Griggs to begin plate-making for four of the Kennington Arabs in 1921. Drafting continued slowly through that year, interrupted by Lawrence's diplomatic travel to Jidda and Ammam. In September, again owing to lack of funds, Lawrence instructed Whittingham & Griggs to stop work on the plates – and yet another hiatus in the project ensued. Despite taking leave from the Colonial Office in February 1922 in order to commit himself to completion of the draft, Lawrence developed doubts about the text, captured in a letter to Kennington: 'The real trouble is about my book, which is not good : not good enough to come out. It has grown too long and shapeless, and I haven't enough strength to see it all in one piece, or the energy to tackle it properly.'[33]

This dichotomous insecurity relative to his brilliant intellect and heroic diplomatic reputation, betrays the complex, and yet humble man that Lawrence was; this tension will be referenced in examining the Roberts portrait. Importantly, at the time of writing this letter, Lawrence was planning to enlist in the R.A.F.

[33] T.E. Lawrence to Eric Kennington (16.2.1922), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

Lawrence did however persevere with *Seven Pillars*, and arranged through the *Oxford Times* a limited printing of 8 copies for a total of £175, printing between late January and July 1922. Given the sensitive nature of the text, he cunningly supplied them to the press in unnumbered, out-of-order tranches, withholding the most sensitive material (including an account of his torture and rape in Deraa in 1917) to the very end. In August of that year - the same month he met Roberts in person for the first time - Lawrence approached Edward Garnett and George Bernard Shaw, both trusted friends, to read and critique the manuscript. Garnett, who was a publisher's editor, swiftly reviewed the book, and offered to make a popular abridgment.

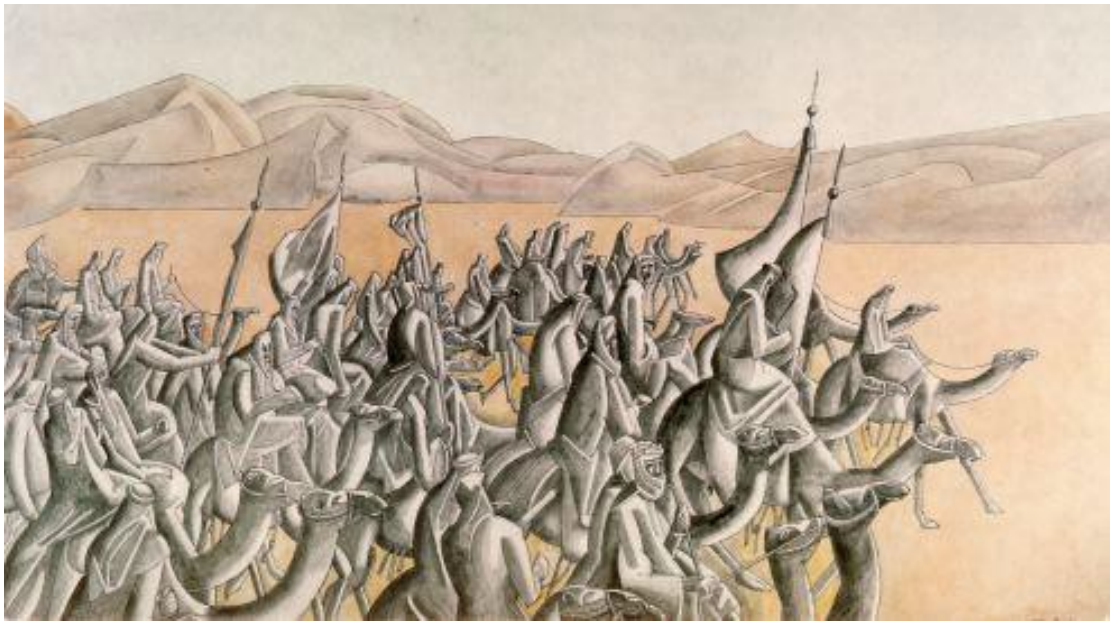
Lawrence, worn by the drafting sought enlistment in the ranks to bring welcome structure – and needed income to fund the next phase of *Seven Pillars* - back into his life. He enlisted on 30 August 1922, as an Aircraftman, 2nd Class, requiring special dispensation from above to pass the medical exam, given his mental and physical exhaustion at the time. The Air Force was sensitive about taking on a celebrity of his stature, so Lawrence was registered as 'John Hume Ross' at Uxbridge training depot, with all informed making an effort to disguise his true identity. His notes of the time, captured in the evenings after each day's gruelling exercises, eventually fed into his book *The Mint*, which portrayed the grim realities of recruits in training.

During the few months at Uxbridge and Farnborough, where Lawrence had been transferred to the R.A.F. School of Photography, deliberations over whether to publish *Seven Pillars* in full or abridged form continued remotely. George Bernard Shaw, a friend and confidante, initially supportive of an abridgment, changed his mind after a more thorough reading of the book, and passionately argued: '*It must be published in its entirety, unabridged*…you must not for a moment entertain the notion of an abridgment first, as no publisher would touch the whole work afterwards.'[34] Lawrence was stressed and uncertain what to do,

[34] A.W. Lawrence, ed., *Letters to T.E. Lawrence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), George Bernard Shaw to T.E. Lawrence (28.12.22), pp. 167-8.

having already authorised Garnett to approach publisher Jonathan Cape to publish the abridgment. The situation was made worse, by the fact that Lawrence's identity was exposed by the press. Lawrence, considering the poor timing of this revelation, abruptly wrote to Cape to cancel the abridgment - much to Cape's frustration. Lawrence was forced to stand down from the R.A.F. after mounting pressure. Within weeks, however, Lawrence radically changed course and proposed back to Cape to publish the complete *Seven Pillars* as a limited edition for subscribers. It is significant, therefore, to consider that this chaotic series of events was occurring whilst Roberts was completing the T.E. Lawrence portrait.

The development and publication of *Seven Pillars* has been the topic of much research and scholarship – and its rich and imaginative art direction and illustration are worthy of a dissertation alone. What is of particular note, however, is that through its multiple full, abridged, trade and limited subscriber editions in the 1920s and 1930s, *no* edition contains the full, comprehensive collection of art and graphics which T.E. Lawrence commissioned. Roberts's own contribution to the book extended beyond the portraits examined here. For example, the book also featured his famous, *Camel March*, which was reproduced as a double-page plate, tipped in at the centre of the volume in some editions.



Camel March (aka *Camel Corps*), 1923, ink and watercolour, 33 cm x 57.8 cm, private collection

Roberts's commission also included 29 'tailpieces', which were additional illustrations for chapter and section endings; these were done in Roberts's more avant-garde, pre-war cubistic style, which Lawrence was known to be fond of.[35] Only a small selection of the tailpieces were printed in the final editions – despite the fact that drawing annotations on many more sketches by Roberts indicate specific page numbers where Lawrence had intended to insert them. Most of the series, done in pen and ink, charcoal, chalk and pencil - including many preparatory sketches, totalling a collection of 59 works - are held by the Houghton Library at Harvard University, which were gifted by Bayard L. Kilgour, Jr., in 1958. These drawings, completed by Roberts between 1925-26 demonstrate the ongoing relationship between Roberts and Lawrence, and also the fundamentally organic development of Lawrence's project over many years. The financial success of an abridged version of *Seven Pillars*, entitled *Revolt in the Desert*, allowed the commissioning of the tailpieces for the limited subscriber's edition; however, several ultimately were not included.[36]

William Roberts*, As-hab ('Companions'),* 1925–6, pen and ink, 28 x 20 cm, Houghton Library, Harvard University

Turning now to the portraits - as noted, Roberts was one of several artists commissioned to illustrate *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. In 1920, on the recommendation of Collin Gill, a former Slade colleague, Roberts contacted Lawrence to express interest in the project.

Lawrence's conceptualisation of *Seven Pillars* was *catholic* and end-to-end: in addition to the comprehensive historical detail of the text, composed in elegant

[35] Wilson, pp. 166-167.
[36] William Roberts Drawings for *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1925-1926, Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Eng. 1653.
.

prose, he art-directed its illustration and assiduously oversaw its proofing and printing process. Once Roberts was appointed, Lawrence actively engaged in recruiting his sitters, and in his correspondence to them and letters to Roberts, we get a real flavour for Lawrence's vision for *Seven Pillars*, his humour and his effectiveness in influencing others. Roberts's formal training and work ethic were well suited to the commission – achieving a documentary realism, which drew out each sitter's character with unflattering, unromanticised honesty – but also applying an economy of line, which gives the pictures a modern vitality.

Colonel S.F. Newcombe DSO

Colonel S. F. Newcombe DSO, 1922, pencil, 35.5 x 33 cm, private collection

The first drawing to be examined is that of Colonel S.F. Newcombe DSO. Stewart Francis Newcombe (1878–1956) served in the Boer War and in the First World War in France, at Gallipoli and in the Hejaz, where he met T.E. Lawrence whilst on military mission. In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* Lawrence characterised Newcombe's 'excess of zeal, and his habit of doing four times more than any other Englishman would do: ten times what the Arabs thought needful or wise…

"Newcombe is like fire," they used to complain; "he burns friend and enemy"; and they admired his amazing energy with nervous shrinking lest they should be his next friendly victims.'[37]

On 22 July 1922, Lawrence wrote to S.F. Newcombe to arrange the first of Robert's commissions:

> There's a young cubist artist called Roberts. Very gifted & good. He'll make it look like a problem in Euclid. You'll love it. So'll I. He's in London: & will draw you when you can give him two hours. Line only: no paint or colour.
>
> I'm aiming at 12 heads: all different men, all different artists: all schools except the Royal Academy. A huge joke. Eventual illustrations for my eventual book.[38]

The sitting was arranged along with Lawrence's modest available funding of the commission, including Roberts's expenses, here captured in a previously unpublished letter:

> Dear Roberts
>
> I've been away three days:- and find tonight a letter from Newcombe saying that he can't come up to London – and that he suggests you go down there tomorrow or Sunday, sending a wire to him (N. Raglan Barracks Devonport) with the time of arrival of your train.
>
> […]
>
> On the chance that you still go down before I get back I enclose a cheque for £14. I've reckoned that about £5 should cover exs. And I'm hoping that Boyle will be there as a second string. If not we'll leave the odd pence on account for a camel-drawing in the future.
>
> I hope you will find the odd people possible to make good things of.
>
> Yours
>
> T.E. Lawrence[39]

'Boyle' refers presumably to Captain Boyle of the Royal Navy's Red Sea Patrol, who is referenced throughout *Seven Pillars* for his valiant strategic manoeuvres during the Arab Revolt. There are no known Roberts drawings or oil portraits of him, despite Lawrence's reference.

---

[37] T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, deluxe edn., (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1938. Originally privately printed, London: Jonathan Cape, 1926; New York: Doubleday, 1926, 1935), XLI, p. 239.

[38] Malcolm Brown, *The Letters of T.E. Lawrence*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1988). T.E. Lawrence to S.F. Newcombe (22.07.22), p. 196.

[39] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (undated, but known to be late July/early August 1922), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

The Newcombe portrait drawing was complete within weeks, evident in a follow-up letter in August from Lawrence to Newcombe which describes well the desired effect:

> Munificence,
>
> He made a great drawing of it: it's a very splendid work of art: better so than as a portrait: because he's turned you from flesh into metal & made you so fierce and warlike that my blood runs cold to see it. It's uncannily like, & yet so much harder. Perhaps it's the being drawn which drew you so much together: or else it's family cares. Any way, time will make your face like that, & will leave the hair only a regretted memory. *Who brushed it?*
>
> […]It's hard for a youngster to be so great an artist, & to know it, & to be unable to sell anything. However his head marks a step in advance of anything he's done to date. It ought to go to the Tate Gallery. I suppose you don't mind its bearing your name if shown? I took it to Kennington, who wondered at it. I'll get Roberts to do two or three others: because by itself it would look too pointedly excellent.
>
> Do you hate it? And did Mrs. N? Some day I'll have prints of it for you.
>
> T.E.L.[40]

Lawrence's correspondence with Roberts continues the praise, but also reveals more of his own impressions of Roberts which must have developed from his own time with him, 'I liked your drawing of Newcombe … the force and naturalism of this head took me by surprise … you have improved on him by putting into him a great deal of your spare solidity.'[41]

The drawing is the most detailed of Roberts's four 1922 *Seven Pillars* portraits, inclusive of line, shading and modelling which describe the head, upper torso and uniform. The 'traditional' draughtsmanship that captures Newcombe's apparent strength and intensity, is complemented well by the more modern swift and energetic lines and shading of the sitter's uniform, jacket and tie. The jet darkness of the Newcombe's eyes and compositional angles of Roberts's lines point and draw attention back to the face.

This drawing was included in Roberts's first one-man exhibition at the Chenil Galleries in 1923, and then not exhibited again until the 1988 T.E. Lawrence

---

[40] Brown, T.E. Lawrence to S.F. Newcombe (?.08.22), p. 197.
[41] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (27 Aug. 1922), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

show at the National Portrait Gallery. According to the William Roberts catalogue raisonné, the picture remains in Newcombe family possession.

Sir Henry McMahon

Colonel Sir Henry McMahon, 1922, pencil, location of original not known

Sir (Arthur) Henry McMahon (1862–1949) was an army officer and colonial governor. Most of his early career was spent in India. According to David Cleall's research for the William Roberts catalogue raisonné, McMahon, as a British commissioner in 1894–6, demarcated the boundary between Afghanistan and Baluchistan, and during 1904–5 was the arbitrator on the boundary between Persia and Afghanistan. In 1913–14 he negotiated a treaty with China and Tibet. When the First World War broke out he was appointed High Commissioner for Egypt under the British protectorate, at the suggestion of Lord Kitchener.[42]

[42] David Cleall, ed., William Roberts catalogue raisonné, http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 26 September 2015].

McMahon played a key, instigating role in the Arab Revolt, and thus it is clear why Lawrence wanted Roberts to capture him.

> Between 1915 and 1916, without closely consulting the British government, Sir Henry conducted secret correspondence with the sharif of Mecca [Hussein bin Ali], encouraging an Arab uprising against the sultan-caliph. In return for an Arab rebellion McMahon loosely promised independence in certain areas of the Middle East, but he failed precisely to stipulate which parts of former Turkish territory he was prepared to hand over to Arab control. The extreme vagueness of the often confused and ambiguous correspondence between McMahon and Hussein…caused almost immediate controversy between the Arabs and the British empire over its differing interpretations, especially about whether it included Palestine.[43]

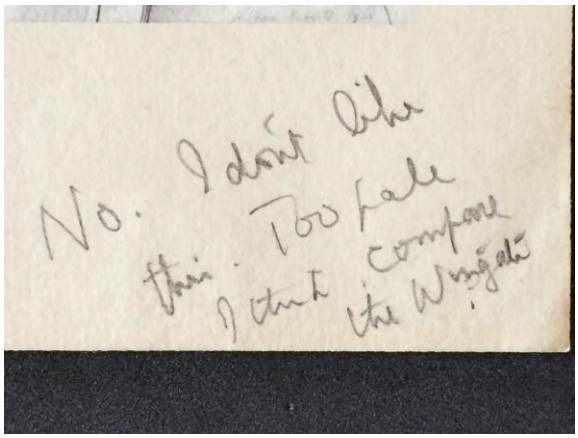
In 1919 McMahon was the British commissioner on the Middle East International Commission at the Paris Peace Conference. From 1920-25 - during which Roberts completed the drawing - McMahon was chairing the management committee and sat on the board of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, London. In a letter to Roberts, Lawrence described this portrait as 'absolutely splendid: the strength of it, and the life: it feels as though at any moment there might be a crash in the paper and the thing start out.'[44]

Like the Newcombe drawing, Roberts achieves a shock effect of photographic realism in the face through a sophisticated and subtle gradation of line and shade. McMahon's character emerges through the quizzical and somewhat irritated expression, the pursed lips and distant, hooded stare communicating an enigmatic blend of fatigue and focus on matters outside of having his picture done. By contrast, Roberts uses brilliantly modern, sweeping lines to outline McMahon's waistcoated suit and tie and rounded shirt collar, which is several degrees less detailed than those of Newcombe. In both instances, it is of note that Roberts's precise modelling and use of erasure to heighten volume and focus in the face, is abandoned in the freer treatment of the garments. He consciously leaves multiple lines and accidental intersections of line (evident at junctures of shoulders, seams, and pockets), which seem to animate the pictures.

---

[43] Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, http://www.oxforddnb.com [accessed 29 December 2014].
[44] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (21 Oct. 1922), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

Tragically, the location of the original McMahon drawing is unknown, although an annotated proof-plate (25.5 cm x 19 cm) is held by the Bodleian Library. Examination of the press proof reveals Lawrence's marginal notes and pursuit of a higher quality resolution to be faithful to Roberts's fine draughtsmanship: 'No. I don't like / this. Too pale / I think. Compare / the Wingate.'[45]



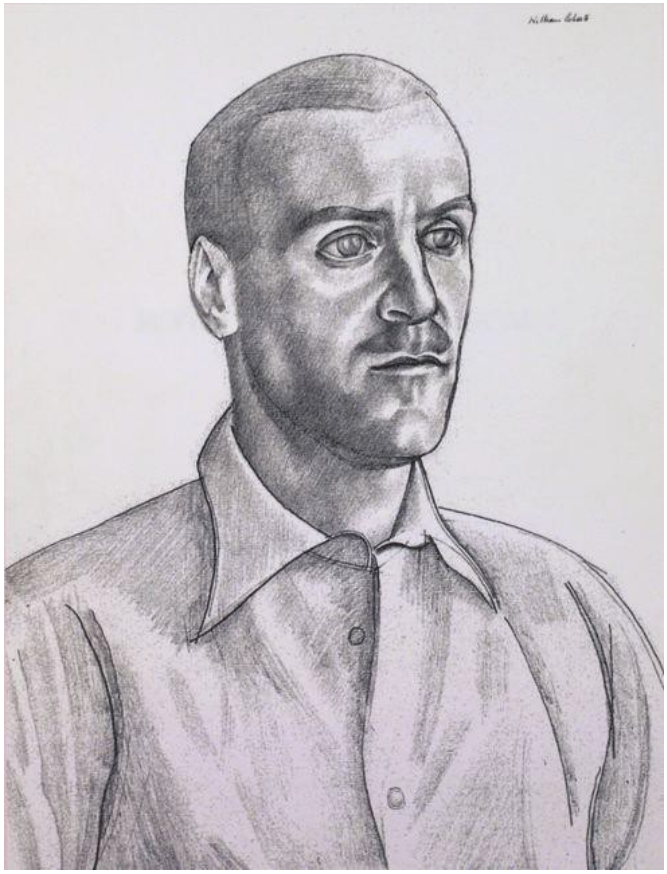
The drawing was also included in the Chenil Galleries Roberts show in 1923, and subsequently exhibited in Edinburgh in 1924, and in 1927 as part of the Leicester Gallery show devoted to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. An anonymous reviewer for *The Times* cited the McMahon drawing as an example to praise Roberts's 'heroic' contribution to *Seven Pillars* amongst many distinguished artists, but also to delineate his extraordinary draughtsmanship and realism in the context of his earlier abstract work:

> The exhibition consists of portraits of personages connected with the Arabian campaign and imaginative illustrations of its incidents. Colonel Lawrence is certainly to be congratulated upon his team of artists - Mr. Eric Kennington, Mr. Augustus John, Mr. Henry Lamb, Mr. Paul Nash, Mr. William Roberts, Mr Colin Gill, Mr. Blair Hughes-Stanton, and Mr. Cosmo Clark. Mr. Kennington's pastel portraits of Arabs have been shown before, and it will be enough here to speak of their incisive character, beauty of colour, and interest of workmanship. Instead of a collection of "Natives" Mr. Kennington has given us a gallery of distinct personalities, "deep and sharp renderings of all that Western Arabians are," in Colonel Lawrence's own apt description. Nor do such portraits as those of "Sir Ronald Storrs," by the late Mr. Sargent, arid " H.M. King Feysal of Irak,' by Mr. Augustus John - though the last shows the artist at his best, because most interested - afford much matter for discussion. The pencil portraits, such as that of " Colonel Sir A. Henry McMahon, O.C.M.G.," by Mr. William Roberts, are specially welcome not only for the close delineation of character in them but because they throw light on the

[45] The McMahon drawing *SPW* press proof was viewed with permission at Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6744, fol. 4.

> foundations of an artist whose more abstract performances are often mistaken for the shirking of difficulties. On the whole, Mr. Roberts is the hero of the exhibition.[46]

Captain Robin Buxton



Captain Robin Buxton, 1922, pencil, location of original not known

Robert Vere 'Robin' Buxton (1883–1953) was a seminal character in Lawrence's life both during the Arab Revolt and later, as adviser assisting in the financial planning and sourcing of the *Seven Pillars* project.

In a previously unpublished letter from Lawrence to Buxton, we get a true sense of the author-patron's complete attention to the detail for his subject matter, its illustration, its artists and contributors:

> Dear Robin,
>
> I've finished my book on the Arab Revolt: finished it to pro. tem. That is, & gone on to another job, which will keep me out of sight for a while. What I am

[46] *The Times,* 4 February 1927, p. 12.

writing to you about is your head. In the final version of the book there are short chapters about I.C.C. with some personal remarks upon yourself. These perhaps you won't mind: but if you do it can't be helped. They are meant well: & the whole book is shockingly personal. You really get off pretty well. Kennington went East, & drew about 20 Arabs to illustrate that side of the book.

I'm now having a small batch of Englishmen drawn in London to show the other side. Bartholomew, Alan Dawney, Clayton, Newcombe; ? yourself ? I'd like you in the gallery, if you'll agree. The others (to the number of about a dozen so far) have agreed and are being drawn by degrees. It's a lottery, because all drawing is, & my tastes are pointed. For you I'd like William Roberts. He's quite a kid, very decent in a hard-shelled way: was a cubist, is over it, & now does black & white of monumental solidity. He has done a wonderful study of Newcombe, fierce almost to the point of terror. I think he might do something rather subtle of you, because you don't look an officer.

It's an odd request: I hope you don't mind. You may not like the result, but it will be Art (with a capital a) if Roberts does it. He's poor & not exacting, though as proud as Punch: but his lack of other work will enable him to study your time, & to make you his sole job for the moment – and that leads to better work.

I expect he'd want three sittings of an hour each. Of Newcombe, he took five, but then he went & stayed at Devonport, & had no distractions. He'd do either in your bank or in your house, when & as you pleased. The finished thing if my property, and because I might someday publish this book, & then would want a block made. I've told Roberts about you: & hope that you will write to him, saying that I have asked you to, & telling him to call on you at such a time on such a day. His address is 2 Coleherne Terrace, Redcliffe Gardens, Earls Court. Don't ask him to dine because he hasn't a dress suit: but be rather nice to him, for he's had a very thin time & is a stout-hearted child. I fancy he's not too well fed always, which is why he'll work so cheaply for me.

Yours

T.E.L. [47]

Buxton served as commanding officer of the Imperial Camel Corps, which was part of General Allenby's British army based in Palestine; in July 1918, he and 300 men joined T. E. Lawrence's forces supporting the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Later, as a director of Martins Bank, Buxton oversaw financing the publication of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, in which he was described as 'an old Sudan official, speaking Arabic, and understanding nomadic ways; very patient,

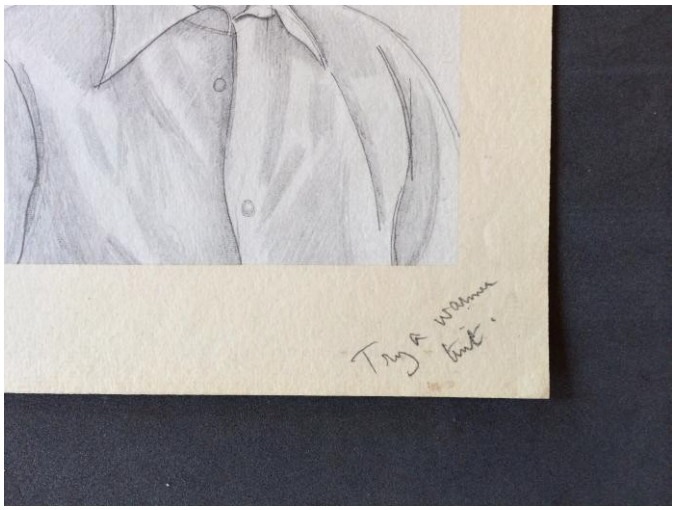
[47] T.E. Lawrence to Robin Buxton (28.8.22), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 3330, fols. 1-136.

good-humoured, sympathetic.'[48] In October 1922, Lawrence wrote to Buxton about Roberts's portrait, '. . . the result is astonishing: you have become severe, abstracted, slightly sorry: with the laughter gone from your face . . . A wonderful drawing.'[49]

As with the Newcombe and McMahon drawings, Roberts has attained a dichotomous balance between photographic likeness in the face outline and shading and an economic, energetic Modernist use of line. There is a confidence in the modelling of the face through shading and erasure, and a purposely simplified treatment of the sitter's shirt and hair in order to heighten focus on Buxton's expression of distant reflection. The shirt and shoulders do seem rushed, however, and less successfully convey the volume of Buxton's upper torso compared to the other two drawings.

The Buxton drawing was included in Roberts's Chenil Galleries debut solo exhibition in 1923 and subsequently in the 1927 Leicester Galleries show devoted to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. The location of the original drawing is unknown; however, I examined the annotated proof plate (25.5 cm x 19 cm) at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, which was exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery 1988. Lawrence's annotation, *'Try a warmer tint'* demonstrates his attention to the detail and quality of reproduction he expected for Roberts's drawing.

[48] T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, XCIX, p. 543.
[49] T.E. Lawrence to Robin Buxton (27 Oct. 1922), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 3330, fols. 1-136. The Buxton drawing *SPW* press proof examined with permission under MS. Eng. c. 6744, fol. 3.



