

Museum receives portrait of BBC journalist Wheeler

CHRISTMAS came early to Horsham Museum with the recent donation of a magnificent painting to add to its portrait collection.

Over the last year, Jonathan England, chairman of the Friends of Horsham Museum, and his colleagues have been holding a number of fundraising events which has enabled them to buy the portrait of Sir Charles Wheeler by Partridge Green artist Claire Phillips.

The late Sir Charles Wheeler, a resident of Warnham, was a noted BBC journalist who up to his death was breaking and making news on the world stage.

The portrait by Claire captures his zest for life as well as the features that made him such a recognisable character as he walked the streets of Horsham, including visiting the museum.

The oil portrait joins the museum's small collection of portraits acquired over the last 100 years.

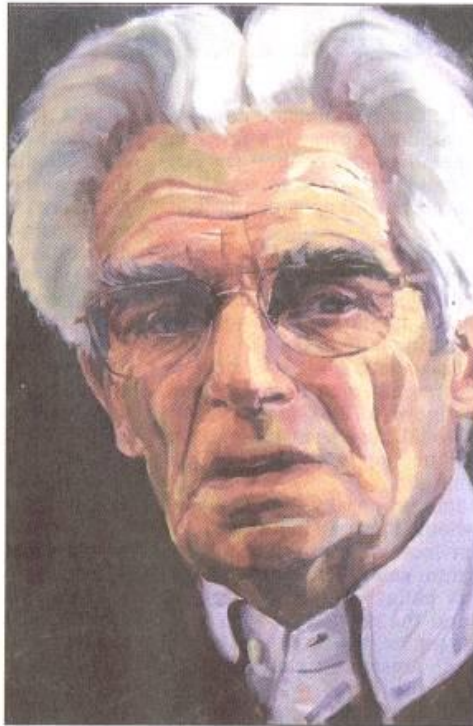
These portraits include politicians, brewers, hairdresser, a pie seller, a vicar and a slave owner as well as an international judge.

While many of these portraits were painted over 50 years ago, it was while making preparations for Clare Phillips' forthcoming exhibition at the museum that the opportunity to add a new portrait by a local living artist proved too good to miss.

The portrait reflects an important aspect of British social life - television - as much as the portrait of a pro-slavery MP represents his time.

While researching the life of Sir Charles, whose daughter is married to Mayor of London Boris Johnson, it became apparent that he not only represented the popular medium of the 20th century, but how much he had experienced the defining moments of that century.

As the BBC News obituary explained: 'He was born Selwyn Charles Cornelius-Wheeler on 15 March, 1923 in Germany and educated at



The portrait of Sir Charles Wheeler, by Claire Phillips.

Cranbrook School in Kent.

His father worked for a shipping company in Hamburg and the young Wheeler experienced life under the Nazi regime.

'He occasionally used to take bread to Jewish neighbours hiding out in the woods and his

experience of totalitarian rule engendered a profound sympathy for the underdog.

He began his career in journalism as a tape boy on the old Daily Sketch newspaper before joining the Royal Marines in 1942.

'He became part of a team led by Ian Fleming which collected technical intelligence ahead of the Allied invasion of Europe and he took part in the D-Day landings...

'In October 1956 Sir Charles, now a producer on the Panorama programme, crossed the border between Austria and Hungary to cover what later became known as the Hungarian Uprising...

'He returned to Berlin in 1962 for a three-year spell before moving to Washington, a posting that cemented his reputation. It was a period of massive change in American society with increasing pressure from the burgeoning civil rights movement.

'Sir Charles covered the race riots and the assassination of Martin Luther King, as well as the growing opposition to the war in Vietnam. He was also on hand for Watergate'.

And on through the 1980s and 1990s; right up to his death in 2008 Sir Charles was reporting on major news stories or creating them because of his coverage of events that authorities wanted hidden.

Pam French, at the museum in the Causeway, said: "Fortunately for Horsham Museum and Art Gallery the Friends were willing to play Father Christmas.

"According to Sir Charles, the art of being a good reporter was simply a matter of luck - of being in the right place at the right time. Fortunately for Horsham Museum the same can be said of acquiring this portrait."

The portrait will feature in 'The Revealing World of Claire Phillips: a Retrospective' which opens on January 5 at Horsham Museum and Art Gallery.