Examining the Lawrence correspondence held at the Bodleian revealed the remarkable passion and vision the author had for the project; but, it also sheds light on, in the case of Buxton and Roberts letters, his grasp of character, and the intimacy and care with which Lawrence regarded both sitter and artist, and his curatorial finesse at bringing them together to create art and enhance *Seven Pillars'* literary significance as a result.

Letter from T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts 24.8.22

Dear Roberts,
A first rabbit escapes our snares!
I've written to Robin Buxton asking him to communicate with you direct. Be kind to him too, for he's a dear fellow. If he doesn't reply to you within a week, then write me here and I'll fix up a baronet or two. You'll notice the high life which saved us in Arabia!

Yours
EL[50]

Letter from T.E. Lawrence to Robin Buxton 28.8.22

Dear Robin,

I've finished my book on the Arab Revolt: finished it to pro. tem. That is, & gone on to another job, which will keep me out of sight for a while. What I am writing to you about is your head. In the final version of the book there are short chapters about I.C.C. with some personal remarks upon yourself. These perhaps you won't mind: but if you do it can't be helped. They are meant well: & the whole book is shockingly personal. You really get off pretty well.

[50] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (24.8.22), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

Kennington went East, & drew about 20 Arabs to illustrate that side of the book.

I'm now having a small batch of Englishmen drawn in London to show the other side. Bartholomew, Alan Dawney, Clayton, Newcombe; ? yourself ? I'd like you in the gallery, if you'll agree. The others (to the number of about a dozen so far) have agreed and are being drawn by degrees. It's a lottery, because all drawing is, & my tastes are pointed. For you I'd like William Roberts. He's quite a kid, very decent in a hard-shelled way: was a cubist, is over it, & now does black & white of monumental solidity. He has done a wonderful study of Newcombe, fierce almost to the point of terror. I think he might do something rather subtle of you, because you don't look an officer.

It's an odd request: I hope you don't mind. You may not like the result, but it will be Art (with a capital a) if Roberts does it. He's poor & not exacting, though as proud as Punch: but his lack of other work will enable him to study your time, & to make you his sole job for the moment – and that leads to better work.

I expect he'd want three sittings of an hour each. Of Newcombe, he took five, but then he went & stayed at Devonport, & had no distractions. He'd do either in your bank or in your house, when & as you pleased. The finished thing if my property, and because I might someday publish this book, & then would want a block made.

I've told Roberts about you: & hope that you will write to him, saying that I have asked you to, & telling him to call on you at such a time on such a day. His address is 2 Coleherne Terrace, Redcliffe Gardens, Earls Court. Don't ask him to dine because he hasn't a dress suit: but be rather nice to him, for he's had a very thin time & is a stout-hearted child. I fancy he's not too well fed always, which is why he'll work so cheaply for me.

Yours

T.E.L. [51]

In February 2004, Christie's Spiro Family Collection sale in New York included the presentation copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom, a triumph*, 1926, which Lawrence had gifted to Buxton. The realised price was $53,775.

AN IMPORTANT PRESENTATION COPY, INSCRIBED BY LAWRENCE TO HIS FRIEND COL. ROBERT BUXTON, WHO ARRANGED FINANCING OF THE SUBSCRIBER'S EDITION

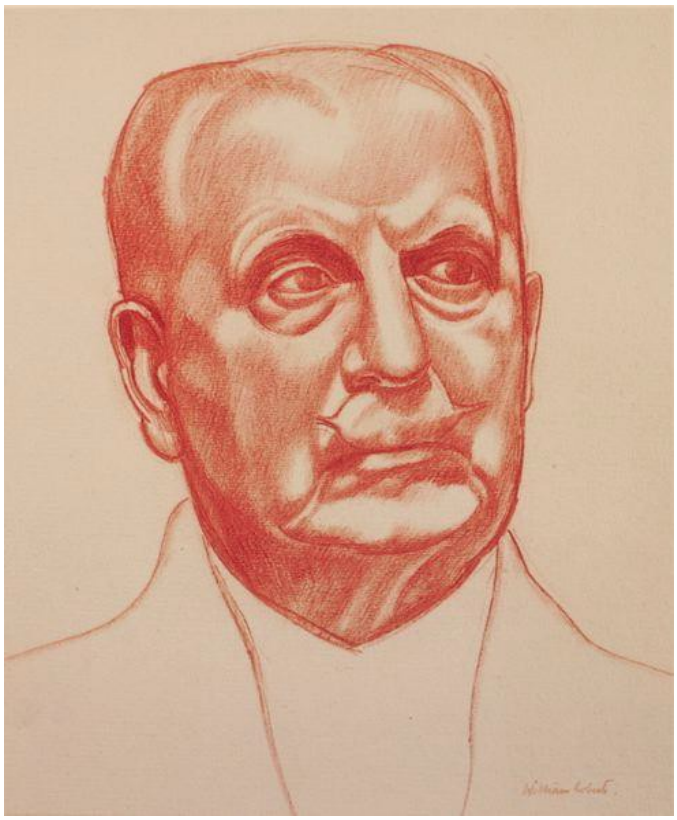
INSCRIBED BY LAWRENCE on the blank leaf at front: "R.V.B.'s own copy, which he specially deserves, having gone to war and helped to do the show,

[51] T.E. Lawrence to Robin Buxton (28.8.22), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 3330, fols. 1-136.

and then having gone to banking and financed all the history of the show -- persuading his innocent Bank to stand an unknown and unprecedented risk, continuing for years. T.E. Shaw. December 1926." He later added to this inscription, "(and not yet ended, indeed. T.E.S. 1931)."

Robert ("Robin") Buxton (1883-1953) was commander of the Imperial Camel Corps, who met Lawrence in Arabia in August 1918. Lawrence guided Buxton and the Camel Corps on the first stage of the journey to their successful attack on Mudawara. He played a major role in the campaign, which resulted in September 1918 in the cutting of the railway junction at Deraa, ensuring that no trains could run through to Damascus by the Turks. The two remained close friends after the war and Buxton served as Lawrence's bank manager, and helped finance the subscriber's edition of *Seven Pillars*. He later served as one of the Trustees of *Revolt in the Desert*. (See lots 135 and 136.) [52]

Sir Francis Reginald Wingate



General Sir Reginald Wingate, 1922, sanguine, 34.4 x 29.9 cm, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Sir Francis Reginald Wingate (1861–1953) is described in the Roberts catalogue raisonné as a British general and administrator in Egypt and Sudan. As director of military intelligence Wingate served in the campaigns of 1896-8, which

[52] Christie's catalogue, Lot 99 / Sale 1348, Sale 1348, The Spiro Family Collection, Part II: Explorers, 26 February 2004, New York. http://www.sothebys.com/ [accessed 30 December 2014].

resulted in the reconquest of Sudan. In December 1899 he succeeded Lord Kitchener as Governor-General of the Sudan and sirdar of the Egyptian army. From 1917 to 1919 he was High Commissioner in Egypt, having succeeded sir Henry McMahon. He was less successful there than in his administration of Sudan, and was made a scapegoat for the political riots that plagued the country, but refused to resign even after he was officially replaced by Lord Allenby. In 1920, he was created Baronet Wingate of Dunbar, in the County of Haddington, and of Port Sudan, but he never held another public or military office after retiring from the army in February 1922.[53]

When T. E. Lawrence commissioned this picture for *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* he wrote to Roberts,

> Do you think you could draw a courtly old man, broken and disappointed now because his career ended badly, a man who was never much more than a butter-merchant and great-man's friend, even in his best days, but whose administration was so successful that it gave him confidence, and for a while he believed himself great … Please be very gentle with him, if you do him. He's not so much a butterfly as a ghost of one, a thing by no means to be broken on a wheel.[54]

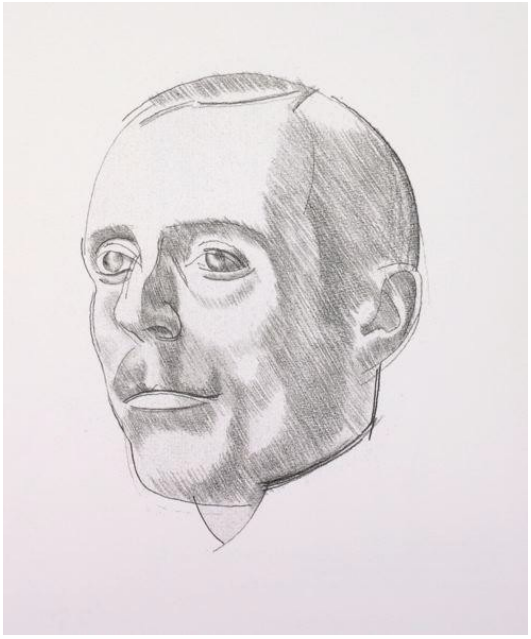
This drawing appeared in both the 1926 and 1935 editions of *Seven Pillars*, having been debuted in Roberts's Chenil Galleries show of 1923. It was also included in the 1927 Leicester Gallery exhibition of the illustrations of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom.*

The Wingate drawing differs not only in the use of sanguine, or red chalk, from the previously described pencil drawings, but also in composition, where Roberts chooses to focus almost exclusively on Wingate's face. The raised eyebrows and chin, pursed lips and waxed moustache effectively capture the stubborn dignity of this elder statesman, past his prime, but poised to the finish. Roberts limits the definition of Wingate's collar and shirt to the most minimal of

~~53 Cleall, ed., William Roberts cata~~logue raisonné, http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 29 December 2014].
54 T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (21.10.1922), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

six lines. The face is extremely well modelled leveraging the subtle gradations achievable in chalk, starkly offset by highlights of erasure.

In addition to these initial four 1922 works, there are two additional Roberts portraits completed later for *Seven Pillars*. The first is a drawing of Edward Turnour, Lord Winterton. It is highly stylised in a Modernist manner and presents more as a study relative to the Newcombe, McMahon, Buxton, or Wingate drawings. The double-lining around the perimeter of the head and eyes is reminiscent of the highly modern drafting style of Wyndham Lewis which can also be found in various contemporary sketches of Roberts's wife Sarah to be discussed in the third chapter. The Winterton sketch appeared in the 1938 'De Luxe' edition of *Seven Pillars*, released by Garden City Publishing, Inc., in America (used for this research), but there is no definitive record of its inclusion in either of the 1926 or 1935 editions.



Lord Winterton, 1923, pencil, present location unknown

Edward Turnour (1883–1962) was born in London and educated at Eton and at New College, Oxford. He served as Conservative MP for Horsham, Sussex. In 1907 he succeeded his father as 6th Earl Winterton, remaining as an MP (until 1951) as his title was an Irish one. In the First World War he served with the Sussex

Yeomanry in Gallipoli, with the Imperial Camel Corps in Egypt, and eventually with T. E. Lawrence in the Hejaz.[55]

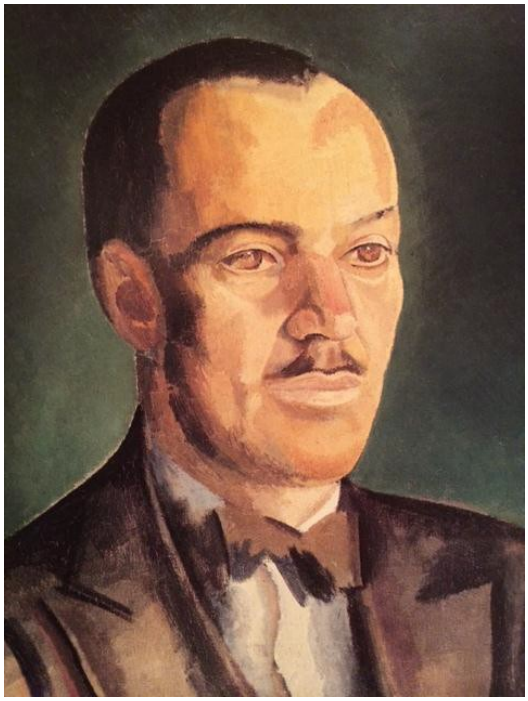
It took T. E. Lawrence several months to persuade Winterton to sit for this portrait. Eventually, in February 1923, Lawrence wrote to Roberts, 'It's V. G. to hear Winterton has yielded up his fort . . . and I hope that the taking-over proceedings will not be as fearful as you expect. He's hot, is Winterton: and he'll be an impatient and unconscionable sitter.'[56]

The drawing - despite its relative draught state compared with the previous four works - succeeds on the basis of capturing the vitality and pride of the sitter with an extremely economic use of line and shading. Perhaps the lack of detailed modelling and refinement is evidence of Winterton's impatience to sit to which Lawrence alluded. In an unpublished letter to Roberts in October 1923 Lawrence appears to confirm this, querying: 'Did Winterton ever give a second sitting?'[57]

A second related work is a portrait oil of George Ambrose Lloyd, 1st Baron Lloyd, which was commissioned by Lawrence, and completed in 1925 and included in both of the 1926 and 1935 editions of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.[58]

---

[55] Cleall, ed., William Roberts catalogue raisonné, http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 30 December 2014]. Winterton was later parliamentary under-secretary for India, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, deputy to the Secretary of State for Air and Paymaster General. Six foot four tall, he continued to favour the high-buttoned jacket and narrow trousers of his youth.
[56] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (02.23), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.
[57] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (13.x.23), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.
[58] Wilson, p.62.



George Ambrose Lloyd (1st Baron Lloyd), 1925, oil on canvas, 50.8 cm x 43.3 cm, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

The picture has an untidy, unfinished quality particularly in the treatment of the clothing and left hand side of the face, and may suggest less time and attention by Roberts in the making. Lawrence thought that Roberts had 'been hard on Lloyd: deep in him is quite a decent fellow: thoughtful, considerate, well-read, charming. You haven't been subtle enough: yet it's a fine portrait, very like,'[59] he conferred in a letter to Roberts in October 1925 Following various posts throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Lloyd took part in the Gallipoli campaign and assisted in the planning of the Arab Revolt with Lawrence.[60]

The T.E. Lawrence / *Seven Pillars* commission illustrates both Roberts‘s workmanlike approach to making art - completing a multipart project to

[59] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (2.10.1925), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737. fols. 248-266.

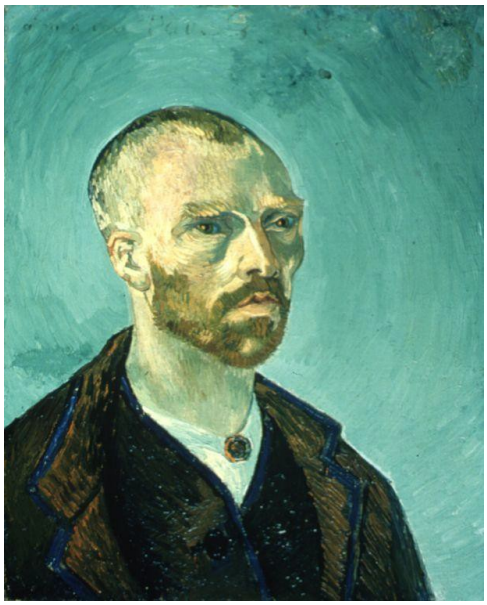
[60] Cleall, ed., William Roberts catalogue raisonné. http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 29-30 December 2014]. After Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, Lloyd (1879–1941) began work as a director of his family's steel-tube company before in 1905 becoming an unpaid honorary attaché in Constantinople. He travelled all over the Ottoman Empire and reported on trade prospects in the Persian Gulf. In 1910 he became a Liberal Unionist MP. On the outbreak of the First World War he was seconded to the intelligence department of the general staff in Egypt, and subsequently took part in the Gallipoli campaign and helped plan the Arab Revolt with T. E. Lawrence. After the war his appointments included governor of Bombay, High Commissioner in Egypt, and Secretary of State for the Colonies.

deadline - but also his ambivalence toward military authority - as illustrated in the Introduction, and referenced in his memoir, *4.5 Howitzer Gunner Royal Field Artillery 1916–1918; Memories of the War to End War 1914–1918* - published in 1974.

Aircraftman Shaw (aka Portrait of T.E. Lawrence), oil on canvas, 92 x 61 cm, 1922, Ashmolean Museum

Turning to the *Aircraftman Shaw* portrait, what strikes you immediately when coming into contact with the picture is a twofold dynamic tension between the tangible solidity of the figure and the shock of the background palette. The three-quarter view - which is uncommon in Roberts's portraits (only also used for

Sarah portraits to be discussed later) - is rendered in life-size; and as such, delivers the impression that you are literally seeing Lawrence as Roberts did. The dark pewter blue-greys of the uniform and cap are strikingly contrasted to the canvas's background field, which graduates from left to right, from a luminous lime green to acidic saffron yellow. The luminosity of this backdrop conjures the heat and stark desertscapes of Lawrence's time in Arabia. No reproduction I have seen does Roberts's palette justice in this instance; the resulting contrast between dark figure and illuminated background propels Lawrence forward in three dimensions, interestingly contradicting the notion of hot colours advancing and cool receding, as the effect is nearly opposite. This colour effect to my eye recalls that achieved in certain portraiture of Vincent van Gogh and Hans Holbein, who consciously minimised their backgrounds with a field of rich colour to intensify the focus on the sitter - using light and contrast to



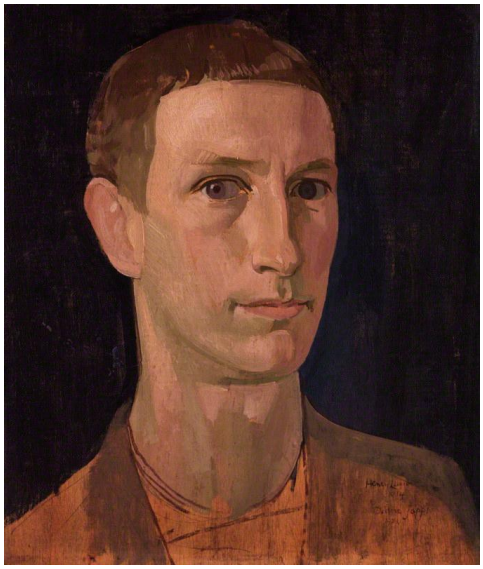
Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gaugin*, 1888, 61.5 x 50.3 cm, © Harvard University Art Museums

Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of a Member of the Wedigh Family,* 42 x 31.8 cm, © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

heighten the physicality of the sitter in a fathomless space devoid mostly of shadow. This effect was characteristic of some of the work of Roberts's contemporaries in the 1910s and 1920s, for example Wyndham Lewis, Mark

Wyndham Lewis, *Mr Wyndham Lewis as a* Tyro, a self-portrait, 1920-21, oil on canvas, 73 x 44 cm, © Ferens Art Gallery, Hull City Museums and Art Gallery

Mark Gertler, *Portrait of Dora Carrington*, 1912, gouache on paper, © Edgar Astaire collection



Henry Lamb, *Henry Lamb*, 1914, oil on panel, 36.8 x 31.8 cm, © National Portrait Gallery

Gertler, and Henry Lamb - although not consistently employed by them, as commissioned portraits more often than not situated subjects amidst their possessions or other visual cues for their character or reputation. These strikingly 'Modern' images use contrasting and unexpected colour to define the planes and contours of the face or upper torso, whilst simplifying and flattening at the same time so as to reflect the two-dimensionality of the canvas; their dichotomous realism and abstraction balanced.

Where Roberts excels particularly in the T.E. Lawrence portrait is in the painterly sculpting of the face. Lawrence was actually rather slight of build,

though lean and fit from training at Uxbridge at the time the painting was rendered. Roberts however chose to present Lawrence with more heft - crossing his arms, bulking up the folds of his jacket, and squaring his jaw. The cheeks, lips, nose and brow are built of facets of subtly graded colours - ranging from peach to lavender, to orange, to white. In relief, these jagged facets echo the sharp edges of Roberts's more extreme Vorticist or cubist abstraction; yet blended together, are softened into a coherent, aesthetically pleasing, whole. This treatment of flesh is very characteristic of his portraits of the early twenties, which will be examined further in successive chapters. The sculptural honing and modelling of the face – save for the medium – is identical to the technique in rendering the Newcombe and McMahon drawings.

Roberts's approach to facial modelling may also draw from the avant-garde influences observed in his visits to Europe, or premiered by Fry's and Marinetti's exhibitions in the UK - although not as radical at this stage as the cubism of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, one of Roberts's Vorticist colleagues who died at war in 1915 aged just 25. Whereas Roberts's facial moulding is more gradual and naturalistic, Gaudier used discordant colour to sculpt the face in paint with arresting effect.

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Self-Portrait*, 1913, © Southampton City Art Gallery

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, 1914, marble, 90.5 x 45.7 x 48.9 cm, © RDN and PRN Foundation, Dallas

Contemporary criticism of the work was largely positive –when it was first exhibited publicly in Roberts's debut solo show at Chenil galleries. Writing for *The Observer*, P.G. Konody (whose own portrait my Roberts is examined in Chapter Two), critically praised Roberts portrait, with a notable exception: 'The otherwise admirable portrait of Colonel T.E. Lawrence (No 12) is marred by an unnecessary, illogical and very disturbing passage of shadow in the plain background along the cheek.'[61]

Beyond its technical merits and Modern representation, Roberts's Lawrence portrait achieves real significance in terms of capturing the equivocal character of this hero-scholar at this particular moment in time. This is certainly evident in the eyes, where Lawrence's distant gaze is both wise and vulnerable, alert and weary. Though hooded and circled, Lawrence's eyes are alive with cobalt light, which complement the various blues, greys and purples of his jacket and cap.

[61] P.G. Konody, 'Roberts's Robots', Art and Artists, *The Observer*, 18 November 1923, p. 10.

Lawrence's inherent strength of will is communicated through his fixed gaze, set

Aircraftman Shaw (aka Portrait of T.E. Lawrence) (detail)

jaw, firm stance and crossed arms, but there are hints of distraction, of fatigue, of resignation. Roberts's own first hand war experience certainly would have enhanced his ability to capture Lawrence's enigmatic expression, and despite their materially different upbringings, education and careers, both painter and sitter shared the war, their mutual attraction to and revulsion of its camaraderie and rote duties. Roberts humanised the hero of Lawrence and portrayed him as an equal - in the guise of the private serviceman whom Lawrence desperately sought to be at this time - bound by their common experience.

Lawrence's reflections on the work in a letter to Kennington are illuminating:

> Dear Kennington
> […]
> I'm very glad you are helping Roberts. He makes help difficult sometimes, and yet I feel that I would like the oyster if I had any tool strong enough to pry it open. Tell me sometime what you think of his considered effort of me. He painted with astonishing certainty: not like John who put a new expression in [my] eyes and mouth on each sitting: but as though there was a fixity in my appearance and mood
> […][62]

In Lawrence's own correspondence with Roberts after completion of the picture, there are three points of significance: first, the directness of language and sense

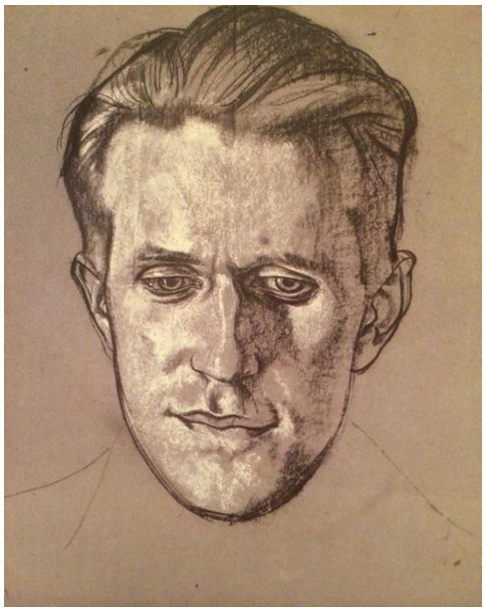
[62] Brown, T.E. Lawrence to Eric Kennington (27.06.23), p. 240.

of narrative reveals the 'equal footing' of their friendship; second, Lawrence's modesty and vulnerability with regard to his dependency on service is palpable; and third, the commission indeed was also business transaction, with promissory payment references confirming the ever-present lack of funds which characterised both painter and sitter in the most fundamental way:

> Roberts,
>
> […]
>
> As for losing the R.A.F.…I feel sorry about it, & very lost now, not having a tender corporal to lead me by the hand. It was a jolly set of fellows, & we were a pleased family. I didn't join for the glory of the uniform! Most of the R.A.F. would accept your judgement upon it: but it's easy to look after, & comfortable & so I had no quarrel with it. People my odd shape would look funny in anything, you know.
>
> I can't imagine what is now going to happen to me. I'm living on what should have been picture-money, & something desperate must happen at once, or there will be no drawing this year: & I <u>do</u> want to get the whole lot finished this year.
>
> […]
>
> I changed name lately, & find it more comfortable than a dressing gown.
>
> Yours
>
> (EL)
>
> J.H. Ross
>
> One cheque enclosed: another in ten days, when my next income-instalment comes in.[63]

The honesty and pathos of Roberts's picture is perhaps similar to that of Eric Kennington's very intimate sketch of Lawrence from a year prior whilst the two travelled in Cairo amassing the Arab portraits. Kennington's portrait is captivating in its intensity - and without the pastiche of the robes that John and others favoured in their likenesses - or any distractions of garment or background, animates the intelligence and reflection of this great man.

[63] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (16.2.23), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.



Eric Henri Kennington, *T.E. Lawrence*, 1921, pastel, 44.7 x 32.8 cm, © Adrian Liddell Hart

Kennington reflected on this picture: 'He was clearly delighted with the drawing, but found its insight into his character almost unnerving…He would not use this for *Seven Pillars* though he liked it best. Reason: it was too obviously the spider in the web of its own spinning.'[64]

Roberts painted Lawrence in his and Sarah's rented rooms in Coleherne Terrace, Earl's Court in August of 1922. 'Roberts recorded that he would find his subject sitting on the dark stairs waiting for him if he was late. Sarah Roberts said that Lawrence preferred the unfinished portrait of himself by John, also in the Ashmolean.[65]

For understandable reasons, Lawrence feared discovery and whilst at Uxbridge wrote to Roberts advising against meeting in London, 'I should have told you before that I'm a photographer-mechanic in the R.A.F. – a tommy – and so cannot dispose of my movements very certainly…I am in blue uniform, and don't want to be known in any of my old feeding-places! Please don't tell anyone I've

[64] A.W. Lawrence, ed., *T. E. Lawrence by his Friends* (London: Jonathan Cape; Garden City, NY: Doubleday Doran, 1937. Abridged edition London: Jonathan Cape, 1954). Eric Kennington to T.E. Lawrence, p. 266.
[65] Katherine Eustace, *Twentieth Century Paintings* (Oxford: Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum catalogue entry, 20, 1999), and preparatory notes (dated 13/03/96) [examined in the Western Art Print Room, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archeology, Oxford, on 25 March 2015].

enlisted. The press would make a humorous story of it!'[66] This was prescient indeed, as in mid-December, two reporters of the Daily Express having been tipped off that Lawrence of Arabia was serving at Uxbridge, arrived at the camp to confirm his presence. According to John Mack, one of Lawrence's biographers, there are multiple views as to who revealed Lawrence's identity - be it an opportunistic café owner selling the story, a malicious officer, or Lawrence himself - but what is certain was that once necessarily confirmed, Lawrence's position became untenable drawing unnecessary media attention, and he was discharged in January 1923.

George Bernard Shaw, wrote plainly if not acerbically to Lawrence of the news:

> Like all heros, and, I must add, all idiots, you greatly exaggerate your power of moulding the universe to your personal convictions. You have just had a crushing demonstration of the utter impossibility of hiding or disguising the monster you have created. It is useless to protest that Lawrence is not your name. That will not save you...But you masqueraded as Lawrence and did not keep quiet; and now Lawrence you will be until the end of your days, and thereafter to the end of what we call modern history Lawrence may be a great nuisance to you sometimes as G.B.S. is to me, or as Frankenstein found the man he had manufactured; but you created him, and must now put up with him as best you can.[67]

A series of as yet unpublished letters from Lawrence to Roberts provide an interesting concluding context to this chapter. They capture one side of an open and honest exchange between patron/employer and his artist/charge. For in the midst of the early phase of their nearly decade-long collaboration, Roberts was preparing for his first solo exhibition at Chenil Galleries which opened in November 1923. The first was written after the Newcombe, McMahon and Buxton drawings were complete, but *predate* Lawrence's own portrait sitting.

> Dear Roberts
>
> Your drawings are packed up & waiting at No.2 Smith Square my mother's house, within a hundred yards of Barton Street. If you will be so good as to call they will be given to you: & I think the estimate for framing very moderate. Have it done as well as you can, for the more attractive they look in the show, the better it will be for you: & perhaps for me.

---

[66] John E. Mack, *A Prince of our Disorder, The Life of T.E. Lawrence*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, 1998), refers to letter from T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts, October 27, 1922, California private collection, p. 512.

[67] A.W. Lawrence, G.B. Shaw to T.E. Lawrence (4 January 1923), pp. 168-169.

They are a most excellent 3.

I'm going to Farnborough tomorrow (for technical training as a photographer) so shall be out of action till I have grown new roots there.

Yours sincerely

T E Lawrence

Two artists who saw them described the McMahon as a knock-out. They thought it was better than the Newcombe. Another liked the Buxton best: but one thought that in it you had lost grip of the structure of the head: & put in surface instead ! Do other people's criticisms of your stuff amuse you?

E.L.

My mother wants me to sit [for] you ![68]

In September 1923, with *Aircraftman Shaw* completed some 8 months earlier, Roberts appears to have asked Lawrence to write the catalogue introduction (which was eventually written by Muirhead Bone); but is sensitively refused, despite being generously supported and inspired to create much of the exhibited work by Lawrence in the show.

Dear Roberts,

You have me beat there. Once I wrote an introduction, for Kennington, but it was to introduce a suite of portraits, & I knew all of the subjects & described them biographically.

That's a totally different thing to trying to write about pictures: for I know nothing of art & and don't want to pretend to. Even the biographical preface was very badly done.

Try & get someone else, since I'm a wash out. I can't even get up to see your new things. Dorset is too far off for a ride (& the bike is laid up for a lack of funds just now) & there aren't funds for a rail journey, & leave is very hard to won. So far I've only been once in London since I left.

The R.A.F. is more admirable in its little finger that the Army is in its body.

Yours truly, TEL

Am very glad you are having the show. It should do infinite good. Chenil is a good master-of-show.[69]

And in characteristic ambivalence, Lawrence concludes this series of letters urging discretion, but also not barring Roberts from featuring such a significant work in the show.

[68] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (6.xi.22), Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.
[69] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (25.ix.22), Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

About the R.A.F. portrait. I'd rather it not be identified with me: but make no article of faith of that, if it would benefit you much to label it.

I hope the thing goes well: and fancy that it will

Yours

TE

Write me results, if they are fit, & you feel fit[70]

Sarah and William Roberts developed a lasting acquaintance with Lawrence, and enjoyed the use of Clouds Hill - Lawrence's home in Dorset - for summer visits before Lawrence's untimely death by motorbike accident in 1935.

The portrait was presented to the Ashmolean Museum in 1946, by the sitter's brother, Professor A.W. Lawrence, along with a portrait sketch by John. The Accession of Pictures report from 1946 reads:

> Two portraits (for the reference section) of T.E. Lawrence, viz. (a) an unfinished head and shoulders, full face, by Augustus John, R.A., which, according to a note in the sitter's writing on the back of the canvas, was 'painted in the morning and afternoon of an August day in 1929'; (b) a half-length to left, wearing Royal Air Force uniform, by William Roberts.[71]

In the context of the vast array of portraits of T.E. Lawrence completed by artists over the years, Roberts's picture stands out, not only for uniquely recording the great hero in an historically significant time whilst serving as an R.A.F. 'tommy', but also for capturing the essence of a self-tortured genius at the pinnacle of his

[70] T.E. Lawrence to William Roberts (13.x.23), Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-266.

[71] *The Accession of Pictures Report from 1939 – 1946* (Oxford: Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, 1946), p. 28.

creation of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom.* It is unlikely at the time that Roberts appreciated the magnitude of the book's importance[72], or of the material nature of his contribution to it; but the Lawrence portrait stands as evidence enough of his personal connection to Lawrence, and of Roberts's extreme gift as an artist

[72] I was curious as to whether William Roberts ever saw or owned a finished proof or published copy of the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, or considered the significance of his contribution thereto. Bob Davenport, of the William Roberts Society, shared the following:

> 'An afterthought. I had an idea that someone, somewhere, knows the history of all the copies of the subscribers' edn of *SPW*, and I've just looked through my email correspondence of a few years ago with Jeremy Wilson to see if he mentions this. He doesn't, but I see that I mentioned to him that JDR's notebooks say, "My father had a proof copy of 'Seven Pillars' with the annotations of Lawrence, who passed it to him by sections, as finished with so that he could design tailpieces. Later WR had a note from the foreign office [sic] about it, and he went down and waited in a corridor with it. Someone came out and examined it, but said it was of little value. Sarah [Roberts] took it to Rota, who gave her £20. 'We had to have the money.' But WR was not trying to sell it to the FO." This was also mentioned in the January 2012 WRS newsletter.
>
> JW replied that he believed that WR's proof is the one now in the London Library.
>
> Colin Cooper, a WRS member who died a couple of years ago and was a friend of JDR's and mine, reckoned that the Robertses had a copy of the *SPW* subscribers' edition, but Pauline (Pauker) found no trace of this when clearing out the house. Since reading in Michael Howard's *Jonathan Cape* book about the more-lavish-than-I-thought first trade edition, I've wondered if this could have been what Colin saw. But I'd have thought Pauline would have picked up on this if it existed. With a print run of only 100 copies, I doubt that TEL could have been that generous with the subscribers' edn.]
>
> Email from Bob Davenport (01.04.15).

In the 'clarity' of retrospect, we may feel a tragic opportunity loss for Roberts regarding his relationship with Lawrence, and how artists of today would exploit such patronage; but there is a brilliant integrity of friendship and symbiotic exchange between these men who were so similar and yet so different.

Chapter Two

Ordinary and Extraordinary People of 1920s London

Chapter Two: Ordinary and Extraordinary People of 1920s London

In terms of the volume and range of work, the 1920s was William Roberts's most prolific and stylistically developmental decade. His profusion of output reflected both Roberts's youthful energy and ambition, but also demonstrated his pragmatic approach to earning income through commissions to provide for Sarah and their son John. Roberts's subject matter and development as an artist in the 1920s literally and figuratively reflected the evolution of London through the decade. Cultural, social and economic change was catalysed by the First World War, including industrial scale manufacture, emancipation of women, ethnic diversity, improved communication and transportation services, and a return to leisure pursuits for the working and middle classes: cinemas, jazz clubs and afternoons in the capital's many parks. Roberts devoured and documented all of this in drawing, watercolour and oil. From group compositions to individual portraits, he captured the ordinary and extraordinary people and life of 1920s London.

As the portrait of T.E. Lawrence and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* commission demonstrated in the previous chapter, Roberts could apply his meticulous draftsmanship and insightful characterisation to an in-depth, single-subject matter, i.e., the Arab Revolt. Whilst completing that project of nearly 50 drawings and paintings, he was simultaneously producing an astounding array of commissioned and self-initiated projects. In Chapter Two, we shall now examine the broader range of portraiture that Roberts produced in the 1920s by reviewing a selection of works capturing 'real people' in Roberts's life - from the elite, to the every-day, to the exotic – in the context of his evolving oeuvre and the portraiture of his contemporaries.

Roberts was well positioned given his training and contacts from the Slade for portrait commission referral. Moreover, he found himself in the heart of Bohemian London during and after the War, where his network and nightlife in the circle of Augustus John, Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell, and art critic P.G. Konody, meant that a rich portfolio of interesting faces and personalities

populated his life in these years. He also needed to earn money; portraiture was therefore a means to a financial end, as well as a useful way to market his abilities and gain greater exposure.

Roberts wrote several essays on The 'Twenties', which were posthumously published in 1990. These provide an eyewitness distillation of Bohemian Soho, with a dramatis personae of the artists, patrons, café and restaurant proprietors, and musicians with whom he ate and drank, and whom he painted in group genre pictures and portraits. Wyndham Lewis and Roger Fry feature significantly in these essays, but are second billing relative to Augustus John, who features larger than life in his favoured 'gypsy' style clothing, and accompanied by his coterie of admirers and hangers-on. Two establishments around Fitzroy and Charlotte Streets, L'Etoile and L'Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel drew the artistic and literary intelligentsia throughout the war and well into the 1920s and 1930s. At the former, Roberts wryly described the selective effect of affluence on filtering the clientele:

> In spite of its French name, L'Etoile had as its proprietor an Italian, Signor Rossi. The restaurant was patronised by Wyndham Lewis and also by Roger Fry, who despite their differences of opinion in art matters were in full agreement when it concerned Maître Rossi's escalope milanaise, pommes sautés et épinards, washed down with a bottle of Sauterne. At the hour of lunch or dinner, among the customers one noticed an artist or two, of the affluent kind of course; perhaps Matthew Smith together with Epstein, after having evaded any lurking Fitzroy Street 'Borrowers.'[73]

L'Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel, and Lewis' and Augustus John's presence therein, are particularly significant to this Chapter, in that Roberts made some of his most influential connections there, and showcased two of his most accomplished murals. And, it was through John that Roberts was directly and indirectly supported in terms of introductions to other artists, patrons and gallerists which led to his first solo exhibition in 1923 at the Chenil Galleries in the Kings Road. Roberts recalled:

> Anyone passing down Charlotte Street southwards would find it impossible to ignore the tall facade of the Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel that seems as one

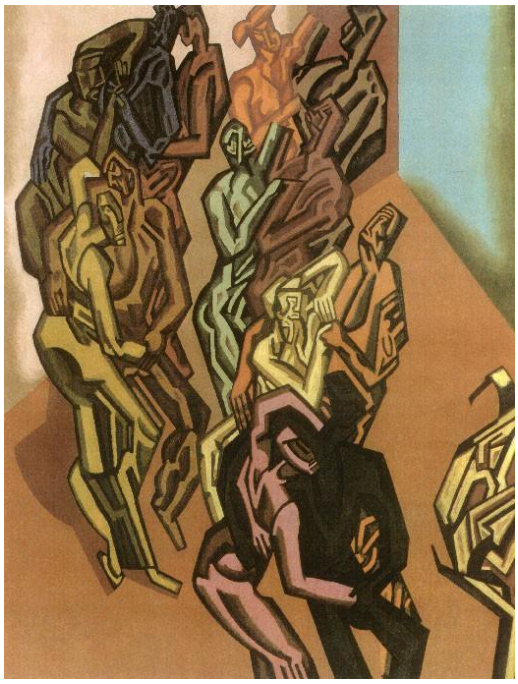
[73] William Roberts, 'The Twenties', published in *Five Posthumous Essays and Other Writings* (London: Valencia, 1990), ed. John David Roberts [text accessed through William Roberts catalogue raisonné, http://englishcubist.co.uk/twenties.html, 21 April 2015].

> approaches to bar the entrance to Soho. Like the Etoile, this Hotel also is only outwardly French, its proprietor, Rudolf Stulik, being Austrian, as were his three waiters Joe, Frank and Otto. La Tour Eiffel, judged by the quality of its cuisine and clientele, was easily superior to any other restaurant in the neighbourhood. One of its earliest customers of note was Whistler, soon to be followed by Augustus John. Stulik soon discovered that John's presence was good for business, and to the frequent question, 'Has John been in lately, Stulik?' he would say 'Yes, Mr. John was here last night' or 'Mr. John was here at lunchtime.' Then with a glance through the window to see if Augustus was approaching, would add 'Oh yes, Mr. John is often here.' One got the impression from this that 'Mister John' spent most of his time at the Eiffel. Nevertheless it was indeed his favourite restaurant.
>
> The next event of importance at the Tour Eiffel was the coming of Wyndham Lewis. It could be said of John that, besides his fame as an artist, it was also his artistic appearance and the legend of his life among the gypsies, that attracted the clientele. But with Lewis it was different. Although sharing John's taste for 'Sombreros' he was not disposed to beat about the bushes with the gypsies, but soon had his paints and brushes in action, with the result that in no time at all Stulik was the delighted owner of a small private dining-room decorated with Lewis' abstract paintings, to be known as the Vorticist room.[74]

It is uncertain how Roberts first came into contact with Osbert Sitwell, but they most likely met at la Tour Eiffel, frequented also by the Sitwell siblings. Roberts had been commissioned by Stulik to paint two panels to augment Lewis' 'Vorticist' private dining room: *The Diners* and *The Dancers*, both 1919. That year, Osbert, who would have seen these murals, commissioned Roberts to design a

[74] Ibid.

The Diners, 1919 (painted for the Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel), oil on canvas, 152.4 x 83.2 cm, Tate

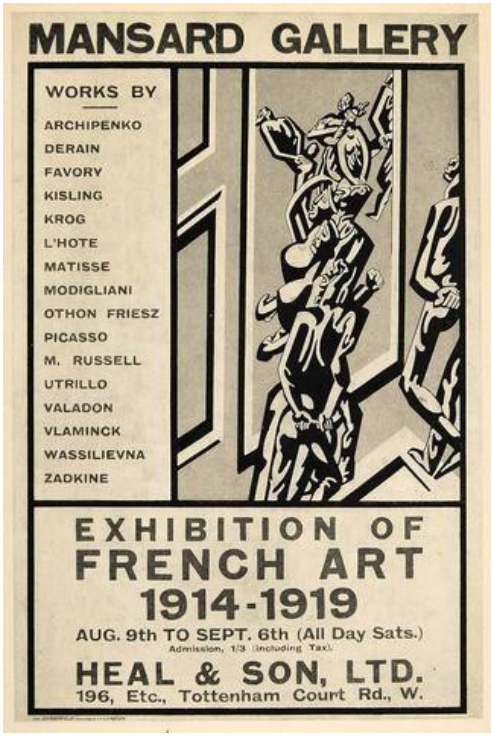


The Dancers, 1919 (painted for the Hôtel de la Tour Eiffel), oil on canvas, 152 x 116.5 cm, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow

poster for an exhibition of French avant-garde art which the Sitwells mounted at the Mansard Gallery at Heals on Tottenham Court Road. This show famously

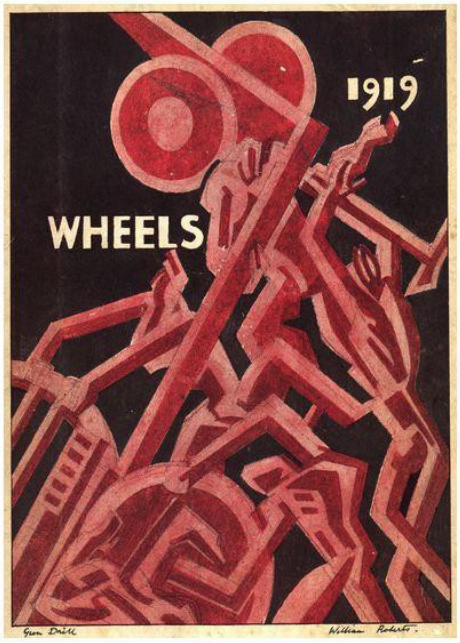
introduced Modigliani for the first time to an English audience – and also included works by Picasso, Leger, Derain and Dufy.[75]

This project led to further commissions from Edith, Sacheverell and Osbert who were actively progressing and promoting their literary projects through the late 1910s and 1920s; Roberts illustrated two of the six editions of *Wheels,* a literary journal Edith edited, as well as designed end papers for *At the House of Mrs Kinfoot*, Osbert's novel of 1921. For these projects, Roberts returned to his pre-war Cubist / Vorticist style of angular, abstracted figures and sharp diagonal compositions.

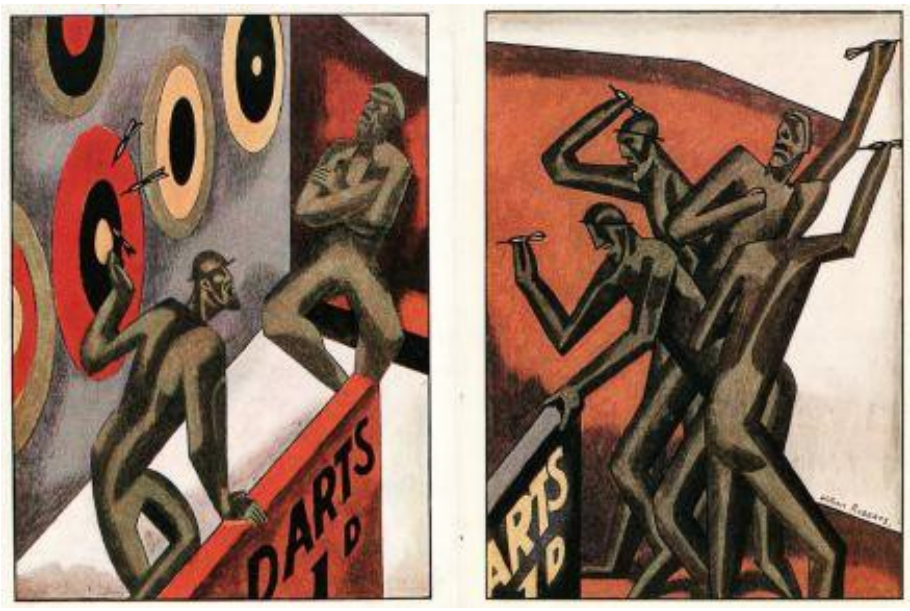


Poster for the Exhibition of French Art 1914–1919 (Mansard Gallery, Heal's), 1919, poster, 75 x 48 cm

[75] Gibbon Williams, *William Roberts: An English Cubist* (London: Lund Humphries, 2004) p. 52.



Wheels 1919 cover design (using *Gun Drill c.*1919) for *Wheels* no. 4, 1919



Wheels 1919, two endpieces for volume of poetry published by Osbert Sitwell, 1919

At the House of Mrs Kinfoot (endpaper for the book of the same title by Osbert Sitwell, published by the Favil Press), 1921

Known for their prolific creativity, the Sitwell family were also great patrons of the arts, and were variously captured in portraits by Frank Dobson (*Osbert Sitwell*, bronze, Tate, 1923), and Wyndham Lewis (*Edith Sitwell*, Tate, 1921-35). Ironically, there are no known formal portraits of the Sitwells executed by Roberts himself, as confirmed by members of the Sitwell family interviewed in my research.[76]

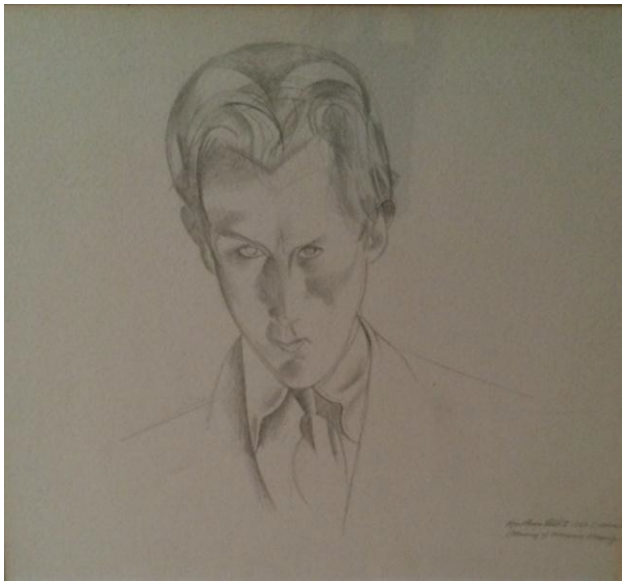
[76] William Sitwell, grandson of Sir Sacheverell, grand-nephew and literary executor to Edith Sitwell interviews & email correspondence, July 2015; visit to Weston, the Northamptonshire home of George Sitwell, William's brother, and before that, of Sir Sacheverell, 19 July 2015. Images of Wyndham Lewis portraits at Weston of Edith and Sacheverell (p. 101) reprinted with permission of William and George Sitwell.

Frank Dobson, *Osbert Sitwell,* 1923, bronze, 31.8 x 17.8 x 22.9 cm, © Tate

Wyndham Lewis, *Edith Sitwell* (1923-35), oil on canvas, 86.4 x 111.8 cm, © Tate

At Weston, the Northamptonshire home of Sir Sacheverell and Georgia Sitwell since 1927 (and now his grandson, George) can be found two portrait drawings by Lewis. One of Edith, signed and dated 1921, is a study for the Tate oil portrait; and the other of Sacheverell, signed and dated 1922, confirm the presence of Lewis in the Sitwells' lives toward the end and beyond the time they were working with Roberts. William Sitwell, brother to George and literary executor for Edith, very kindly arranged access to these remarkable drawings as well as to other invaluable books and research materials.

Wyndham Lewis, *Edith Sitwell*, 1921 (study for Tate portrait), approximately 33 x 25 cm, Sitwell family collection



Wyndham Lewis, *Sacheverell Sitwell* (detail), pencil on paper, 1922, 37.1 x 27 cm, Sitwell family collection

Whilst it is conjectured by Roberts's biographers that he, like Lewis, may have despised his patrons' intellectual elitist tendencies, he conscientiously completed his commissions and benefited from the ongoing work and referrals. Indeed, for another commission, Roberts depicted the Sitwells leading an avant-garde charge for the cover of *Coterie* - a literary journal they supported and

contributed to in 1919 - their caricatured figures hoisting a battering ram against philistinism.[77]

Coterie No. 3, December 1919, cover and title page image, 19 x 25.5 cm

Osbert became one of Roberts's most active early collectors, acquiring in 1919 several watercolours Roberts reluctantly parted with, and subsequently commissioned him to paint two pictures, the subject matter of which to be Roberts's own choosing. Only one was completed: *The Interval Before Round 10*, 1919-1920, is considered the best of Roberts's paintings depicting boxing, and has been noted for its brighter palette and more volumetric figures,[78] relative to his earlier work.

The Interval before Round 10, 1919-1920, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 119.4 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

[77] Gibbon Williams, p. 52.
[78] Ibid.

This picture, also known as 'Prize Fight' hung prominently in the dining room of Osbert's and Sacheverell's Chelsea residence at No. 2 Carlyle Square, in good company along with works by Modigliani, Severini, Tchelitchew, Gaudier-Brzeska, and Picasso.[79]

Before examining a selection of portraits, it is also significant to note that Roberts's technique in capturing group scenes in movement evolved with real sophistication in the early 1920s. Whereas *The Diners* and *The Dancers* abstracted figurative movement with pure, but flattened geometric dynamism, we see more depth and volume emerging in Roberts's boxing and café scenes – often populated with colleagues, friends and family. Biographer Andrew Gibbon Williams notes this transition is particularly evident in Roberts's drawing, *Discussion in a Café*, 1921:

> With its dramatically diagonal composition formed by the long table and its tightly conceived figure groupings and lack of clutter, the drawing advertises its debt to Cubist logic. But there is nothing at all generalised about it. A pensive, bearded Augustus John wearing a Homburg is easily identifiable, as is the bushy haired Jacob Kramer engaged in conversation with the two standing figures at the end of the table. Discussion in a Café is above all a record of a specific event, particularised by the emphasis on sartorial features: beards, bobbed hair, trilbies and pointed shoes.

Thus, Roberts's portraiture can be linked to the development of his maturing group figurative work – where his innate gift of figurative observation and characterisation fed into and fused with his well-practiced craft of design and composition.

[79] Robin Gibson and Honor Clerk, *The Sitwells and the Arts of the 1920s and 1930s* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1995), pp. 64-65.

Café Royal Scene (aka *Discussion in a Bar* and *Pimps in a Bar*), *c.*1921, pencil, ink and watercolour, 40.5 x 51 cm, private collection

The first portrait to be examined in Chapter Two is that of P.G. Konody (1872-1933), an influential art critic for both *The Observer* and *The Daily Mail* before the First World War, and one of three critics to be 'blessed' by Wyndham Lewis in *BLAST* No. 1.[80] Paul George Konody was born in Budapest in 1872. He was educated in Vienna before emigrating to London in 1889. In addition to his newspaper reviews, he edited *The Artist* from 1900-1902, and published works covering a range of artists including Velasquez, Raphael and Delacroix, as well as broader subjects such as art and war (published around the First World War), and French and Italian painting. He died in 1933.

[80] William Roberts catalogue raisonné http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 22 April 2015].

The Art Critic (P.G. Konody) (detail), 1920, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm, private collection

Konody was influential in securing Roberts's commission for *The First German Gas Attack at Ypres* in 1918, whilst serving on the selection committee of Official War Artists. This portrait - like many others in this paper - was exhibited at Roberts's debut solo exhibition at the Chenil Galleries in November 1923, priced £35. Whilst considered lost for decades, the picture has been found to be in the Konody family possession since that date.

Significantly, Konody reviewed Roberts's first one-man exhibition for *The Observer* (tactfully omitting reference to his own portrait), using the critique to

champion Roberts's 'truly exceptional power of draughtsmanship', and the show as evidence of the artist's evolution toward more representational work from 'decorative geometric abstraction' associated with Vorticism, which turned human beings into 'robots'.

> …His exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Chenil Gallery in Chelsea is made up partly of Vorticist "Robots" in his old manner – grotesque inventions in which the sinuous forms of the human body are forced into simplified geometric shapes without losing their clear articulation and latent power of movement, partly of straightforward portraits, with an accentuation of structural planes that, together with the total elimination of atmosphere, is the logical outcome of his earlier experiments. Apart from this insistence on plastic relations, these portraits have a curious affinity with Mr. Brockhurst's Leonardesque heads – the same clear cut design, decorative spacing, strong characterisation, clean execution, and colour modified by reflection, though Mr. Roberts is mainly interested in the angles and edges and planes of the head, and Mr. Brockhurst in the roundnesses and tone transitions.[81]

Apt words to also describe his own portrait, with its sculptural modelling of the flesh, and faceted gradations of colour defining temples, cheeks, nose, lips, chin and eyelids. Peter Martin, grandson of P.G. Konody, has kindly supplied detailed

The Art Critic (P. G. Konody), 1920, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm (detail), private collection

images of the picture which reveal the freshness and sculptural aspects of Roberts's palette and modelling. The spectrum of pink, peach, taupe, ochre and grey to define the planes of the face, are starkly contrasted by the moss and mud greens used to describe the suit jacket and background.

[81] P.G. Konody, 'Roberts's Robots,' *Art and Artists, The Observer*, 18 November 1923, p. 10.

Gerald Brockhurst, *Ranunculus* (1914), Oil on panel, 79.5 x 66 cm, © Sheffield Museum

Konody's comparison of Roberts to Gerald Leslie Brockhurst (1890-1978) is interesting, where the artists seem to meet a shared objective to capture the strength of character of their sitters with prominent forward-advancing figures, but executionally diverge in terms of achieving volume and space. Brockhurst's approach literally draws from Leonardo's Madonnas in idyllic landscapes with subtle chiaroscuro modelling, whilst Roberts sculpts facets of flesh by juxtaposing small planes of colour and stripping backgrounds to bare minima. Only five years Roberts's senior, Brockhurst was broadly his contemporary; and whilst he went on to paint some of Britain's most elite personalities through the 1930s and 40s, Brockhurst's style never evolved beyond a highly meticulous, cinematically-lit take on Renaissance portraiture.

The Chenil show did much to raise awareness of Roberts's work - and Konody's endorsement and accolades must have signalled a real coming of age:

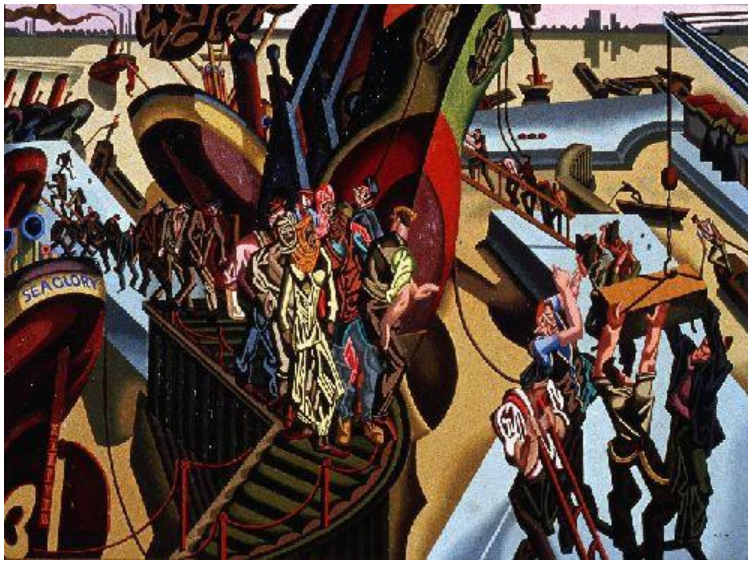
> From the whole exhibition, Mr. Roberts emerges as an artist as original in his somewhat cynical attitude towards life as in his manipulation of form and colour; an artist, moreover, who has broken the fetters of rigid formula to which at one time he threatened to become addicted, and who now applies himself to the solving of new artistic problems.[82]

[82] P.G. Konody, 'Roberts's Robots', *Art and Artists, The Observer*, 18 November 1923, p. 10.

Indeed, the previous year, in regard to the Goupil Gallery summer exhibition of 1922, which included 'thirty works illustrating the movement of French and British painting from the Impressionists to William Roberts', Konody traced a pivotal shift in Roberts's work in the early 1920s,

> The most important example of independent modern art is Mr. Roberts's "The Bridge" (No. 5). In this picture the artists uses less arbitrarily the form content which has made his work so well known. He has brought it into the realm of realism, and with much success retains the ordered balance of his design and colour, although his figures are a little wooden and jump away from their surroundings. Still, this is the sanest and most complete picture Mr. Roberts has yet shown.[83]

The whereabouts of *The Bridge*, are currently unknown, and no images remain, but a contemporary work, *Dock Gates,* may have been completed in the same series of Thames River scenes – a picture which Konody would later come to acquire in 1931.



Dock Gates (aka *Disembarkation*), 1920, oil on canvas, 106.7 x 137.2 cm

A final note on the Konody portrait: it is curious that this picture - which remains in the family's private collection - was listed for sale in the Chenil show in 1923. Perhaps the commitment was already there for Konody to purchase the work in advance, albeit it had been more than two years since its execution. In any event, the picture would have served as a sophisticated form of marketing for Roberts's portraiture – exhibited in context with T.E. Lawrence *Aircraftsman Shaw*, and the

[83] P.G. Konody, 'The Goupil Gallery', *Art and Artists, The Observer*, 9 July 1922, p. 10.

Seven Pillars panoply of heroes – it features one of the most distinguished art critics and historians of the time, and thus by association, imbuing Roberts with critical credibility. So too, as a highly educated émigré, of discerning taste, Konody represented the extraordinary intellectual and cultural influences of the continent which permeated 1920s London.

The second picture in this chapter is *The Creole (aka Portrait of a Negress - Helène Yellin)*, 1923. This oil - which has been exhibited extensively since its execution - depicts the wife of musician W. Yellin, both of whom performed in Soho clubs in the 1920s, including the Harlequin Café in Beak Street, frequented by Augustus John, Jacob Epstein, and Sarah and William Roberts. Helène posed for Roberts as well as Jacob Epstein, a bronze cast by whom is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. This picture was purchased from the Chenil show in 1923 by the Contemporary Art Society, and gifted to the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent in 1937.

Of particular note is the fact that Roberts often used his portrait sitters as dramatis personae for group figurative works; for example, Helène and Jacob Kramer recognizably appear in *The Joke*, also 1923. *The Creole* portrait and this related café scene in tandem also demonstrate a significant *leitmotif* in Roberts's work - that of observing, capturing and celebrating London's diversity of race, religion, class and culture - well in advance of such objectives becoming fashionable or politically correct.

The *Creole* (aka *Portrait of a Negress – Hélène Yellin*), oil on canvas, 60.7 x 50.5 cm, 1923, City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

The Joke, 1923, oil on canvas, 75 x 62.5 cm, private collection

The Creole portrait has recently been on view at Tate Britain as part of an exhibition '*Spaces of Black Modernism: London 1919–39',* tracing the interactions of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in London's art and literary scene between the wars. In addition to Roberts, the exhibition included works by artists such as John Banting, Edward Burra, Jacob Epstein, Barbara Ker-Seymour, Ronald Moody, Glyn Philpot and Matthew Smith, as well as the writers such as Claude McKay, and poet, political activist and socialite Nancy Cunard, who travelled in Sitwell circles.

There is an important distinction to Roberts's portraits of London's ethnicity, relative to the pre-war work of Augustus John, for example – where the interest in the exotic seems grounded in Victorian ideals of Empire, with English sitters – famously here his muse and lover, Dorelia McNeill - dramatising John's penchant for costume. It wasn't until the late 1930s, where John - perhaps inspired by

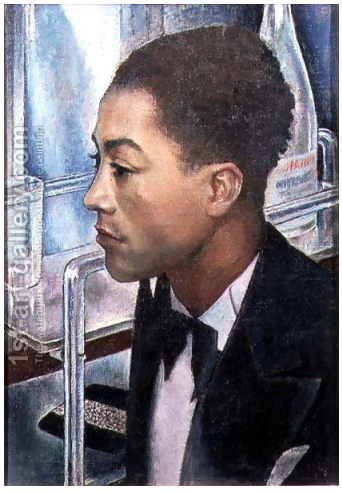
Augustus John, *Woman Smiling*, oil on canvas, 196 x 98.2 cm, 1908-9, Tate. © Tate

Roberts's more modern approach to painting people of non-British cultures - produced a range of portraits of Jamaican women and children, which seem more honest and less posed pastiche.

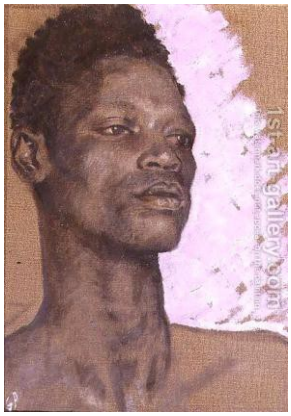
Augustus John, *Two Jamaican Girls*, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.8 cm, 1937, © Walker Art Gallery Liverpool

Others, like Glyn Philpot, however, came closer to Roberts's more truthful, documentary approach, notably in his set of portraits of Julien Zaire 'Tom Whiskey' painted in Paris, and of his Jamaican servant Henry Thomas in the 1930s, although therein, Philpot's well-documented personal relationships with

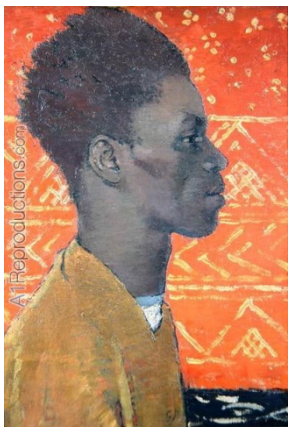
Glyn Philpot, *Monsieur Julien Zaire Tom Whiskey,* 1931-32, oil on canvas, private collection. Images above and below reprinted from *Glyn Philpot, 1884-1937* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1985)



Glyn Philpot, *Monsieur Julien Zaire Tom Whiskey,* 1931-32, oil on canvas, 44 x 31.8 cm, private collection



Glyn Warren Philpot, *Henry Thomas,* c. 1937, oil on canvas

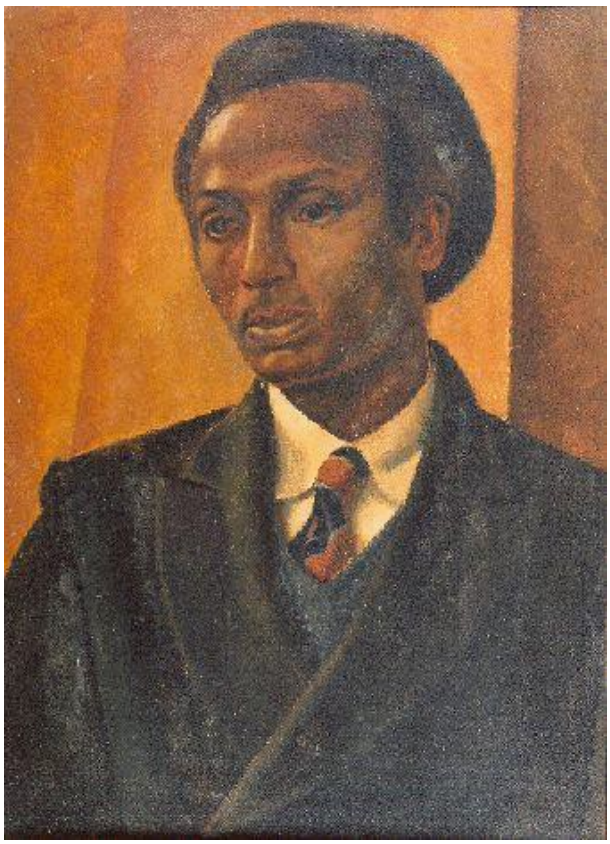


Glyn Warren Philpot, *Negro in Profile Portrait of Henry Thomas*, 1934-35, oil on canvas, © Pallant House Gallery

W.H. Grove & Son, Philpot at his Landsdowne House studio with *Empty House by Sea, N. Africa* and Henry Thomas, c.1934

his sitters and privileged position as socialite portraitist at this time, might betray a different context for his work than that of Roberts's more objectifying documentation of people in his daily life.

Roberts continued to capture people of colour for decades to come, including Doctor Paul de Zoysa, whom he painted around 1930-31 – the third picture to be examined in detail. Roberts met de Zoysa (born Agampodi Paulus de Zoysa



Dr. Paul de Zoysa, *c.*1931, oil on canvas, 51 x 38 cm, private collection

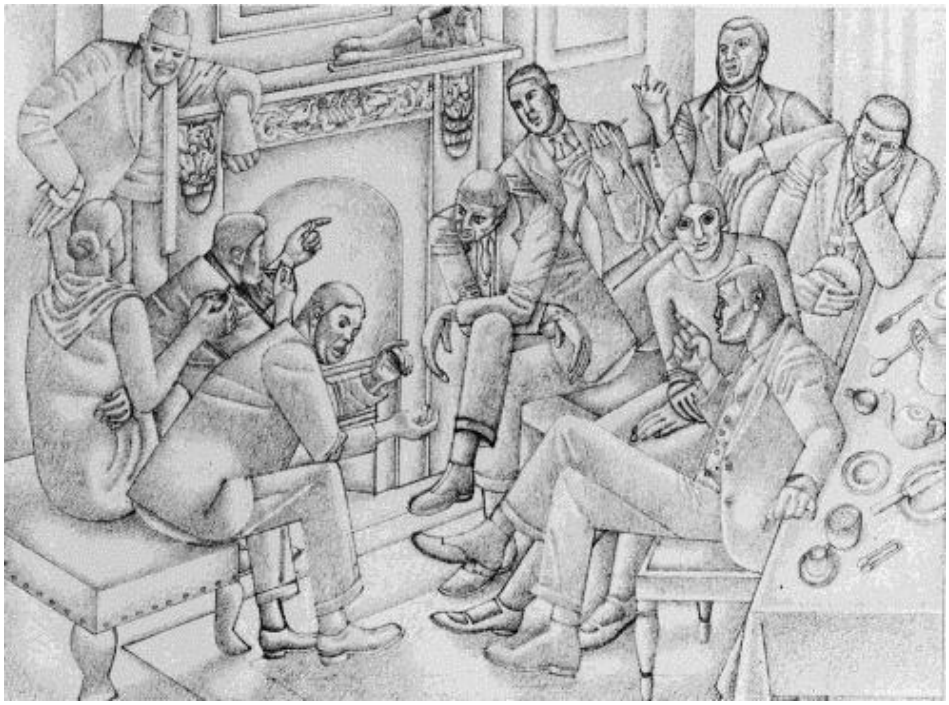
(1890–1968) in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka), through Roberts's brother Michael, whose fiancée Doris was sister to Eleanor Hutton, who became de Zoysa's wife. De Zoysa had come to Britain in 1921 to further his education, and at the Buddhist mission in London he met Eleanor, whom he married in 1929, where Roberts and Sarah stood witness.[84] Bob Davenport of the William Roberts Society cites in the catalogue raisonné: 'Eleanor de Zoysa later claimed that Roberts liked painting people with darker skin - though, he tended to depict them as darker than they really were - and he paid her husband 2s. 6d. to sit for a

[84] William Roberts catalogue raisonné http://englishcubist.co.uk/ w.r.t. de Zoysa. 'Having obtained an external London degree, been called to the Bar at Gray's Inn, and obtained a PhD in anthropology at London University, in 1934, de Zoysa returned to Ceylon, where he practiced law and was politically active. He also acquired a small printing press, and published his own English–Sinhala Dictionary and a major translation into Sinhala of the Tripitaka canon of Buddhist scriptures. In March 2009 a stamp commemorating his life as a social reformer and Buddhist scholar was issued in Sri Lanka.' [accessed 5 May 2015].

portrait.'[85] De Zoysa went on to complete his law degree and was called to the bar at Grays Inn, after which he returned to Sri Lanka to a distinguished career in academia and political activism. It is interesting in the context of their personal connection and family relations to consider Roberts paying his learned and distinguished friend to sit for him, but it may have been in a pragmatic manner to practice and enhance his ability to capture skin tone and features which Roberts was pursuing for his group genre pictures.

As with Helène Yellin in *The Joke*, Roberts captured de Zoysa in a more stylised manner in the drawing *A Talk About Buddha,* which is dated a year prior to the portrait, depicting a lively fireside debate in a north London front room.

De Zoysa's portrait was exhibited in the 1931 London Artists' Association show, and was noted by *The Times* critic thus: 'Simple as it looks, "Dr. Paul de Zoysa" is full of science – the way, for instance, the right angle made by the head and right shoulder, otherwise too obtrusive, is brought into order by the downward swing

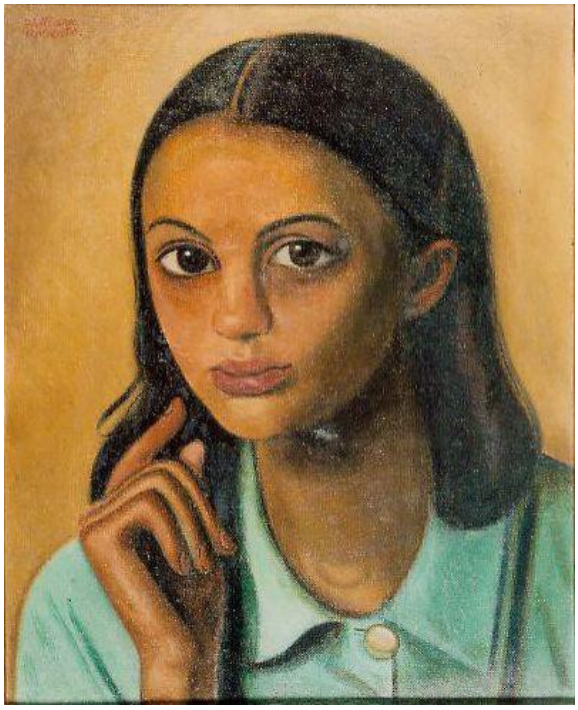


A Talk about Buddha, 1930, pencil, squared, 33 x 45 cm, private collection, London

[85] Bob Davenport, William Roberts catalogue raisonné, w.r.t. *Dr. Paul de Zoysa* http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 6 May 2015].

of the left lapel of the coat'.[86] The picture was purchased by Sir Edward Marsh, a Trustee of and active acquirer for the Contemporary Art Society which subsequently placed the portrait at Southampton Art Gallery in 1952. The picture was loaned back to the Roberts family in 1956,[87] who gave it to Paul and Eleanor de Zoysa, and by inheritance it remains with their daughter, Kumari Jayawardena.

In 1946, Roberts painted Kumari who is today his last known living sitter. She was born in 1931, incidentally the year her father's portrait was completed,



Kumari de Zoysa, 1946, oil on canvas, 48 x 38 cm, private collection of sitter

and educated in London. Her own portrait was painted during five sittings totaling 17 hours between 7th and 26th July 1946 in Marsden near Oxford, when the Robertses were living there. In the family tradition, Kumari was

[86] 'Mr. William Roberts' *The Times*, 30 October 1931, p. 10 – review of paintings and drawings at the Cooling Galleries, New Bond Street.
[87] The de Zoysa portrait was loaned by Southampton Art Gallery to Sarah Roberts at her request on 22 May 1956 for her friend the sitter's wife, Eleanor. In exchange, William Roberts loaned *The Art Master*, ink and watercolour, to the Gallery but there was no agreement in writing. When the de Zoysas moved to Sri Lanka, contact was lost and the loans were made a permanent swop in 1978. This has been confirmed by Tim Craven, Curator of Art Arts and Heritage, Southampton City Council – as noted in William Roberts catalogue raisonné http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 5-6 May 2015].

exceptionally well-educated, graduating in political science from the London School of Economics, and then qualified as a barrister from Lincoln's Inn. After further studies in Paris and London, she taught at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka and at the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague. She also served as an affiliated fellow of the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Under her married name of Kumari Jayawardena, she is the author of several books, including the widely used text *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, published in 1986.[88]

Kumari recalls some telling detail of her experience sitting for Roberts, which sheds light on his process and also confirms the familial and long-standing relationship between the de Zoysa's and the Robertses:

> There was no small talk at WR sittings - in fact no talk at all! I used the chance to memorize Latin grammar for my exams. I was still in school…There was a preparatory drawing which my mother wanted to buy but WR refused. After he had done the portrait he wanted to add the hand pose and got me several times to try various poses.[89]

In terms of method, the reference to the preparatory drawing is significant; whereas for his group scenes almost always systematically included first stage sketches and second stage watercolours, there is relatively little evidence of preparatory drawings for painted portraits. This is either a reflection that with multiple portrait sittings – as referenced in the *Seven Pillars* Newcombe and Buxton cases in Chapter One – the iterative process obviated the need for sketches; or that Roberts serially destroyed preparatory portrait drawings - or some combination.

It is notable that by the Forties, Roberts's portrait style aligned more closely with that of his group scene paintings, with simplified, less sculptured figures. Note the lack of facial modelling in Kumari's portrait relative to *The Creole* or *P.G. Konody* two decades earlier; this is true even relative to her own father's picture. Similarly, the tubular treatment of the hand, and the flattening of the face and eyes is more consistent with characters populating his mature urban scene

[88] William Roberts catalogue raisonné http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 6 May 2015].
[89] Kumari Jayawardena email to Zachary R. Leonard 18 March 2015.

abstractions. We will examine this progression from realism to modernist abstraction in portraiture in Chapter Three in the context of successive Sarah Roberts portraits through the decades.

In terms of the provenance of her father's portrait, Kumari has helped to fill in some interesting context, noting an earlier date for the work, especially given that Roberts had paid de Zoysa initially for the sitting:

> My parents could not afford to buy my father's portrait done in 1928 and often regretted it. But […] Sarah managed to trace the portrait to Southampton Art Gallery and do an exchange with another WR picture. And [we] bought it from her for pounds 50, (if I recall). We all valued the portrait except for one villager who said "Oh Mother of Buddha. The artist has made both portraits of dark skinned people. There is a man in our village (Remanis Silva who worked in my father's printing press) who would have given them fair skins (NB. In our part of the world, alas, the fair skin is valued !!). When asked as is usual here, how much we paid for it, I gave him an imaginary small figure, to which he said. "Let the Gods be witness ! You could have bought a good plot of land for that amount !90

Kumari also confirms the identity of the sitters in *The Chess Players*, 1929-1930 - one of Roberts's best-known pictures:

> We visited Sarah often in London. WR would join us at the tea table. Sarah would prod him saying "It's Kumari" and he would nod and mumble something. WR was friendlier with my father with whom in the 1920s he used to play chess all night. One of the players in the WR painting I identify as my father. The other was their Malaysian friend Mahmud Hashim.91

Specifically, Kumari points out that de Zoysa is the figure in the lower left, contemplating his next chess move, whilst the man in the purple jacket and cap is Mahmud Hashim, a law student from Malaya (Malaysia). Sarah is asleep with a book in her lap and Roberts looks on from rear left. The second woman in the upper right is Hashim's Scots wife Helen.92

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 18 & 19 March 2015.
92 Ibid., 14 June 2015.

The Chess Players, 1929-30, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 92 cm, private collection

P.G. Konody, reviewing *The Chess Players* for *The Observer*, explicates Roberts's gift to imbue otherwise mundane scenes and activities with sophistication and meaning. Although we now know that de Zoysa and Hashim - along with William and Sarah Roberts and Hashim's wife - are depicted, they act as models in a modern urban tableau, engaged in an intellectual and social game.

> The sketch for [this] painting is called "Checkmate". The change of the title is significant: the anecdotal side of an incident in a game, from which Mr. Roberts derived his first inspiration, became of minor importance when it came to the painting of the picture. Here the problem broadens, and from a mere notation of a trivial occurrence grows into a dramatic rendering of a whole phase of human life and nature. It is this faculty of stating with unerring precision the essential character of certain aspects of humanity that makes Mr. Roberts more than an ordinary illustrator.[93]

The Chess Players has been widely exhibited and heralded as one of Roberts's most significant works; it was sold at Sotheby's in 2012 for nearly £1.2m. The picture was debuted at the London Art Association's 1931 exhibit, and was included in the William Roberts 1965 retrospective at the Tate. In 1937, a reviewer noted Roberts's dichotomous ability to simplify figures in group scenes whilst also expressing a gift for realism in his portraiture:

[93] P.G. Konody, 'Mr. William Roberts', *Art and Artists, The Observer*, 1 November 1931, p. 17.

> The big canvas . . . by William Roberts, "The Chess Players", which irresistibly reminds one of a trio of American gangsters and their "molls", has crude forms intentionally created by an artist who can also produce the vivid and handsome “Creole Woman”, in which anatomical knowledge is demonstrated to be complete. [94]

This picture, in tandem with the de Zoysa and Helène Yelin portraits, clearly demonstrate the dynamic interplay between Roberts’s portraiture and urban genre painting, and between his personal relationships and social commentary on life in London in the 1920s.

The fourth picture is far lesser known than *The Creole*, and depicts Frederick Knewstub, *Fred*, 1920-23. This picture, which was also exhibited in the Chenil

[94] *Express and Star* (Wolverhampton), 13 March 1937, http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 14 June 2015].

Fred, 1920–23, oil on canvas, 62.5 x 51 cm, private collection

show, is significant not only for important details of its execution, but for its place and resonance in the context of Roberts's career. Frederick Knewstub (1909-2001) was a nephew of John Knewstub, proprietor of the Chenil Galleries. Two related works include: *Kit*, 1923, which portrays Fred's sister Kate (Kit) Knewstub, now at Wolverhampton; and *Elsie* (portrait of a young woman), 1922-23 at York City Art Gallery, portraying the nanny of John Knewstub's daughter, Deirdre, cousin to Fred and Kit.

Kit, 1923, oil on canvas, 50 x 39 cm, Wolverhampton Art Gallery

Kate and John had come to live with John Knewstub after the deaths of their mother Florence (née Nelson Fulcher) in 1915, and their father, Frederick Oliver Knewstub, in 1914.

The portrait of Kate Knewstub, later Katie Bissett-Smith (1907-2008) was also exhibited in Roberts's solo Chenil show, as well as Whitechapel Gallery in 1929, the Venice Biennale in 1932 and in the Roberts retrospective at Tate Gallery in 1965. Sir Edward Marsh (as with the de Zoysa portrait), purchased *Kit* from the Chenil Gallery on behalf of the Contemporary Art Society.

Whilst there is no documented evidence of the Knewstub portraits being commissioned in exchange for securing his first solo exhibition, it is reasonable to conjecture that John Knewstub may have encouraged Roberts to complete these pictures to add depth and breadth of subjects – and sales prospects for the show. The portrait of *Elsie* - which was also included in the Chenil show - was likely painted at Pett Level, the Knewstub's Sussex home, where she helped

Elsie (aka Portrait of a Young Woman), 1922–3, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm, York City Art Gallery

mind their daughter Deirdre Knewstub (1922–2011). There is less modelling in the face and the background is more monochromatic; but, as with *Fred* and *Kit*, Roberts animates the eyes with youthful light and character, in Elsie's case communicating a bashful anxiety from sitting for a portrait.

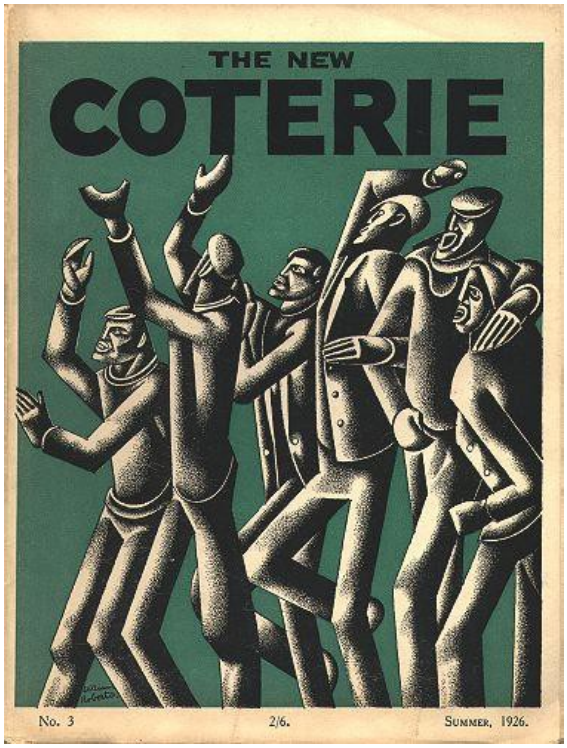
Executionally, *Fred* is significant owing to Roberts's vibrant, modern palette, and range of brushwork. The treatment of the shirt returns to the jagged shading characteristic of Roberts's sketches and watercolours of Tommies from First World War and earlier Vorticist works, whilst the more defined volume and facets of the face confer a very contemporary, sculptural approach to modelling the boy's head. In this way, the picture demonstrates the transition Roberts was making in his pre- and wartime figurative style to post-war techniques.

Signallers, pencil & watercolour, 31.8 x 51.0 cm, © Imperial War Museum, ART 1167

The fifth portrait to be examined is that of Esther Lahr. Building on the Sitwell projects and references, Roberts continued to pursue publishing illustration work and related portrait commissions. Charles and Esther Lahr owned the Progressive Bookshop in Holborn. Alongside this commissioned portrait of Esther, Roberts designed covers for *The New Coterie,* the Lahr's leftwing publication that combined poetry and prose and was published between 1925-27. Other illustrators of *The New Coterie* included Jacob Kramer (including a

Esther Lahr, 1925, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Tate

sketch of Esther Lahr), Bernard Meninsky and Frank Dobson. Roberts's work for the Lahrs led to further literary projects including a portrait of H.E. Bates and two book covers for Rhys Davies.[95, 96]



New Coterie No. 3, summer 1926, Magazine size 19 x 25.5 cm

New Coterie was edited by Russell Green, who had edited no. 6/7 of the original *Coterie* magazine (No 3. of which Roberts had illustrated the 'Sitwell cover' in 1919 mentioned earlier in this chapter). Roberts black and white illustration above was used successively for the first 4 issues, printed against different colour backgrounds, and depicts six figures be they laborers or artists. According to his younger daughter Oonagh, Charles Lahr used to claim that the design represented 'the Communist Party at the barricade – all six of them!'[97]

Esther and Charles Lahr's story is a particularly poignant profile of 1920s working class London, and thus an interesting contrast to other portrait sitters in this chapter. Esther, nee Argeband, was born in 1897 at 32 Stanhope Street in the

[95] William Roberts catalogue raisonné http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 20 June 2015].
[96] *William Roberts & Jacob Kramer, The Tortoise & The Hare*, p. 30.
[97] William Roberts catalogue raisonné [accessed 21 June 2015].

sub-district of Regent's Park, and was raised in the East End. She was a first generation English Jew, born, according to her daughter's memoir, in the context of immigrants from 'Eastern Europe, heirs to the Anarcho-Communist tradition, [who] fought for an improving quality of life. Fought against the sweater, the slum landlord and against discrimination. Throwing off also the restrictions of a culture brought from a foreign land.[98] She was educated in a local church school, until age 13, when, despite dashed hopes to attend private high school, was forced to work in a cigarette factory by her mother:

> "School, schmool!" scoffs her mother, "you're too old for school...it's time you brought some money in instead of head-in a book!" and so my mother becomes a cigarette-maker for many years, having first been instructed by her mother always to wear demure clothing and never to look the boss, the foreman or any other male in the factory, directly in the face, for tales of seduction, or even rape [were] rife, culminating in illegitimate births and utter disgrace for the girl.[99]

Whilst working at Rothman's cigarette factory in the East End, Esther became an organiser for the International Workers of the World movement. She also joined Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation, and became a confident speaker at outdoor rallies. She changed her name to Esther Archer in the early 1920s.

Esther Lahr, 1920s. Image reprinted from www.militantesthetix.co.uk/yealm/yealm1.htm

[98] Sheila Lahr, memoir of Esther Lahr, www.militantesthetix.co.uk/yealm/yealm1.htm [accessed 3 June 2015].
[99] Ibid.

Esther and Charles met at the Charlotte Street Socialist Club after the First World War, after Charles was released from internment from Alexander Palace, held there as a German émigré having been born in Bad Neuheim in 1885, and despite living in London since 1905. They married in 1922. Esther bought a bookshop at 68 Red Lion Street, Holborn, which they ran jointly as the Progressive Bookshop. Esther became friends with Sarah Roberts during this time.

A fascinating image of Esther is described in her elder daughter Sheila's rather unorthodox 'dreamlike' memoir, referencing Ken Weller's publication, *Don't be a Soldier*, detailing the radical anti-war movement in north London from 1914 and 1918:

> I have met my mother once during the First World War, speaking from a platform in Victoria Park in the East End, her red curly hair acting as a beacon to draw the crowds around her, to the warmth of her anger at ruling classes which send their youth to kill each other. Her bright blue eyes flash as she grasps the top of the stand which because of her small stature puts her into the position of a child peering over a wall.[100]

Although painted several years later, Roberts's 1925 portrait captures this same firebrand energy and determination, evident in Esther's rightward glance, her eyes alight with intelligence and alertness, and the lioness treatment of the hair. Whilst the specific dates of the sitting are not documented, it is known that Esther had in that same year suffered the stillbirth of her first daughter Poppy in mid-November; and thus, her furrowed expression – heightened by Roberts's shading and moulding of the face - may reveal either the torment of that experience or the anxiety of pregnancy leading to it.

Direct examination of this picture at Tate Store revealed a strikingly similar palette to that of the Konody portrait, with flesh tones built from planes of mauve, pink, ochre and olive. The brushstrokes are 'worked' and sculptural with transitions between tones sometimes subtle, sometimes harsh. The canvas is in a heavy, classical walnut frame of what appears to be northern Italian or more broadly Continental, design, suggesting an heirloom from either of Charles's or Esther's families.

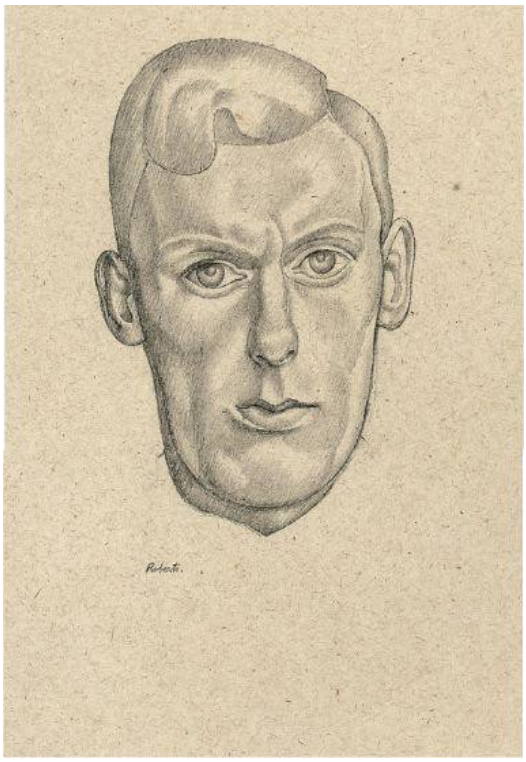
[100] Ibid.

Sarah and William Roberts's friendship with the Lahr's continued for many years, and Roberts accompanied Charles Lahr to Germany along with Roberts's brother Michael, and writers H.E. Bates and Rhys Davies. This trip inspired *The Prodigal Sets Out*, painted in 1927-8, which demonstrates Roberts's adaptation

The Prodigal Sets Out (aka *The Prodigal Son* study), 1927–8, watercolour, 19 cm x 15 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

of religious stories using secular, contemporary characters and scenes - a technique he had been developing since his training at the Slade, and one familiarly used by other fellow Slade students, like Mark Gertler and Stanley Spencer.

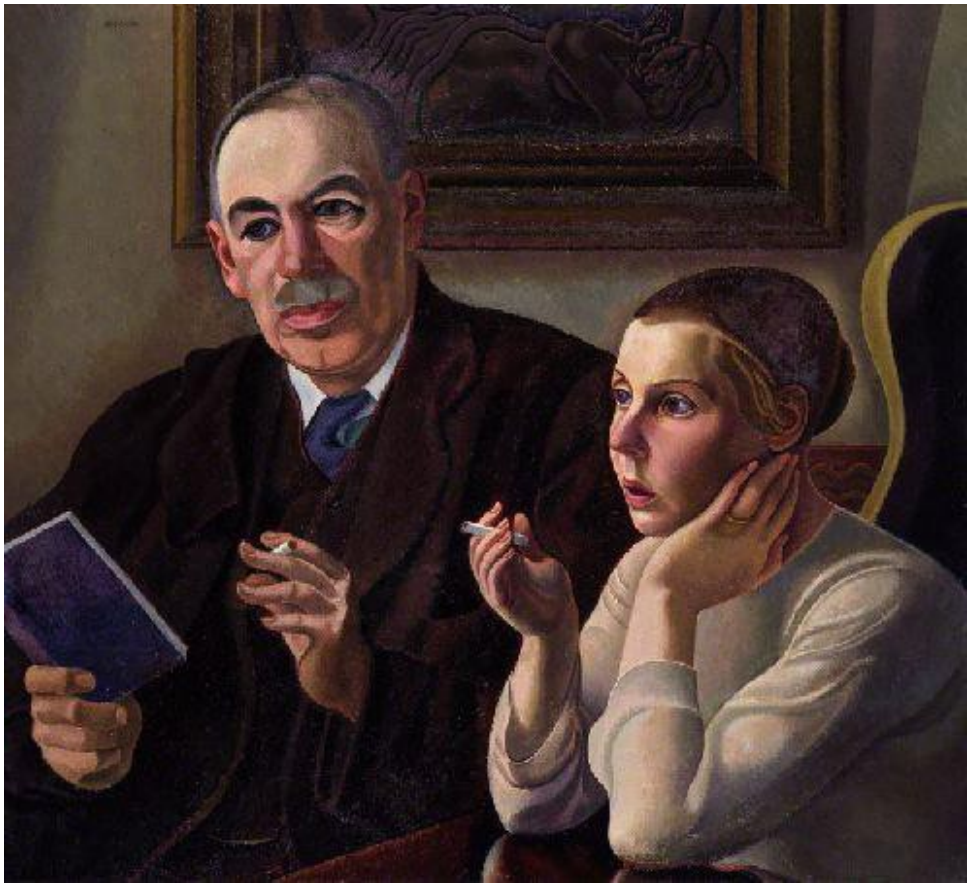
Roberts also completed two striking portrait drawings between the time of the Esther Lahr picture and the trip to Germany, namely of his travel companions H.E. Bates and Rhys Davies. These drawings both reflect Roberts's gifted draftsmanship, and very reminiscent of the executional detail and handling of line, facial modelling, and shading of the *Seven Pillars* series discussed in Chapter One.



H. E. Bates, 1927, pencil, 27.9 x 19.1 cm, National Portrait Gallery

Rhys Davies, 1926, Pencil, 31.7 x 19.1 cm, Rhys Davies Trust

The final portrait to be examined is that of John Maynard Keynes and his wife Lydia Lopokova, 1932. Whilst this picture was completed outside the 1920s focus of this dissertation, it is an appropriate work to bracket the decade of Roberts's development as a painter and portraitist. Roberts's association with Keynes stemmed back to his invitation to join the London Artists' Association (LAA), which was founded by Keynes to financially support artists on a non-charitable basis, the foundation from which later grew the Arts Council. The LAA acted as a co-operative, 'where chosen artists - almost all initially drawn from the London Group, but more specifically from Keynes's Bloomsbury coterie – were to receive a small guaranteed income, which the Association set off against sales made at exhibitions.'[101] Roberts had mixed feelings about the LAA, given



John Maynard Keynes and Lydia Lopokova, 1932, oil on canvas, 72.4 cm x 81.6 cm, National Portrait Gallery

its affiliation with Bloomsbury, and the 'double tax' of paying commission both to the LAA and to the Cooling Gallery on picture sales. His resentment of this financial dependence, whilst in character, must be tempered in light of the fact

[101] Gibbon Williams, p. 74.

that his two solo shows put on by Cooling were never bettered in terms of sales, and included further acquisitions by Edward Marsh, and also Wilfred Evill, who later became solicitor to Stanley Spencer and amassed one of the most significant British Modern collections including several Roberts pieces, sold by Sotheby's in June 2011.

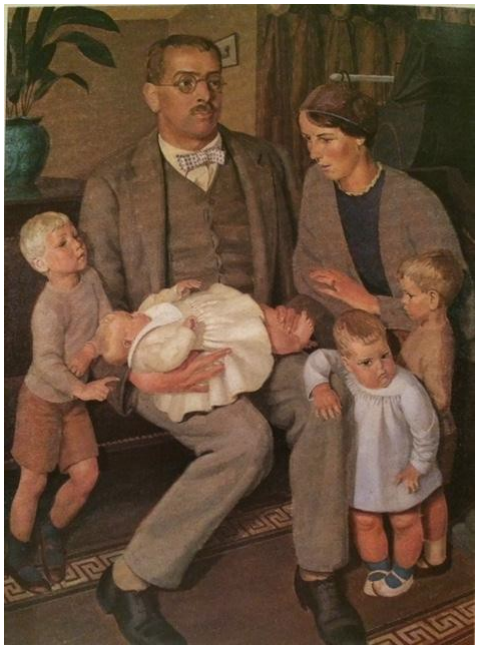
Roberts certainly was able to hold any personal resentment of Keynes in check to have been commissioned by him in 1932 to complete the double portrait. The picture was executed in their home in Gordon Square - the original seat of the Bloomsbury Group – which would have brought a certain irony to the many sittings. As referenced, there is little evidence of preparatory sketches for Roberts's portraits; but the Keynes Lopokova portrait is an exception, with two sketches of the detail of Lopokova's head and hands held by the Fitzwilliam. The portrait has been characterised as Roberts's most important since that of T.E. Lawrence:

> It is the most refined essay in formal portraiture [Roberts] ever made. In a deceptively simple composition, Roberts manages to combine grasp of character, relaxed naturalism, and an impression of monumentality. Lydia Lopokova's bland mask provides the perfect foil for her husband's benign and quizzical air. The prominent arrangement of the sitters' hands, described in an elegant, stylized manner, introduces a rhythmic arabesque to the lower portion of the picture that contrives to stress the subjects' cultural sophistication.[102]

Whilst completed over a decade earlier, there is something akin to the Keynes Lopokova portrait in two group portraits by Henry Lamb. *The Anrep Family*, 1920 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and *The Kennedy Family*, 1921 (private collection), both possess the same dichotomous sense of calm contemplation and fatigued ennui – captured in an informal domestic setting. This is exacerbated by the relative crowding of figures to the fore of the picture plane, the intertwining of limbs and spacial cropping – characteristic of both Lamb's and Stanley Spencer's group genre scenes and portraits of the period.

[102] Gibbon Williams, pp. 79-80.

Henry Lamb, *The Anrep Family*, 1920, oil on canvas, 95.3 x 157.5 cm, © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Henry Lamb, *The Kennedy Family*, 1921, oil on canvas 112.8 x 82.1 cm, private collection

Whilst there is very little evidence of direct contact between Lamb and Roberts, there is certainly correspondence between Spencer and Lamb of Roberts's work, and of their shared patron, Edward Marsh.[103] The parallels in the artists' war experiences, career paths and circles of friends and patrons are remarkable, not to mention the significance of portraiture in their overall oeuvre. Lamb, though

[103] Keith Clements, *Henry Lamb, The Artist and his Friends* (Bristol: Redcliffe, 1985), p. 209.

of higher formal education and class than Roberts, shared his scepticism of the 'Bloomsberries' and all they stood for. Like Roberts, he had for a period an admiration for and dependency on Augustus John (in Lamb's case, living with John and Dorelia in Normandy for a period), but was similarly a determined individual in pursuing his talent – preferring to chart his own course, rather than be part of a group or movement. In terms of portraiture, Lamb's most famous work, the Tate's *Lytton Strachey*, 1914, which falls too early for direct contemporary comparison in this dissertation, and his arresting self-portrait of the same year, illustrated in Chapter One, are both equally seminal contributions to British Modern portraiture, rightly owned by the National Portrait Gallery.

But returning to the Keynes Lopokova picture, the use of hands to heighten the dynamic energy of the figures became a convention for Roberts, as seen in the Kumari Jayawardena portrait, which is reminiscent of Renaissance symbolic gestures associated with sanctity. Roberts's celebration of hand movement is perhaps most notably illustrated in *The Restaurant*, 1929, where the 14 hands of 7 figures percolate vertically and demonstrably punctuate the action amidst drinkers and wait staff in a busy London 1920s bistro. This picture, owned by Wilfred Evill and by inheritance, by Honor Frost, was sold at Sotheby's for £373,250 in 2011.

The Restaurant (aka *Discussion in a Café*, *Café Scene* and *Café-bar*), 1929, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 40.5 cm, private collection

One man's 'arabesque' is another man's 'liana', expressed P.G. Konody in his mixed critique of the Keynes' portrait:

> . . . the sedate and compact portrait of "Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Keynes", into the linear and chromatic arrangement of which Mr. William Roberts seems to have poured all his science and love of harmonious organisation and fundamental solidity. As a pictorial composition it has the dignified countenance of an old master; as a portrait, in spite of the very perfect rendering of the sitters' features, it is deficient in human characterisation. The expressionless eyes with their empty, fixed, look, the unlit cigarettes held between exaggeratedly stylised liana-like fingers – (has Mr. Roberts lately been closely looking at Uccello?) – contribute to the solidarity of the composition, but also give the sitters the appearance of lifeless, mechanical dolls. Still, it is a fine piece of painting and one of the most consistent and accomplished works Mr. Roberts has ever produced.[104]

Despite the visual energy they bring the portrait, the rather unnatural curves and twists of the fingers are woody and vine-like as Konody's word suggests; indeed there is an irony in the lifeless gaze and hunched posture of Lopokova - famed for her balletic talent and grace. Whilst not to everyone's taste, the picture does demonstrate the gradual and progressive simplification of facial modeling, when compared to that of T.E. Lawrence or Konody nearly a decade earlier. Eyes, hair, fingernails, and lips are delineated and reduced to the minima of curved shorthand lines, drawing from the then mature language of his group genre paintings. Roberts included a detail of one of his own paintings collected by Keynes in the background, immortalizing the relationship between artist and patron.

[104] P.G. Konody, 'The London Artists' Association', *Art and Artists*, *The Observer*, 17 July 1932, p. 10.

Elliott & Fry, *John Maynard Keynes, 1st Baron Keynes of Tilton; Lydia Lopokova,* 1920s © National Portrait Gallery, London

At a more symbolic level, this picture suitably closes this chapter on the ordinary and extraordinary people of 1920s London. For the portrait, Roberts was paid £500 - commissioned by one of the most learned economists of the twentieth century, and great patron and supporter of the Arts in Britain. Keynes's deeply entwined association with Roger Fry and the Bloomsbury Group was the corollary of Roberts's dissociation; but his financial largesse provided steady work and a valuable promotional platform for Roberts's career in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Roberts does indeed capture the character of the man, benign and distracted in a thought, but seems to lack the connection with the sitter and empathetic pathos achieved with *Lawrence,* or the aliveness of *Fred* or *The Creole*. It is, however, an important painting: executionally linking Roberts's portraiture with his figurative groups and maturing style, whilst immortalizing an extraordinary person, and a time of significant economic and artistic development in London.

Chapter Three

Family: William, Sarah and John Roberts Portraits

Chapter Three – Family: William, Sarah and John Roberts Portraits

Chapter Three will examine a body of Roberts's 'family' portraits – those of himself, Sarah and John completed during the 1920s – placing that work in context with portraits done before and after the decade.

Roberts painted portraits nearly every year of his career; indeed the earliest evidence of his artistic talent and skill was in portrait form. Family sketches from 1909 show his already exceptional draughtsmanship, which earned Roberts an apprenticeship in the commercial art department of Sir Joseph Causton, Ltd., in Eastcheap.[105]

Studies of the Artist's Father, Brothers and Sister, 1909 (dated). Red chalk on paper, 28.6 x 21.6. © Estate of John David Roberts (held in Tate store, 2014)

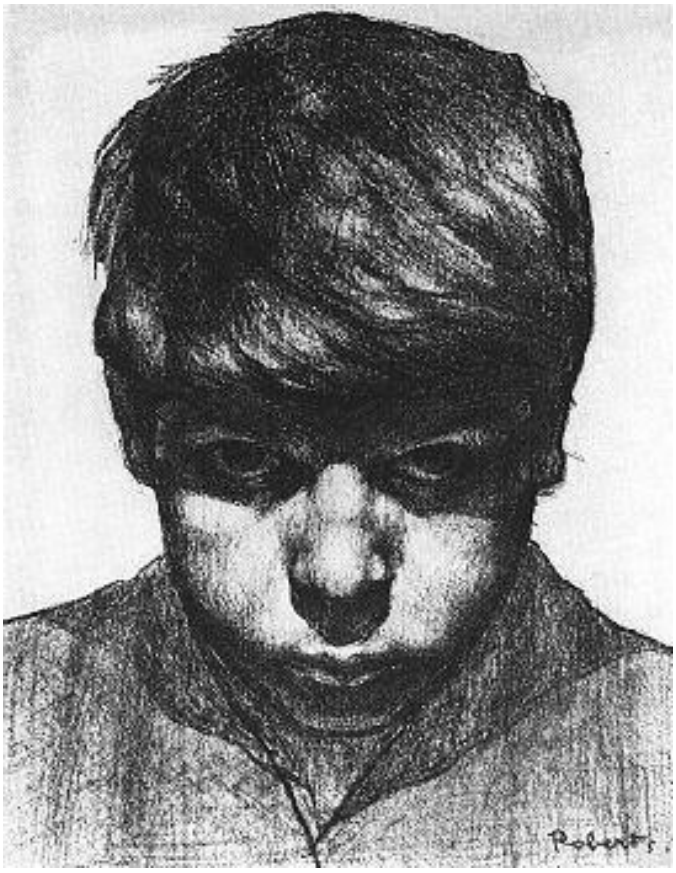
Self-Portraits

At the Slade from 1910 until 1913, Roberts completed a number of self-portraits as part of his studies, and several excellent examples remain in museum and private collections in London and New York. These early works not only

[105] Andrew Heard, *William Roberts (1895-1980)*, (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle, 2004), p. 16.

demonstrate Roberts's innate gift for draughtsmanship, but also provide evidence of early experimentation in Modernist abstraction and technique.

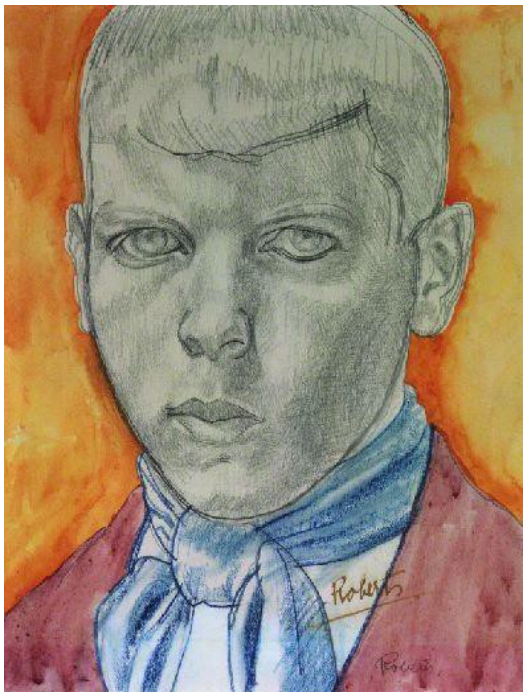
Perhaps one of his best-known early self-portraits sets the context for the artist and man Roberts was to become. Executed in red chalk, Roberts achieves a shocking realism with a range of line weights and textures, and a delicately worked chiaroscuro to form the cheeks and nose whilst emphasizing the overhead light source illuminating the lower part of the face and highlights of hair. Despite the successful application of these classical techniques, there is a very modern aspect to this drawing; the conscious decision to dominate the image with the contrasting dark hair and overshadowed eyes against the stark light of the lower face makes it more arresting. The intensity of the teenaged Roberts's stare and sense of self is disarming – perhaps more rational if drawn by another artist many years his senior – but revealing of a focus and ambition that fuelled his work for the next 70 years.



Self-portrait, suggest 1909–10 (also dated as 1911), coloured pencil on paper, 23.6 x 18.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

It is unclear by the early dating of this work whether it was completed whilst Roberts studied in the evenings at St. Martin's – from which his work earned him a scholarship from the London County Council to the Slade – or as an early assignment at the Slade itself. The latter is more likely, given that the drawing was owned by his Slade classmate Dora Carrington, and by inheritance, her family until 1971. No doubt, this red chalk sketch would have provided material evidence to Roberts's portfolio that led to his and Dora Carrington's receipt of the Slade's Prize for draughtsmanship in 1913.

Roberts's self-portraiture took a hiatus during his service in the First World War, but bridging that gap are two exceptional examples. Completed in parallel or slightly after the red chalk drawing above, is a watercolour, pencil and blue crayon sketch which preludes several of the techniques we find in Roberts's portraits of the 1920s. For example, he minimally describes the face, eyes, nose,



Portrait of a Boy Wearing a Blue Scarf (self-portrait) suggested date 1908–10 (also dated c.1909–12 and c.1911–13 National Portrait Gallery), watercolour, pencil and blue crayon, 27 x 25.8 cm, National Portrait Gallery

lips and hair as well as scarf and lapels linearly, offset by more subtle shaded modelling of the flesh and hair - as executed a decade later in the *Seven Pillars* portraits examined in Chapter One. The execution may be less sophisticated than

seen in the Newcombe or McMahon drawings; however, the nucleus of this stylistic technique can be sourced back to these early Slade works.

A second stylistic element is the interplay between sitter and background, emphasised by the bold use of contrasting colour along the perimeter of the head. The blood orange wash intensifies the image, drawing attention to Roberts's face and serving both as compositional framing element to the right and abstracted shadow to the left of the head. It is hard to accurately interpret Roberts's attire in this picture - be it a true reflection of his clothes and demeanour at the time or possibly an affected dandy costume to mock the sartorial preferences of his fellow Slade students and instructors. Henry Tonks, Philip Wilson Steer, and Professor Fred Brown were all larger than life characters, as was Augustus John, former student and oft visitor during this period.

Brian Sewell, reviewing the joint Roberts-Kramer exhibition entitled *The Tortoise and The Hare* at the Ben Uri Gallery in 2003, raises a critical question about the influence of Roberts on artists of greater notoriety through his early work:

> Could Roberts have influenced Stanley Spencer? The question is only hinted at in this exhibition, but Roberts's *First German Gas Attack*, a war record painted in 1918, seems to lie behind Spencer's Macedonian Travoys of the following year, and the very early portrait drawings anticipate, by two or three years, those of the far more famous Spencer.[106]

Boy with a Blue Scarf does provide an interesting link to Roberts's first 1920s self-portrait, where he returns to the use of contrasting colour to frame the head and shoulders (a version of cloissonism of French Post-Impressionism), but also repeats the downward cast, straight-on gaze of the 1909-10 red chalk drawing. Ten years - and a lifetime of experience gained in service as an artillery gunner - had aged Roberts; but the intensity and focus of the artist are the same. The vibrancy and variety of line bring a real dynamism to the drawing, with a mosaic

[106] Brian Sewell, 'True Tale of the Tortoise and the Hare', *Evening Standard*, 18 July 2003.

Self-portrait, c.1920, charcoal and red chalk, 35.6 x 25.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

of cross-hatching, for example, building up a texture for his jacket, as well as modelling of forehead, cheeks and chin.

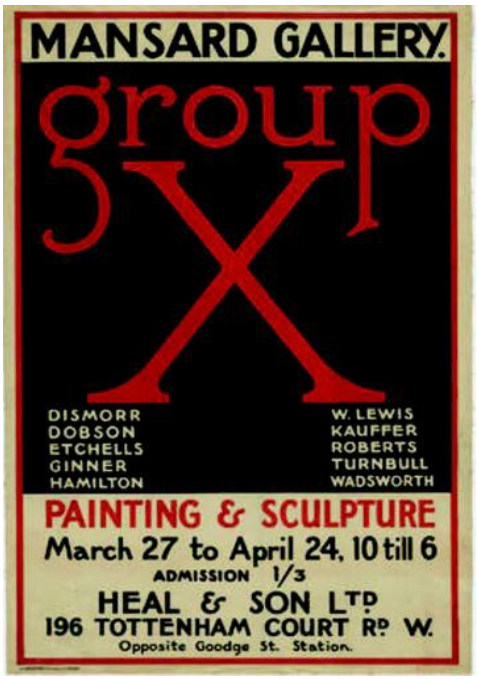
These self-portraits provide pivotal evidence of Roberts's exploration of a definitive style – a pursuit that continued in his self- and Sarah portraits throughout the decade. For example, also in 1920, Roberts executed the

Portrait (*Self-portrait*), *c.*1920, drawing, Hampstead Library

above portrait in a similar composition of straight-on head and shoulders, but he moulded the face and jacket in a tactile, almost pointillist manner to describe the contours of the face and jacket. The fixed gaze and curve of the lips are similar to the Metropolitan's watercolour, but the use of high contrast lights and darks again hails back to the red chalk drawing of 1909-10. The swoop and curve of line detailing the jacket are very reminiscent of Wyndham Lewis's portrait style of the time, which is not surprising, given the fact the two artists had re-established contact after the war. Roberts was asked to exhibit in Lewis' somewhat vain and short-lived attempt to revive the Vorticist movement by staging the 'Group X' exhibit at Mansard galleries in 1920. In addition to Lewis, the show featured Edward Wadsworth, David Bomberg, Charles Ginner, Charles Hamilton, Frank Dobson, John Turnbull, Jessica Dismorr, Helen Saunders and the American photographer and graphic artist, E. McKnight-Kauffer.[107] For the catalogue, Roberts submitted a woodcut self-portrait from 1919, which radically differs from the more sophisticated drawings and watercolours described above.

*Self-portrait, c.*1919, woodcut for Mansard Gallery 1920 catalogue, 7.5 x 5 cm

[107] Gibbon Williams, p. 55.

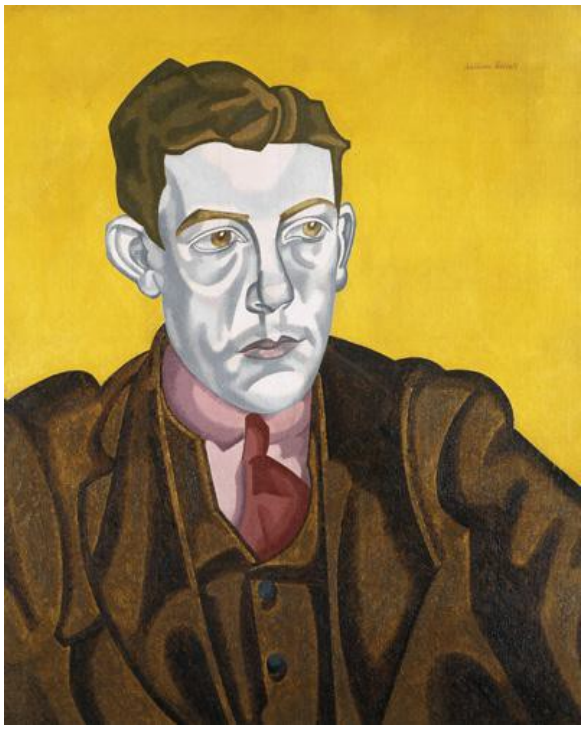


E. McKnight-Kauffer, poster for Group X exhibition, 1920

Despite his relative youth of 24 years, this woodcut portrays a middle-aged, post-war face, and provides further evidence of Roberts's ability to conjure three dimensions in two through stark contrasts of black and white. Indeed, the graphic impact also recalls the dynamic energy and optical illusion of Wadsworth's dazzle boat designs for the First World War. Roberts recalled in his own essay, *Some Early Abstract and Cubist Work* of 1957, 'For the lack of a manifesto we consoled ourselves with a catalogue illustrated with wood-cut self-portraits of each "X"-ist'[108] – conveying his retrospective cynicism for Lewis and Vorticism as a definitive 'movement'.

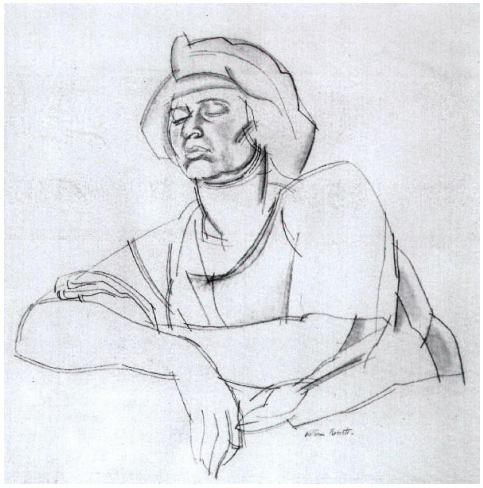
Indeed, the Lewis influence - conscious or otherwise on Roberts's part - is most evident in Roberts's portrait of his elder brother Michael, also completed in 1920, otherwise known as *The Stockbroker's Clerk*, which has been in the British Council collection since 1948.

[108] William Roberts, *Some Early Abstract and Cubist Work 1913–1920* (self published, London, 1957), p. 12; preface reprinted in *Five Posthumous Essays and Other Writings* (London: Valencia, 1990) as *William Roberts and Vorticism Year*. Text available in the William Roberts catalogue raisonné, http://englishcubist.co.uk/ [accessed 7 July 2015].



The Stockbroker's Clerk (aka *The Usurer*), 1920, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 63.5 cm, British Council

As with the *Boy with a Blue Scarf*, Roberts renders the face nearly monochrome, with the exception of eyes, eyebrows and lips. The background is electrified in a flat saffron yellow, which chromatically propels the figure forward and illuminates the highlights in the sitter's hair, suit jacket and waistcoat. Whilst the painting is the closest to Lewis's style of all Roberts's oils, two contemporary sketches reveal parallels between Roberts's and Lewis's work at the time – an energetic sweep of line and flattened planes made dimensional and dynamic through contrasting colour or shading, as in *Seated Woman* and *Stretching Man,* both 1920.



Seated Woman (Sarah), 1920, pencil on paper, 33 x 33 cm, Arts Council Collection

Stretching Man (aka *Standing Figure*), *c.*1920, charcoal and blue crayon, 47 x 32 cm, private collection

The 1965 Tate Roberts retrospective included *The Stockbroker's Clerk*, noting 'A portrait of one of the artist's brothers, who worked in a stockbroker's office and died young'[109]. This is likely an inaccurate attribution, as Roberts's younger brother Joseph did indeed die young, but having had a history of poor physical and mental health, was unable to hold a job of any substance. David Cleall, in the Roberts catalogue raisonné notes: 'The Stockbroker's Clerk' is also the title of one of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories, in which someone takes up an ostensibly good job but is then kept hanging around doing little; 'The Usurer' may refer to some financial transaction between the brothers.'[110] The Gibbon Williams monograph also identifies the sitter as Roberts's older brother Mike, not his younger brother, Joey.

The picture has been exhibited extensively, debuting at the Goupil Gallery in 1920, then in Roberts's solo exhibition at the Chenil Galleries in 1923, Whitechapel Gallery 1928, Manchester 1929, Brighton 1929, New Zealand and Australia 1934, Tate Gallery in 1935 and 1965, Leicester Galleries 1948, and by the British Council 1957, 1963 and 1992.

---

[109] Arts Council and Tate, *William Roberts ARA*, retrospective exhibition catalogue (London: Arts Council, Tate, 1965), p. 11.
[110] William Roberts catalogue raisonné, www.englishcubist.co.uk [accessed 6 July 2015].

Roberts's startling and captivating self-portrait of 1923 - believed to be his earliest oil of himself - presents the artist in an honest, clinical light, his right eye centred on the horizontal axis of the composition with riveting focus.

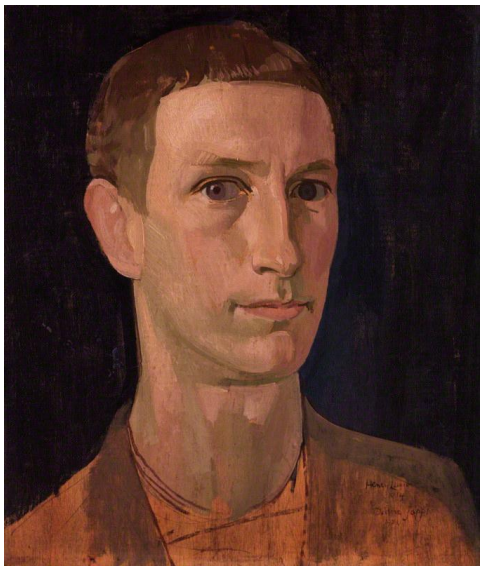
Self-portrait, 1923, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4 cm, private collection

There is a modernist simplicity and softness to the use of colour and shading, rather than hard lines, to define the planes and volume of the face. But this reduction of detail belies the complexity and ambivalence of the expression, which is at once confident yet suspicious, pleasant yet annoyed, engaged yet withdrawn. As described in the Lawrence commission and the Ordinary and Extraordinary portraits in previous chapters, Roberts uses gradations of, as well as contrasting, colour to build dimension and volume to the face, a distinct evolution away from the chiaroscuro of the 1909-10 Slade drawing.

Set against the equivalent work of contemporary artists, Roberts's self-portraits in the 1920s are both more prolific, but also more wide-ranging in terms stylistic technique. A self-portrait drawing by Wyndham Lewis, which he published in January 1927 in *The Enemy, A journal of Art and Literature,* represents Lewis at the more realist end of his range, but retains the characteristic sweep of curves to describe the collar and shoulders, waves of hair, and facial features. This is not quite the degree of realism that Roberts achieved in the *Seven Pillars* commissions or in the *Rhys Davies* (1926) or *H.E. Bates* (1927) portraits completed for *The New Coterie*.

Wyndham Lewis, *Self-portrait*, pencil on paper, 1927, published in *The Enemy, A journal of Art and Literature*

However, certain parallels can be drawn when compared to Roberts's Metropolitan or Hampstead self-portraits discussed earlier, where the fixed central eye, bravura line technique and reduction to the bare essentials of detail achieve a captivating result. As illustrated in Chapter One, Henry Lamb used a similar convention nearly a decade earlier of fixing his right eye just to the left of centre, in a startlingly modern image in his self-portrait held by the National Portrait Gallery, painted in 1914. Flesh, hair, shoulders and backdrop are reduced to the barest essentials.



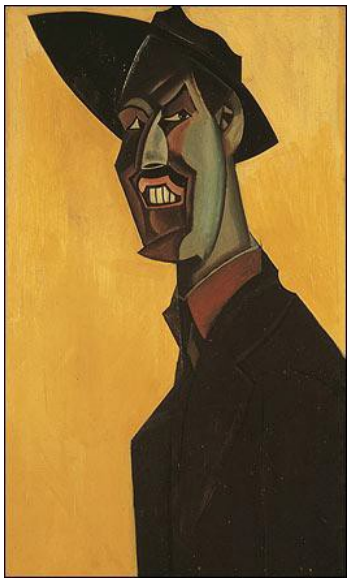
Henry Lamb, *Henry Lamb*, 1914, oil on panel, 36.8 x 31.8 cm, © National Portrait Gallery

In oil, two Wyndham Lewis self-portraits are notable foils to Roberts's. The first, and perhaps best known, *Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro*, 1920-21, not only exemplifies the angular abstraction of the artist's Vorticist style, but also projects a character and attitude rather than documents a 'self' in a traditional portrait sense. This practice hails back to the 'tronie' characters of 16th and 17th century Dutch Golden Age and Flemish Baroque painting. Paul Edwards and Richard Humphreys in the National Portrait Gallery catalogue for the 2008 exhibit of Lewis portraits interpreted this work thus:

> The grin of the Tyro can be seen as a kind of continuation into peacetime of the 'keep smiling' attitude instilled in the British Tommy in the First World War…the sour and sickly colouring of the image hints that the terrible past is not that easily repressed.[111]

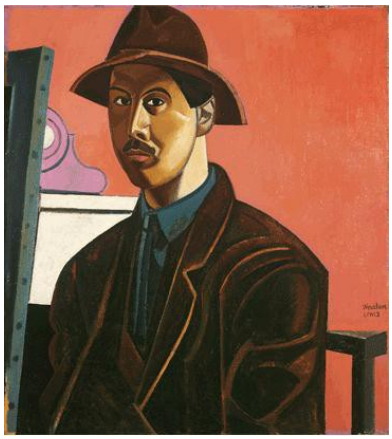
The technique of offsetting and emphasising the sitter by use of a highly-charged, monochromatic background was referenced in comparison to the T.E. Lawrence picture, but is very equivalent in Roberts's *The Stockbroker's Clerk* in the way it animates and adds real heat to the picture, discussed above. The artists were known to be in touch at this time owing to the Group X show.

[111] Paul Edwards, with Richard Humphreys, *Wyndham Lewis Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008), p. 24.



Wyndham Lewis, *Mr Wyndham Lewis as a* Tyro, self-portrait, 1920-21, oil on canvas, 73 x 44 cm, © Ferens Art Gallery, Hull City Museums and Art Gallery

A second Lewis self-portrait in oil, *Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael*, similarly captures Lewis effecting another persona – but seems more akin to Roberts stylistically, in the sharp outlining, lively palette and minimal background propping. At a detail level, the rendering of the jacket, shirt and tie are very familiar, reminiscent of work by both artists in their respective First World War commissions. The title and composition here are meant to mimic Raphael's own head and shoulders in *The School of Athens* (1511), but may also be making some portrait references to well-known engravings of Shakespeare.[112] In either case, Lewis's ego and pretension sharply contrasts with the quieter confidence of Roberts.



Wyndham Lewis, *Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael*, 1921, oil on canvas, 76.3 x 68.6 cm, © Manchester City Galleries

[112] Edwards, p. 26.

It is important to remember that during the 1910s and 1920s, Roberts and Lewis had a symbiotic artistic relationship. Whilst poles apart in terms of ego and social engagement, their aesthetic expression during those two decades was closely aligned. It was actually decades later, owing to Lewis' overwhelming egocentrism - and a piece of inadequate, biased scholarship by Sir John Rothenstein (then Director of Tate Gallery, and son of Sir William) in 1956 - which fomented the myth of a great rivalry between the artists.

This was well documented from Roberts's perspective in his self-published *Vorticist Pamphlets*. These included five separate papers released over 2 years: 1) *The Resurrection of Vorticism and the Apotheosis of Wyndham Lewis* (1956); 2) *Cometism and Vorticism – A Tate Gallery Catalogue Revised* (1956); *A Press View at the Tate Gallery* (1956); 4) *A Reply to My Biographer, Sir John Rothenstein* (1957); and 5) *Vorticism and the Politics of Belles Lettres-ism* (1958).[113] These pamphlets make fascinating reading, both building a rational, art historical case, whilst exuding Roberts's polemic logic and humour, with brilliant turns of phrase. As such, they read as a literary self-portrait and potted history of early British Modernism.

In summary, there were two issues Roberts attempted to clarify in the pamphlets with a mostly dispassionate catalogue of fact and chronology: on the one hand, with its 1956 Vorticism exhibition, that the Tate presented an unbalanced, sensationalised celebration of Lewis as the sole source of British Cubism, under Lewis's adopted moniker, Vorticism – which to many of its associated constituent artists wasn't a conscious 'movement' at the time - and in so doing, relegated artists like Roberts to secondary acolyte status.

[113] William Roberts, 'A Reply to My Biographer, Sir John Rothenstein' the fourth essay of *The Vorticist Pamphlets* (London: self-published, 1957). Roberts explicates inaccuracies and inadequacies of research on the part of Rothenstein. Text available in the William Roberts catalogue raisonné http://englishcubist.co.uk/reply.html [accessed 7-8 July 2015].

On the other hand, Roberts was also understandably frustrated by the incomplete and inaccurate profile of himself that was authored by Rothenstein in his 8 volume series, *Modern English Painters*, vol. 2: *Lewis to Moore* (1956). On the basis of less than an hour's interview with Roberts and transitory sightings over the years, Rothenstein drew conclusions such as, 'Early in life Roberts discovered the narrow range of subjects he wished to represent.'[114] This does seem a rather limiting and naïve characterisation in the context of what was already a 40-year career of prolific output across a range of styles and subject matters. The inadequacy of Rothenstein's research, and not so veiled references to Lewis as a 'distinguished painter acquaintance' informing his opinions, confirm Rothenstein's bias.

Perhaps Roberts's best-known self-portrait, *Self-Portrait Wearing a Cap*, 1928-31, in the Tate collection, tells us most about the artist as he saw himself. Gibbon Williams dates this work to 1928 (Robin Gibson to 1929, and Tate to 1931), so perhaps the last self-portrait of the decade; it captures the intensity, intelligence and self-possession of the working-man artist.

As part of his daily routine, Roberts dressed formally in shirt, tie and braces. The flat cap in this instance was consciously selected to complete the 'uniform', bringing with it immediate associations to Roberts's working-class Hackney roots. As with the 1923 picture, Roberts repeats the compositional technique of fixing the sitter's right eye at the exact centre of the canvas' horizontal axis. The diagonal thrust described by his tie, braces and shirt-folds display further evidence of Roberts's characteristic compositional mechanic; whilst the

[114] John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters*: *Lewis to Moore* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956), p. 284.

Self-portrait Wearing a Cap, 1928-1931[115], oil on canvas, 55.9 x 35.9 cm, Tate

ironically slightly askew tie adds a genuine touch to a rather formal design structure. Roberts applies harmonic colour treatment by painting the eye, cap and shirt in the same steel blue, whilst carrying his complexion's high red colour through to the tie. In addition to the class statement the flat-cap makes, it also serves to mask Roberts's discernibly thinning hair and aging face, which are more evident in a conté crayon drawing done around the same time, which was sold in Paris in 2000 to a private collection. In this example, Roberts again anchors the sitter's right eye at the composition's exact centre, with all features and contours of the face seeming to radiate out from his arresting pupil. The lined forehead, receding hairline and copious chin are that of a man well in

[115] Dated as 1931 on Tate website; also dated as 1929 in *William Roberts, ARA* (London: Arts Council, Tate, retrospective exhibition catalogue 1965), p.14; and in Gibbon Williams, p. 77.

advance of Roberts's 35 years; however the intensity of focus and enigmatic expression communicate real vitality below the surface.

Self-portrait, *c.*1930, conté crayon, 33.0 x 25.4 cm, private collection

Sarah Roberts Portraits

Although Roberts's oeuvre is wholly figurative, he never employed models in his 70-year career. Famously, for his group genre scenes he would work up detailed drawings from memory, at times informed by sketches on small scraps of paper he would carry with him whilst walking about London, capturing expressions on faces or limbs in gesture. Further, and significantly, there is no evidence of Roberts working from photographs for any of his painting. For his urban life scenes, he preferred to work in isolation, developing sketches, gridding them up, moving on to watercolour, and ultimately the finished oil on canvas. Portraiture, however, followed a different process. Robin Gibbons, in the 1984 National Portrait Gallery catalogue of Roberts's family portraits notes,

> Portraiture therefore marked a complete change from his normal practice and there is evidence that he felt he needed to work from a model, and preferably a familiar one, in order to benefit from the discipline of working from observation instead of from what was in his head.[116]

[116] Robin Gibson, *William Roberts 1895–1980: An Artist and His Family* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1984), p. 4.

This explains the relative dearth of preparatory sketches for portraits as discussed in Chapter Two, and why there is such a significant range and volume of portraits of Sarah. There are nearly thirty works by Roberts which feature Sarah as portrait sitter or as identifiable figure in his London life 'genre' scenes. She was a willing and experienced sitter, and the range of gestures and expressions she was able to effect through the decades reveal not only her own depth of character and confidence, but the trust and connection between subject and artist.

There is a high concentration of 'Sarah' works in the 1920s - some 14 - partially driven by the limited means of a young artist only just establishing a commissioned portrait business, and the experimentation of an artist in stylistic transition, where the availability of an in-house model provided invaluable material to work through particular situations, expressions and subjects.

> When Sarah asked WR 'whether he didn't get bored with her as a subject, he replied that her face changed all the time; as a subject, there was always enough interest in the face alone. [117]

Woman Standing, c.1920, black and red chalk, location unknown

The first known oil painting of Sarah, *The Red Turban* (Sheffield), was completed in 1921. This painting should be considered in tandem with another work of the same year, which draws more directly from classical antecedents, but is no less

[117] Ruth Artmonsky, 'William Roberts – the Tortoise', essay in *William Roberts & Jacob Kramer: The Tortoise and The Hare* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2003), p. 14.

modern in its execution. *Portrait of Sarah, the Artist's Wife* (aka *La Femme Tragique*), *c.*1921 (private collection), has been suggested to draw directly from Titian's *Man with a Glove*, 1520, in the Louvre.

The Red Turban (Sarah), 1921, oil on canvas , 103 x 82.2 cm, Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield

Portrait of Sarah, the Artist's Wife (aka *La Femme Tragique*), *c.*1921, oil on canvas, 76 x 51 cm, private collection

Interestingly, both portraits share a common palette of rich earth tones, despite the different clothing in which Sarah modeled; and each is in the three-quarter figure kit-kat format, only used by Roberts occasionally, as seen in the T.E.

Lawrence portrait. But therein the similarities end. The Sheffield picture appears more soft-focused, with contours of flesh and fabric delineated through contrasting colour and line. *La Femme Tragique*, which is about one-third smaller in scale, has a heightened sense of realism, particularly in the face and Sarah's exposed left hand, when compared to the facets of colour denoting joints and cheeks in the Sheffield picture. There are overt references to classical painting

Titian, *Man with a Glove*, c. 1520, oil on canvas, 100 × 89 cm, ©Musee du Louvre,

including the hand gestures, and the drapery in the picture's upper right corner. It has also been suggested by David Cleall that *La Femme Tragique* borrows from Titian's *Man with a Glove* in the Louvre, and may be the portrait of Sarah 'in a suede turban' which, according to notes left by John David Roberts, was given to a surgeon named Milne in payment for his operating on John, when he was dropped and seriously injured at the age of four[118]. The picture was sold at auction by Bonhams in 2007 for £27,600, and has only been exhibited twice including Manchester in 1929 and the Leicester Galleries in 1948. Against the formal context of *La Femme Tragique* is an interesting contrasting note on the Sheffield picture, which portrays Sarah in a jacket of her own making. Pauline Paucker, a long-term friend of Sarah's from1969 until her death in 1992, points out that Sarah was remarkably thrifty and industrious with their domestic affairs, and made most of her own clothes - this wide-lapelled jacket being a fine example.[119]

---

[118] David Cleall, William Roberts catalogue raisonné [accessed 21 July 2015].

[119] Pauline Paucker interview with Zachary R. Leonard, 6 September 2015. Pauline, an historian and writer, befriended Sarah Roberts in 1969 and remained close until her death in 1992. They were neighbours and walking companions on Hampstead Heath and Primrose Hill. Pauline,

Another fine example of Sarah portraits dates from 1922, *Sarah (Girl Standing with Arms Folded)*, which demonstrates Roberts's skilled draughtsmanship in capturing anatomy and drapery. There is a fatigue and distraction in her expression, but an elegance and sense of self which communicate Roberts's complete grasp of her character and presence in the momentary stretch, cigarette in hand. The flesh of the arms, neck and face is subtly shaded and hued, and illuminated by her yellow blouse and headscarf - the folds of cloth, classical academic.

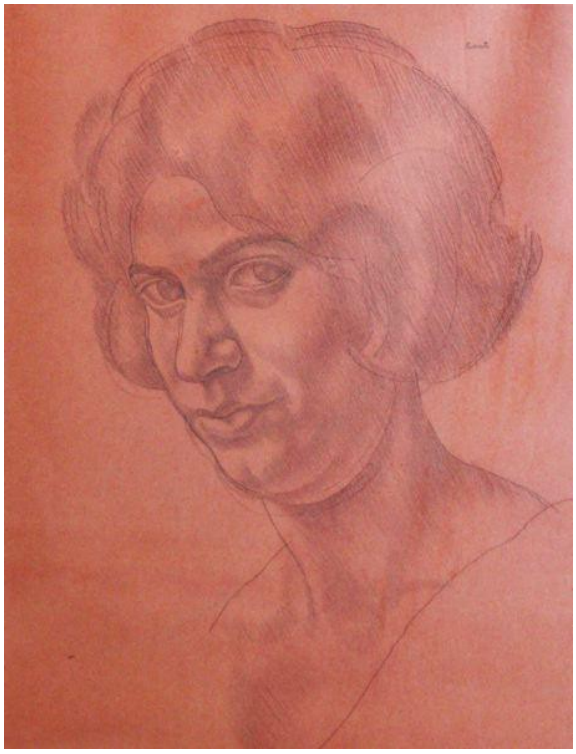
Sarah (aka *Girl Standing with Arms Folded*), 1922, watercolour, 45 cm x 33.5 cm, private collection

This drawing was exhibited at Leicester Galleries in 1922, Parkin Gallery 1976, Albemarle Gallery 1989, and included in the 'Tortoise & the Hare' exhibition in Leeds and London, curated by the Ben Uri Gallery in 2003.

A brilliant pencil sketch of *Sarah* from 1925, which was included in the 1984 National Portrait Gallery exhibition, has featured in several shows through the decades as 'a virtuoso example of Slade drawing' - owing to its continentally-influenced draughtsmanship and shading, which is leavened with a more

instrumental in setting up the William Roberts Society, has written several essays on Sarah. She graciously shared her reflections, William Roberts catalogues, and copies of photographs from the 1920s, which have been used as source material for this dissertation.

modern cropping, and energetic, multi-lining to describe shapes. There is an overall simplification of detail to the bare essentials. This juxtaposition of realism and abstraction is similar to the technique found in many portrait



Sarah, 1925, pencil on red paper, 31.3 x 23.8 cm, Estate of John David Roberts (held in Tate Store)

drawings of Spencer, Lamb, and Gertler. Notably by mid-decade this drawing betrays very little of the more overtly cubist or Vorticist influences which had characterised Roberts's[120] pre-war work.

A contemporary drawing of Sarah makes for an interesting comparison, and looks to be an exercise in linear technique and weight as well as shading and modelling, with Sarah's features and hands neatly described, and her left arm rounded and volumetric in what was emerging as Roberts's trademark tubular style.

[120] Gibson, p. 14.

Sarah, *c.*1925, red chalk, 29.5 x 23.2 cm, Estate of John David Roberts (held in Tate Store)

What is remarkable in these 1920s Sarah portraits is the range of expressions, moods and attitudes she is able to effect, and Roberts to capture. No two are alike, and all convey the strength, confidence and intelligence of the artist's wife, and in so doing, the trust and connection between sitter and painter. These

Sarah, 1922, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, Manchester City Art Galleries

pictures do not idealise or objectify Sarah. One might argue that in both *Sarah*, 1922, and *Girl in a Mauve Hat*, 1923, Roberts deliberately presents Sarah in unflattering clothes and lighting – the former is very raw and real with highly contrasting darks and lights; the latter shows a curiosity of humour, mockery and impatience in the eyes of the sitter. The Manchester portrait – which Paucker describes as the most successful in capturing Sara's physical and inner strength[121] - was purchased by S.E. Thornton, who presented it to the Contemporary Art Society in 1926, which in turn gifted it to Manchester. The picture debuted in Roberts's Chenil Galleries solo show in 1923, was included in his Tate retrospective in 1965, and in the 1984 National Portrait Gallery *William Roberts, An Artist and his Family.*

Girl in Mauve Hat (aka *Sarah*), 1923, oil on canvas, 61x 51 cm, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh

[121] Paucker, interview with Zachary R. Leonard, 6 September 2015.

Girl in a Mauve Hat is owned by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. Although dated 1925 in the Gibbon Williams' Roberts monograph, a painting by this title was listed in Roberts's Chenil Galleries catalogue, dated 1923, which is more likely. Roberts's treatment of Sarah's expressive eyes is particularly sophisticated, layering highlights and subtle colouring to mould the eyeballs and catch the overhead light source across her irises. The saffron and green backdrop is reminiscent of the T.E. Lawrence portrait painted a year prior in the couple's Coleherne Terrace flat, and may have been executed in the same studio.

William Roberts painting Sarah. Photograph courtesy Mr & Mrs Tony Baker[122]

This body of documentary works of Sarah is interesting in relief to Roberts's group genre pictures in which Sarah features as model or active member of the dramatis personae. This was referenced in Chapter Two (*The Chess Players*, 1929-30), where Sarah appears as the napping figure in the lower right of the canvas. One of the more famous of Roberts's family portraits known as *Bath-Night*, or *The Wash*, once owned by Sir Kenneth Clark, features Sarah and John in a domestic ritual of cleaning whilst Roberts appears absorbed in his newspaper

[122] Gibbon Williams, p. 72.

Bath-night (aka *The Wash*), 1929, oil on canvas, 40.5 x 51 cm, Bolton Museum and Art Gallery

in the background. It is a deceptively simple composition; however, with further examination, the complexity of diagonals, volumes, and subtle gradations of colour and multiple perspectives reveal a highly sophisticated dynamic tension between mother, father and son - and between labour and leisure. The play of light and shade to describe limbs, towel and newspaper hark back to the techniques of Caravaggio, and the composition to Greek and Roman friezes. In the case of this picture and *The Chess Players*, Sarah is not recognisable in a realistic portrait sense, but in a simplified, familiar figurative one.

Sarah's role as 'sitter' would grossly under-describe the scope of her relationship with Roberts, as lover, wife, mother to John, later guardian of Roberts's legacy - and throughout the entirety of their life together - his *muse*. Pauline Paucker, a friend of Sarah, has published several essays describing William and Sarah's bond, and strengthening our understanding of Sarah herself. 'Underneath was a shrewd judge of character, dispenser of sound advice.'[123] Her strength of purpose and confidence is palpable in each of the Sarah portraits, despite the vast range of expressions, gestures, positions and costumes.

Sarah's intelligence and character drew from her family's roots as Jewish Ukranian émigrés - Sarah was the only Kramer sibling born in Britain. The

[123] Pauline Paucker, 'Sarah', an essay in *William Roberts & Jacob Kramer: The Tortoise and The Hare*, p. 38.

family, who had settled in Leeds, were highly educated, and thrived in an environment of music, literature and art. Sarah's brother, and Roberts's fellow Slade student, Jacob Kramer (1892-1962), introduced the two at the ABC Tearoom in Tottenham Court Road when Sarah was merely 15, whilst visiting her brother during school holidays. Their attraction was instantaneous, and correspondence linked them together throughout Roberts's First World War service; soon after he was demobilised, they moved in together. Ruth Artmonsky comments that Roberts 'quickly appreciated that the Kramers were of a very different ilk from his own family, and was probably overawed by Jacob's and Sarah's wide interests in music, literature and the arts in general, and by their striking looks and lively sociability.'[124]

Jacob Kramer went on to have a very successful career as an artist and lecturer, based in Leeds. He and Roberts were the subject of an exhibition *William Roberts & Jacob Kramer, The Tortoise and The Hare*, produced by the Ben Uri Gallery, which toured Leeds and London in 2003. Whilst the parallel profiling of the exhibition and catalogue was a useful structure to compare and contrast the work and careers of these passionate, 'immigrant-class' artists, this dissertation will not seek to reproduce the same construct. However, the essays which compile *The Tortoise and The Hare* catalogue have been invaluable sources of primary and secondary material through which to examine Roberts's 1920s portraiture – and also to develop a richer appreciation of Kramer's sister Sarah.

From a portraiture perspective, there are several parallels between Roberts's and Kramer's work to note; for example, they both documented, and thus celebrated, the everyday working class and intellectual cultures in which they lived. They both exploited Sarah's and Cecillia's availability, depth of characters and ranges of expression to exercise their artistic skills. Both also executed portraits of Esther Lahr, sharing a connection through work for her journal, *The New Coterie*. By contrast, Kramer's portrait work is largely flat, monochromatic, expressionist, and graphic-illustrative compared to Roberts's.

---

[124] Ruth Artmonsky, 'William Roberts – The Tortoise', an essay in *William Roberts & Jacob Kramer: The Tortoise and The Hare*, p. 10.

Jacob Kramer, *Portrait of Sam Nagley,* 1922, oil on canvas, 75 x 62 cm, © Ben Uri Gallery

Jacob Kramer, *Dorothy Parker*, 1928, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 64.1 cm, © Tate

Jacob Kramer, *Head of Sarah Kramer*, c. 1920, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.5 cm, private collection

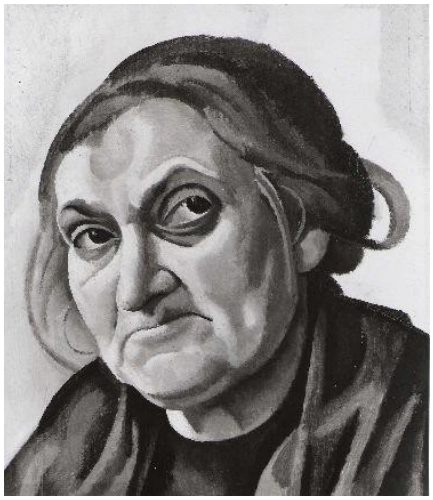
In a rather fundamental way, marrying Sarah meant marrying the Kramer family, and Roberts seemed to take to this rather enthusiastically – in sharp contrast to the disassociation he had from his own family. Indeed, there is a well-trod anecdote which states that it was not until William's death, that Sarah Roberts was aware of much of any detail of Roberts's family, when his brother Mike appeared at the Primrose Hill house, having read the artist's obituary.[125] Roberts actively included Jacob Kramer as a 'character' in his work, for example in *The Joke*, 1923 discussed in Chapter Two (p. 19), where Kramer is recognisable through his distinctive features and hairstyle, sat next to Helène Yelin, or in the *Café Royal Scene* (aka *Discussion in a Bar* and *Pimps in a Bar*), 1921.

[125] Gibbon Williams, p. 9.

Jewish Melody, 1920–21, oil on canvas, 160 x 90 cm (estimated size), mostly destroyed

In 1920-21, Roberts painted Sarah and her mother Cecilia Kramer in the now-destroyed *Jewish Melody*. The picture had a whirlwind history; it debuted in Roberts's 1923 Chenil Galleries solo show (No. 3, priced at £130), but at some stage was 'destroyed' (or more accurately, radically cut-down), and subsequently purchased by Sir Edward Marsh from Sarah Roberts for the Contemporary Art Society. The CAS donated it to Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane in 1954. At which point the picture was cut-down is unknown, but the detail of Cecilia's head remains, with some retouching in the upper right corner to mask what was a painted framed picture in the background. The picture portrays Sarah playing guitar, and Cecilia, their drapery and shoes rendered in swift, angular Cubist lines and shapes. *Jewish Melody* was both charged with energy, and grounded by the solidity and strength of the Kramer women. 'Roberts was very fond of his

mother-in-law, Cecilia Kramer. She had tremendous character and intellect, thinking nothing of translating Russian poets into Yiddish'[126]



Head of Woman [Cecilia Kramer] (aka *Head of Old Woman*), detail from *Jewish Melody*, 1920–21, oil on canvas, 33.7 x 28.5 cm, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a fundamental difference between Roberts's documentation of the Kramers' genuine Eastern European culture in these portraits, and Augustus John's costumed portraits of Dorelia McNeill in gypsy garb.

Augustus John, *Woman Smiling*, oil on canvas, 196 x 98.2 cm, 1908-9, ©Tate

There is a related study drawing for *Jewish Melody* called *Sarah with Guitar* from 1920-21. *Jewish Melody*, and another portrait in the middle of the decade, *Gypsy Girl*, 1925-26, appear as evidence of Roberts's ongoing interest in exploring the ethnicity of London, in this case of the people he loved and lived with - thus

[126] Gibson, 1984, p. 18.

Sarah with Guitar (aka *The Banjo*, Chenil Galleries 1923) - a study for *Jewish Melody*, 1920-21, pencil, 52.5 x 30 cm, private collection

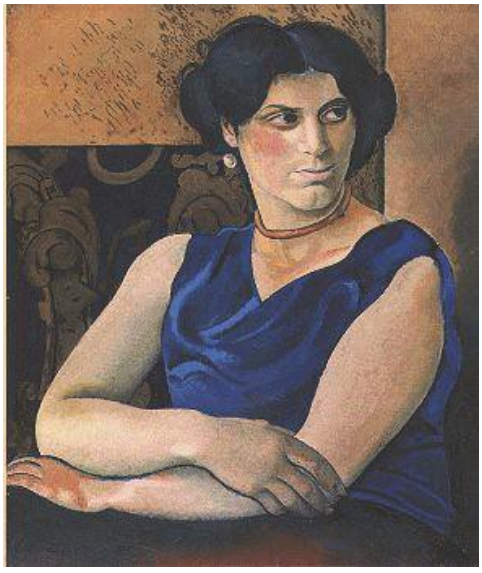
A Gypsy Girl, 1925–6, oil on canvas, 41.5 x 31.2 cm, Arts Council

placing the Sarah portraits in a broader context of the 'ordinary and extraordinary' examined in Chapter Two. Roberts infuses *Gypsy Girl* with a rich palette of reds and greens to offset the subtle range of yellows and golds, which unify Sarah's flesh tones to the background itself. This picture has been in the Arts Council Collection since 1950. It delivers a rather severe aspect to Sarah, but demonstrates the versatility and enigmatic nature of her face and expressions.

An earlier photograph of Sarah and John captures a tender moment between mother and son, as well as further evidence of Sarah's Eastern European influenced preferred attire of the time.

Sarah and John Roberts, c. 1921. Photograph, courtesy of Pauline Paucker

Two portraits of Sarah complete the set of 1920s works – again stylistically distinct from any other, as if Roberts was exploring two more facets of her



Sarah (aka *A Woman*), 1927, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, Manchester City Art Galleries

character and intellect, whilst flexing different painting styles. *Sarah* (aka *A Woman*), 1927, portrays Sarah in a café or perhaps reception room setting. She is formally adorned with jewellery, and appears to be listening (and possibly

disagreeing) with interest to a conversation off to her left. This compositional aspect, achieved by Roberts setting her gaze stage right, and twisting her head toward the conversation away from whom- or whatever she'd been facing, creates a moment of tension or distraction, as she prepares to comment or quip. The rich blue of her blouse, and the brocade of the banquette suggest an evening out, an overheard conversation. The specific sense of scene and degree of detail, e.g. the wallpaper pattern, make it unlike any other Sarah - or other of Roberts - portrait for that matter.

The last known painting of the decade, *Thoughts* (aka *Sarah*), 1929, similarly utlises Sarah's expressive leftward-cast eyes as a mechanic to create a moment of contemplation - not in a melancholy or pensive sense, given her enigmatic smile - but in quiet reflection.

Thoughts (aka *Sarah*), 1929, oil on canvas, 50 x 39.5 cm, private collection (Sir Barnett Stross MP)

The number and range of Sarah portraits are unique to Roberts's oeuvre relative to his contemporaries' pictures of their wives and lovers. However, Wyndham Lewis's portraits of his wife Gladys Hoskins (1900-79) in the 1930s are of note. She was known as 'Froanna' from 'Frau Anna' (her middle name), which a German wife of one of Lewis's acquaintances had nicknamed her. Froanna had been a frequent and favourite model for Lewis in the 1920s, and they married in 1930. She was devoted to Lewis, and according to Paul Edwards, may have had a calming, emotionally-maturing effect on Lewis, possibly owing to the artist's

dependency on her following surgery he underwent to address urinary tract infections.[127]

Lewis painted seven portraits of her - and many works on paper – between 1936 and 1938. His increasing dependency on Froanna, onset of blindness and nervous breakdown led him to publish a novel, *Self-Condemned,* in 1954 loosely based on their marriage,

> The husband begins by regarding his wife as an embarrassment, her attractive physical attributes merely serving to advertise that his self-presentation as a pure intellectual is undermined by a common sexual appetite. He is forced to revalue this, as he becomes dependent on his wife's companionship.[128]

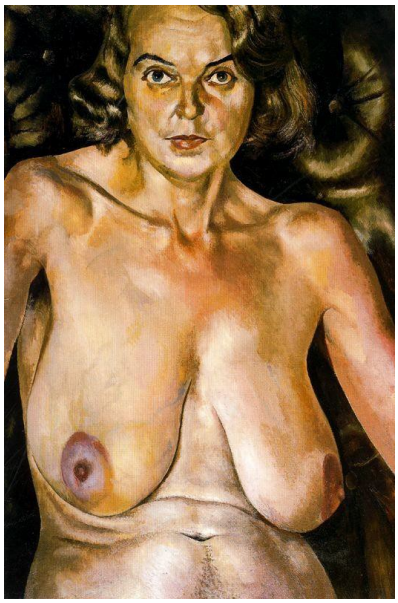
Wyndham Lewis, *Froanna (Portrait of the Artist's Wife)*, 1937, oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm, © Glasgow City Council

Unlike most of his other more stylised portraits where the sitters stare off in some direction, Froanna's direct gaze establishes a real connection with Lewis – and in turn the viewer. The use of bold red throughout has been ascribed to Lewis's failing vision at this time.

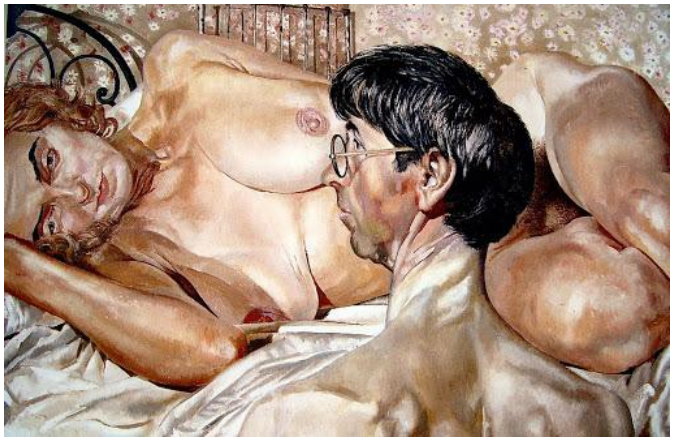
[127] Edwards, p. 91.
[128] Ibid.

Wyndham Lewis, *Pensive Woman*, 1938,oil on canvas, 59.4 x 44.5 cm, © Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery A more intimate Froanna portrait of the following year, *Pensive Woman*, shares more qualities with Roberts's 1920s work: the head and shoulders composition, the expressive hand, the monochromatic background, and the subtle curves and colouration of the clothing. This portrait explores his wife's introversion and thought, and is radically distant from Lewis's 1920s *Tyro* or *Raphael* self- portraits, which are demonstrative, extroverted, confrontational.

Stanley Spencer, who actively painted portraits throughout his career, executed them, not unlike Roberts, very distinctly in style from his primary imaginary scenes; although, like Roberts, many of his imaginary characters include 'recognisable' people including family, friends and colleagues. As with Lewis, Spencer painted his lovers; during the 1930s, he became isolated from his artist colleagues, and concentrated his subject matter increasingly on intimate portraits of Patricia Preece and Hilda Carline. The famous series of six nudes of Preece, painted between 1933-1937, are frank, clinical studies in realism, with no idealisation of Preece's large hands, heavy features and folds of flesh. These remarkable pictures, 'fully-cropped' in the way Spencer zooms in with flesh, sheets, and drapery all bleeding off the four edges of canvas, propel the image toward the viewer. They presage Lucien Freud's extraordinary palette of flesh-tones and heavy impasto decades later – and are a far cry from Roberts's rather tame and domestic pictures of Sarah.



Stanley Spencer, *Nude, Portrait of Patricia Preece*, 1935, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 50.8cm, © Ferens Art Gallery, Hull



Stanley Spencer, *Self-Portrait With Patricia Preece*, 1936, oil on canvas, 61 x 91.5 cm, © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Roberts continued to paint Sarah throughout the decades following the 1920s, though with less frequency. These include two double portraits – one from 1943 when the Robertses lived in Oxford; and the second in 1975. What is immedia-

The Artist and His Wife, 1942–3, oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm, private collection

tely noticeable is the fact that these pictures are rendered in Roberts's mature Cubist-tubular style, with simplified, rounded features; contours and shapes are more distinctly described with hard lines and colour fields. That being said, they

The Artist and His Wife, 1975, oil on canvas, 76.2 cm x 64.2 cm, National Portrait Gallery

are no less animated; indeed, each tells a story and portrays a real intimacy between painter and sitters, who become one on each side of the canvas.

Sarah was largely responsible for organising and lending to the 1984 National Portrait Gallery show *William Roberts 1895-1980: An Artist and His Family*. Paucker recalls,

> At that time, seeing her life in portraits led Sarah into a reminiscent mood, more responsive to her friends' queries about the past. She usually disliked being asked about the outstanding people she had known; she felt she was being treated as a monument. For her the present was more important. But she sometimes spoke of T.E. Lawrence, whom she had very much liked, and sometimes she would tell anecdotes – not to his credit – of Wyndham Lewis. Ezra Pound, she conveyed, was unspeakable.[129]

John Roberts Portraits

There are remarkably few portraits of John Roberts, numbering about a dozen, considering he was an only child – and only a handful in the 1920s. This may be a factor of age; during the decade, John spanned ages 1 to 11, and Roberts was prolifically occupied in painting adult portraits be that in commission form or in studying Sarah; moreover, he was forging new directions in the primary body of his figurative group works, and may have had little time in reserve to devote to painting John.

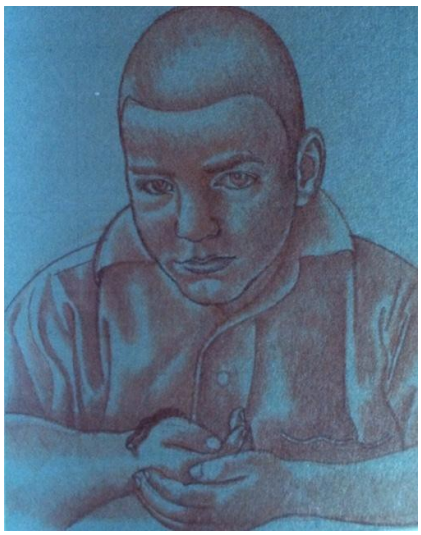
Bob Davenport, in his ongoing research for the Roberts catalogue raisonné notes that only one portrait of John dated to c.1923 (listed in the Chenil exhibition, and for which no images survive) predates a c.1925 etching – i.e. in the first five/six years of John's life. Similarly, another other work listed in the Chenil show was *Her Baby* 1920-23, portraying Sarah and John.[130]

---

[129] Paucker, 'Sarah', *The Tortoise and The Hare*, p. 38.
[130] Bob Davenport, email to Zachary R. Leonard, 31 July 2015.

John, study for etching, *c.*1925, pencil, 11.7 x 7 cm, location unknown

The 2004 Roberts retrospective exhibition in Newcastle and Sheffield, included a red chalk drawing, *Portrait of John Roberts with a Caterpillar*, 1927-30, which is a charming study of the curiosity of boyhood, delicately drafted and modelled.



John with a Caterpillar (aka *Portrait of John, the Artist's Son*), 1927-30, red chalk on paper, 26.7 x 21, location unknown.

Roberts's *Portrait of a Boy* (aka *John and Boy in a Blue Jersey*), *c.*1929, is the first documented oil of his son. It is composed in the familiar head and shoulders format, and captures a rather quizzical expression on John's face. Stylistically, it conforms to many of the works examined in Chapter Two, with carefully colour-moulded facial features and shadows, against a fairly monochrome backdrop. The rather dour palette relative to *Fred, Kit* or *Elsie* earlier in the decade must have been a conscious choice on Roberts's part, reasons for which would only be

conjecture. John's school uniform also places this work in a series of 'schoolboy' portraits which Roberts was to execute between the 1920s and 1930s, including *The Schoolboy* (aka *Paul Rimmer – Friend of John*), 1930. This picture, originally purchased by Sir David Scott in 1931, was later sold for £14,375 and interestingly listed by Sotheby's as depicting John Roberts.[131]

Portrait of a Boy (aka *John and Boy in a Blue Jersey*), *c.*1929, oil on canvas, 69 x 60 cm, Methyr Tydfil

The Schoolboy (aka *Paul Rimmer – Friend of John*), 1930, oil on canvas, 43.5 x 33 cm, private collection

[131] There is ongoing debate amongst Roberts's archivists as to whether a later painting, *Boy with Blue Shirt and Blue Striped Tie*, *c.*1931 (43 x 33 cm), (currently held in the Tate Store as part of John Roberts's unsettled estate), could indeed be Paul Rimmer.

The Schoolboy was exhibited by the London Artists' Association in 1931, and *The Times* reviewer proclaimed that the picture, 'in its incisive drawing of the features, recalls Botticelli's *A Young Man* in the National Gallery.'[132] It was also shown by Redfern Gallery in 1942, Kettering Art Gallery in 1959, in the Roberts retrospective at Tate in 1965, and in Reading 1983. It remains in private hands.

Sandro Botticelli, *A Young Man*, c.1480-5, tempura and oil on wood, 37.5 x 28.3 cm, © National Gallery, London

What is curious therefore is the relative *unfinish* of the John portrait by contrast to *The Schoolboy*, or compared to two other contemporary works, *Portrait of a Schoolboy* and *Portrait of a Schoolboy with Braces*, which both again reveal more care and subtlety in Roberts's treatment of detail around the eyes and hair. The latter work, *Braces*, also exhibits an essence of Roberts's more cubistic style, particularly in the treatment of the lips when compared to either the *John* or *Paul Rimmer* pictures. It would be conjecture to suggest that Roberts was

[132] *The Times*, 30 October 1931, p. 14.

Portrait of a Schoolboy, *c.*1930, oil on canvas, 43.2 x 33 cm, private collection

Portrait of a Schoolboy with Braces, *c.*1930, oil on canvas, 43.2 x 33cm, private collection

demonstrating somehow less interest in painting his own son in comparison to painting others, especially if those were commissions or gifts, which is unknown. Davenport, who knew John Roberts in the later years of his life, and researches Roberts works for the major auction houses, offered a rather thoughtful opinion on the relationship between father and son:

> I think John to some extent struggled to carve out a sense of identity for himself as separate from his talented father and very sociable mother, and this wasn't helped by the fact that, except for a fairly brief period, he was largely

financially dependent on them. I also think there's truth in Andrew Gibbon Williams's saying that John would often have felt himself to be in the way as a child. [133] My *guess* is that his conception wasn't planned, and though WR's study of Sarah pregnant seems quite tender, he *may* have felt different about the distraction and financial burden of the eventual child.[134]

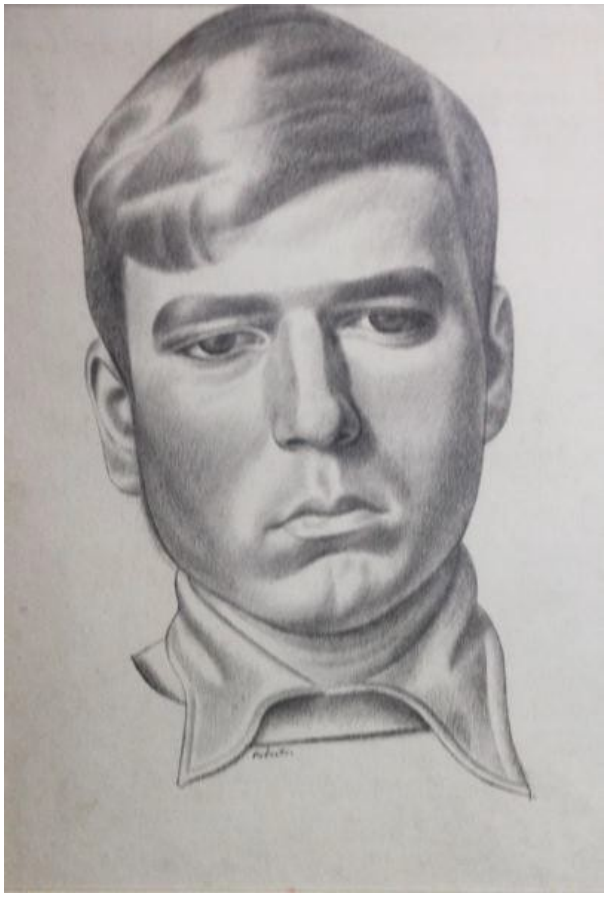
Sarah Pregnant (aka *Study* (Chenil Galleries 1923) and *Woman Standing* (Tate Gallery 1965)), pre-June 1919, pencil and brown ink, 50.5 x 22 cm, once owned by artist Diana Gurney, present location unknown

As referenced when looking at *La Femme Tragique* earlier, John was dropped at age four and seriously injured. According to John's notes the portrait of Sarah 'in a suede turban' was given to a surgeon named Milne in payment for his operating on John. The long hospitalisation may have distanced Roberts from his son at the time, when he was profusely busy completing work, and when hospitals didn't allow frequent visits. Davenport concludes, 'But John once described his father to me as "the greatest artist since Michelangelo", and didn't appear to be joking.'[135] Pauline Paucker confirmed that at some stage Roberts paid John 'the going rate for portrait sitters' as an incentive to get his son to model for him.[136]

---

[133] Gibbon Williams, p. 84, as referenced by Bob Davenport, email to Zachary R. Leonard, 31 July 2015.
[134] Davenport, email to Zachary R. Leonard, 31 July 2015.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Paucker, interview with Zachary R. Leonard, 6 September 2015.

Perhaps Roberts's most successful portrait of John was completed in 1938, a pencil drawing, exerting the highest degree of draughtsmanship and observation. There is an emotional pathos in John's expression and a real physicality to the delicate modelling, as seen in the *Seven Pillars* and *New Coterie* portraits – and a real essence of the father in his maturing son's face. This drawing remained in John's possession, and along with hundreds of other works, is now being looked after by the Tate, as a result of John dying intestate.



John (aka *John Roberts*), 1938, pencil, 33 x 22.5 cm, © Estate of John David Roberts (held in Tate store, 2014)

So how shall we interpret these 'family' portraits in the context of Roberts's other portraits and broader canon? There are several dimensions by which to characterise this work. At a most basic level, the ***quantity and range*** of self- and Sarah portraits distinguishes these pictures from those individual portraits of his other models and sitters. As such, they provide a multi-decade catalogue of

Roberts's ***process of working-out*** a range of human expressions and gestures that he subsequently abbreviated and applied in his 'London life' genre paintings. But certainly these pictures served not merely an elaborate experimental purpose only.

In that way, they ***historically document a life*** of the artist, the husband and wife, the family, and all the emotions and subtleties of experience, relationship and aging they shared. The bracket of Roberts's 1920s portraits was particularly concentrated with self-, Sarah and John pictures – the decade of their union, conception and fusion as a family - including the Kramers - as representative immigrant, working class Londoners. And in the dutiful, workmanlike way that Roberts painted, he exploited the availability of Sarah and John as sitters to enrich his portfolio, which would sell through the London Art Association, the Chenil Galleries, and the Goupil group shows; as well as be collected and subsequently placed by the Contemporary Art Society in institutions across the UK and Commonwealth. As noted in Chapters One and Two, only a select few of Roberts's 1920s portraits were technically commissioned, such as *Aircraftsman Shaw* and *Maynard Keynes and Lydia Lopokova*, and many portraits are likely to have been working exchanges or expressions of appreciation, such as those of *P.G. Konody* or *Esther Lahr*; and so in that way, the freely accessible Sarah as model particularly kept Roberts's draughtsmanship and more representational portrait execution skills sharp.

Are these works therefore among his best portraits? Certainly the *Red Turban* and *La Femme Tragique* could contend in terms of quality of modeling, use of colour, sophistication of sitter's expression and overall visual impact, when paired with *The Creole* or *Esther Lahr*. And the later, enigmatic sketch of *John* (1938) bears the finesse of the arresting *Newcombe* or *Davies* portrait sketches of a decade earlier.

The cohabitation of all three Robertses for essentially sixty years from 1919 through to William's death in 1980, itself is testament to a peculiar depth of intimacy and knowledge of Roberts's sitters' characters and behaviours. The

extraordinary range of pictures, particularly of Sarah and himself demonstrates the working process of a brilliantly gifted draughtsman and translator of emotion, expression and will. These ‘family’ portraits are among his very best, and bring new meaning and value to Roberts’s wider, better-known group figurative work – as evidence of a depth of observation and keen passion for human emotion and intellect.

Conclusion

William Roberts's seventy-year career spanned decades of social, political, and economic development in Britain. His entire canon documents this history, predominantly through the lens of urban life in London. Classically trained at the Slade, influenced by the European avant-garde, gifted with extraordinary draughtsmanship, he developed a modern, idiosyncratic 'English Cubist' style to distinguish his wholly figurative work.

This dissertation focused on a sparsely researched aspect of his work – Roberts's portraiture of the 1920s. These works illustrate Roberts's artistic skill and insight into human character, whilst demonstrating his workmanlike approach to pursuing commissions to provide for his young family. This paper has also aimed to explicate the role of portraiture in Roberts's overall oeuvre, whereby the personalities, expressions and gestures of *individuals* provided a trove of material from which to draw for his more anonymously-peopled group genre paintings.

As an 'outsider' from working class Irish Hackney amidst his Slade peers and middle class patrons, he opportunistically developed a means to effect useful connections with Roger Fry, Augustus John, P.G. Konody, the Sitwells, and others, which led to portrait, illustration and painting commissions. Moreover, as a soldier and official war artist, Roberts experienced the atrocities of the Front first-hand, and galvanized his already prodigious work ethic with keen character-observation skills - which flourished in the series of portraits he created for *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and of T.E. Lawrence.

The 1920s in stylistic terms, served as a kind of 'junction box' for Roberts, through which he experimented with various previous styles, revisiting his Cubist / Vorticist angularity of the immediately pre- and post-war pictures, then shifting radically to more volumetric, brightly-hued figures, which became more characteristic of his mature style. Roberts's portraiture, by contrast, moved in a separate, more *evolutionary* manner through the 1920s. The portrait commissions for *Seven Pillars* were actively art directed toward realism – but

never dictated - by Lawrence himself, but were equally attractive to the patron-author as Roberts's more Cubist endpieces for the same project. Roberts's academic chiaroscuro perfected at the Slade gave way in favour of Modernist colour-modeling for facial contours, as evidenced in the *P.G. Konody, Fred Knewstub, Esther Lahr* or any of the *Sarah* portraits.

The thrust and heave of London society is captured in Roberts's entire portfolio, but his 1920s portraiture particularly demonstrates his interest in documenting the cultural diversity of the capital. *The Creole, Dr. Paul de Zoysa* and *Jewish Melody* in this context show that Roberts celebrated this diversity amongst the people he loved and lived with - and captured them not in a pastiche or politically correct way - which could be a misinterpretation today.

In the context of his contemporaries, Roberts is likely to have produced more paintings in the 1920s than Lewis, Lamb, Kramer – and potentially even Spencer. Certainly in portraiture, that is the case. The volume alone speaks to his prolific and prodigious output, which has left a significant visual archive of the personalities, cultures, emotions and sensibilities of inter-war London. These portraits (as with Roberts's group figurative scenes) are documentary and honest – not fantastical or imaginary. His portraits of Sarah, John and himself reveal their connection as individuals, but also due to their number and range, represent a concentrated study of his gifted insight into human nature, intellect and emotion.

In their provenance, Roberts's portraits also illustrate the dominant influences of patronage and art commissioning of the period. The Sitwell family's literary publishing and art projects, and subsequently those of Charles and Esther Lahr, directly led to graphic and portrait work by Roberts for *Coterie* and *The New Coterie*. The tenuous and contentious associations with Roger Fry and Wyndham Lewis, led to patronage by Maynard Keynes through the London Artists Association and his double portrait. Similarly, Edward Marsh's interest in Roberts led to a steady stream of acquisitions for The Contemporary Art Society, for which he was picture buyer and chairman, and thus to the dissemination of

many Roberts portraits throughout the Commonwealth. This is evidence of Roberts's established significance at the time, and its resonance now through great collections in London, Cambridge, Leeds, Manchester, Oxford, and Sheffield, as well as in New York, Ottawa and Sydney.

Roberts did not suffer fools gladly, and thus his notorious pamphleteering against Rothenstein and the British art establishment in the 1950s, and his increasingly reclusive life with Sarah and John cast a shadow over the later phase of his career. His rather belated admission to the Royal Academy is thus explained, and the often over-sensationalised rivalry with Wyndham Lewis sometimes the only thing people remember of him. However, Roberts's contribution to British Modern art is significant, and his 1920s portraiture is particularly poignant in presenting the people and history of London in a way that had never been done before with such depth and breadth.

William Roberts

Portraiture of the 1920s

Bibliography

Zachary R. Leonard

Candidate MA, History of Art, University of Buckingham

Books

Backemeyer, Sylvia (ed.), *Making Their Mark – Art, Craft and Design at the Central School 1896–1966* (London: Herbert Press, 2000)

Bell, Keith, *Stanley Spencer: Catalogue Raisonné* by (London: Phaidon, 1992)

Black, Jonathan*, Edward Wadsworth, Form, Feeling and Calculation, The Complete Paintings and Drawings* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2005)

Blasting the Future, Vorticism in Britain, 1910-1920, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art (Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004) (various contributors)

British Contemporary Art 1910-1990, Eighty Years of Collecting (London: The Herbert Press in Association with the Contemporary Art Society, 1991)

Brown, Malcolm, editor, *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Cayzer, Elizabeth, *Changing Perceptions: Milestones in Twentieth-century British Portraiture* (London: The Alpha Press, Ltd., 1998)

Clements, Keith, *Henry Lamb, The Artist and His Friends* (London: Redcliffe, 1985).

Cork, Richard, *Art Beyond The Gallery In Early 20th Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985)

Cork, Richard, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994)

Cork, Richard, *David Bomberg* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988)

Cork, Richard, 'Roberts, William', in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 26, ed. Jane Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996)

Cork, Richard, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (London: Gordon Fraser, 2 vols., 1976)

Cork, Richard, *Vorticism and Its Allies* (London: Arts Council, 1974)

Fry, Roger, *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920) lectures and papers

Gibbon Williams, Andrew, *William Roberts: An English Cubist* (London: Lund Humphries, 2004)

Gibson, Robin, *Glyn Philpot,1884-1937, Edwardian Aesthete to Thirties Modernist*, (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1984-5)

Harris, Alexandra, *Romantic Moderns* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010)

Harrison, Charles, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939* (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 1981)

Hassall, Christopher, *Edward Marsh, Patron of the Arts, A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959)

Haycock, David Boyd, *A Crisis of Brilliance -- Five Young British Artists and The Great War,* (Old Street Publishing, 2009)

Holroyd, Michael, *Augustus John, The New Biography*, (Vintage, 1997)

Jason, Neville, and Thompson-Pharaoh, *The Sculpture of Frank Dobson* (The Henry Moore Foundation, 1994)

Lawrence, A. W., ed., *T. E. Lawrence by his friends* (London: Jonathan Cape; Garden City, NY: Doubleday Doran, 1937. Abridged edition London: Jonathan Cape, 1954)

Lawrence, T. E., *Seven Pillars of Wisdom, A Triumph* (Garden City Publishing, New York, 1938). De Luxe Edition was a reprint of the privately printed edition on 1926, and the first published edition for public circulation in 1935 by Jonathan Cape in the UK and in the US by Doubleday, Doran & Company

Lewis, Wyndham, editor, *Blast 1* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2004) facsimile edition

Mack, John, *A Prince of our Disorder, The Life of T.E. Lawrence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, 1988)

Michel, Walter and Fox, C.J., editors, *Wyndham Lewis on Art, Collected Writings 1915-1956*, (Funk & Wagnalls, 1969)

Pearson, John, *The Sitwells, A Family's Biography* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978)

Pound, Ezra, *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska*, (New York: New Directions, 1970)

Ross, Cathy, *Twenties London* (London: Philip Wilson for the Museum of London, 2003)

Rothenstein, John, *Modern English Painters: Lewis to Moore* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956)

Shone, Richard, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1976)

Simon, Robin, *The Portrait in Britain and America: With a Biographical Dictionary of Portrait Painters 1680-1914* (MacMillan, 1987)

Spalding, Frances, *The Bloomsbury Group* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1997)

Wilson, Jeremy, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Authorized Biography of T. E. Lawrence* (Heinemann, 1989)

Museum and Gallery Exhibition Catalogues; Auction Sales Catalogues

Arts Council and Tate, *William Roberts ARA*, retrospective exhibition catalogue (London: Arts Council, Tate, 1965)

Bone, Muirhead, foreword to exhibition catalogue: *Paintings and Drawings by William Roberts* (Chenil Galleries, 1923)

Cayzer, Elizabeth, Exhibition catalogue: *William Roberts, R.A. 1895-1980: A Retrospective Exhibition*, (Maclean Gallery, 1980)

Cayzer, Elizabeth, 'William Roberts Portraits', the 2002 William Roberts Lecture, given at the National Portrait Gallery, London, on 2 February 2002

Christie's catalogue, Lot 99 / Sale 1348, Sale 1348, The Spiro Family Collection, Part II: Explorers, 26 February 2004, New York

Edwards, Paul, with Richard Humphreys, *Wyndham Lewis Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008)

Eustace, Katherine, *Twentieth Century Paintings* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum catalogue entry, 20, 1999)

Gibson, Robin, Introduction to exhibition catalogue: *William Roberts: An Artist and His Family* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1984)

Glazebrook, Mark, Introduction to exhibition catalogue: *William Roberts R.A.: Paintings, Drawings and Watercolours 1910–1978* (Albemarle Gallery, 1989)

Haycock, David Boyd, *Nash, Nevinson, Spencer, Gertler, Carrington, Bomberg, A Crisis of Brilliance 1908-1922* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2013).

Heard, Andrew, *William Roberts 1895–1980* (Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle and Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, 2004)

MacDougall, Sarah, and Dickson, Rachel, editors, *Uproar, The First Fifty Years of the London Group, 1913-63*, Ben Uri Gallery 2013-14 (London: Lund Humphries, 2013)

Skipwith, Joanna, ed., *The Sitwells and the Arts of the 1920s and 1930s* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1994)

Stanford, Eric, Introduction to exhibition catalogue: *William Roberts R.A.: An Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by William Roberts R.A. 1895–1980*(Reading: Reading Museum and Art Gallery, 1983)

William Roberts: An Artist's View (Gillian Jason Gallery, 1990)

William Roberts & Jacob Kramer: The Tortoise and The Hare (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2003), including essays: Artmonsky, Ruth, 'William Roberts – the Tortoise' (pp. 7-18); Dickson, Rachel, 'Jacob Kramer – the Hare' (pp. 19-34); and Paucker, Pauline, 'Sarah (1900–1992)' (pp. 35-40)

Wilson, Jeremy, *T.E. Lawrence: Lawrence of Arabia*, (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1989)

Manuscripts and Library Archives

Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Beaumont Street, Oxford, OX1 2PH. T.E. Lawrence portrait viewing and related papers
Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, The Accession of Pictures report from 1939-1946

Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Weston Library, University of Oxford, Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3BG. T.E. Lawrence papers, letters, memorabilia:

Transcripts of letters to and from T.E. Lawrence, 1922-35
MS Eng. d. 3330, fols. 1-136
MS Eng. d. 3341, fols. 194-203

Photocopies of letters from T.E. Lawrence, 1922-34
MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 248-254

Transcripts of letters from T.E. Lawrence, 1922-34
MS Eng. c. 6737, fols. 255-266

Drawings
MS Eng. c. 6744, fol.3 (press proof of drawing of Buxton, c. 1922)
MS Eng. c. 6744, fol.4 (press proof of drawing of McMahon, c. 1922)

Tate Archive and Reading Rooms, Tate Britain, Millbank, London. Contemporary Art Society reports, 1911 to June 1924:

TGA 9215/2/2 – Executive Committee of the Contemporary Art Society, signed minutes 1910-1956
TGA 9215/14/1 – Loose press cuttings[c. 1910-1980]
TGA 9215/12/1 - Ephemera

Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, Houghton Library:

MS Eng. 1653. Fifty-nine drawings and other works, including endpieces created for *Seven Pillars of Wisdom.* Gift of Mr. Bayard L. Kilgour, Jr., 1958-1966

Works By William Roberts

(Self-Published or Posthumously edited by John David Roberts)

Roberts, William, '*4.5 Howitzer Gunner Royal Field Artillery 1916-1918: Memories of the War to End War 1914-1918*'. This was first published (London, 1974) as *Memories of the War to End War 1914–18* (on the title page) or *4.5 Howitzer Gunner R.F.A. 1916–1918* (on the cover). Text and title are from William Roberts, *Five Posthumous Essays and Other Writings* (London: Valencia, 1990)

Roberts, William, *The Twenties,* Valencia (text reproduced in William Roberts catalogue raisonné, http://englishcubist.co.uk/twenties.html

Roberts, William, *The Vortex Pamphlets 1956–1958* (London: January 1958), comprising five articles, the first four of which were originally issued as separate pamphlets:

1. *The Resurrection of Vorticism and the Apotheosis of Wyndham Lewis at the Tate* (London, August 1956)
2. *Cometism and Vorticism - A Tate Gallery Catalogue Revised* (London, August 1956)

3. *A Press View at the Tate Gallery* (London, October 1956)
4. *A Reply to My Biographer Sir John Rothenstein* (London, February 1957)
5. *Vorticism and the Politics of Belles-Lettres-ism* (London, January 1958)

Journals and Essays

Paucker, Pauline, *Sarah: An Anecdotal Memoir of Sarah Roberts, Wife, Model, Muse and Defender of William Roberts RA* (London: Tenby, William Roberts Society, 2012)

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Cork, Richard, Article in response to *In Defence of English Cubists, Evening Standard*, 2 December 1976

Cork, Richard, 'Family Still-life', *The Listener*, 6 September 1984

Cork, Richard, 'Alone in the Crowd' (review of 2004 Hatton Gallery exhibition), *New Statesman*, 3 May 2004

Hendry, Philip, 'William Roberts', *London Mercury*, March 1935

Konody, P.G., 'The Goupil Gallery', *Art and Artists, The Observer*, 9 July 1922

Konody, P.G., 'The London Artists' Association', *Art and Artists*, *The Observer*, 17 July 1932

Konody, P.G., 'Review of Chenil Exhibition', *Daily Mail,* 9 November 1923

Konody, P.G., 'Roberts's Robots' (review of Chenil exhibition), *Art and Artists*, *The Observer*, 18 November 1923

'Mr William Roberts' (review of Chenil Galleries exhibition), *The Times*, 11 November 1923

'Mr William Roberts' (review of Cooling Galleries exhibition), *The Times*, 30 October 1931

'Mr William Roberts' (obituary), *The Times*, 30 January 1980

Monro, Harold, ed., The Chapbook (A Yearly Miscellany), No. 40, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925)

'Review of Chenil Galleries Exhibition', *Morning Post*, 14 November 1923

Rutter, Frank, 'A Master of Satire: William Roberts, Cartoons and Portraits', *Sunday Times*, 17 February 1935

Sewell, Brian, 'True Tale of the Tortoise and the Hare', *Evening Standard*, 18 July 2003

Spalding, Frances, 'William Roberts: An English Cubist' (book review), *Burlington Magazine* 147, September 2005

The Times, 4 February 1927

The Times, 'Mr. William Roberts', 30 October 1931

Whitford, Michael, 'Portrait of the Modernist as an Old Man', *Arts Review*, 11 December 1965

'William Roberts' (obituary), *Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 1980

Web Sites

BBC Your Paintings
http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/

Christie's
www.christies.com

Cleall, David, ed., with further research from Davenport, Bob, on behalf of the William Roberts Society, William Roberts catalogue raisonné: http://englishcubist.co.uk/

Lahr, Sheila, memoir of Esther Lahr, www.militantesthetix.co.uk/yealm/yealm1.htm

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, http://www.oxforddnb.com

Sotheby's
www.sothebys.com

Tate art collection search
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/search

Tate archives, including The Contemporary Art Society papers,
http://www.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/printrooms/

Wilson, Jeremy, ed., www.telstudies.org. Papers, chronologies, supplementary essays and others reference material.