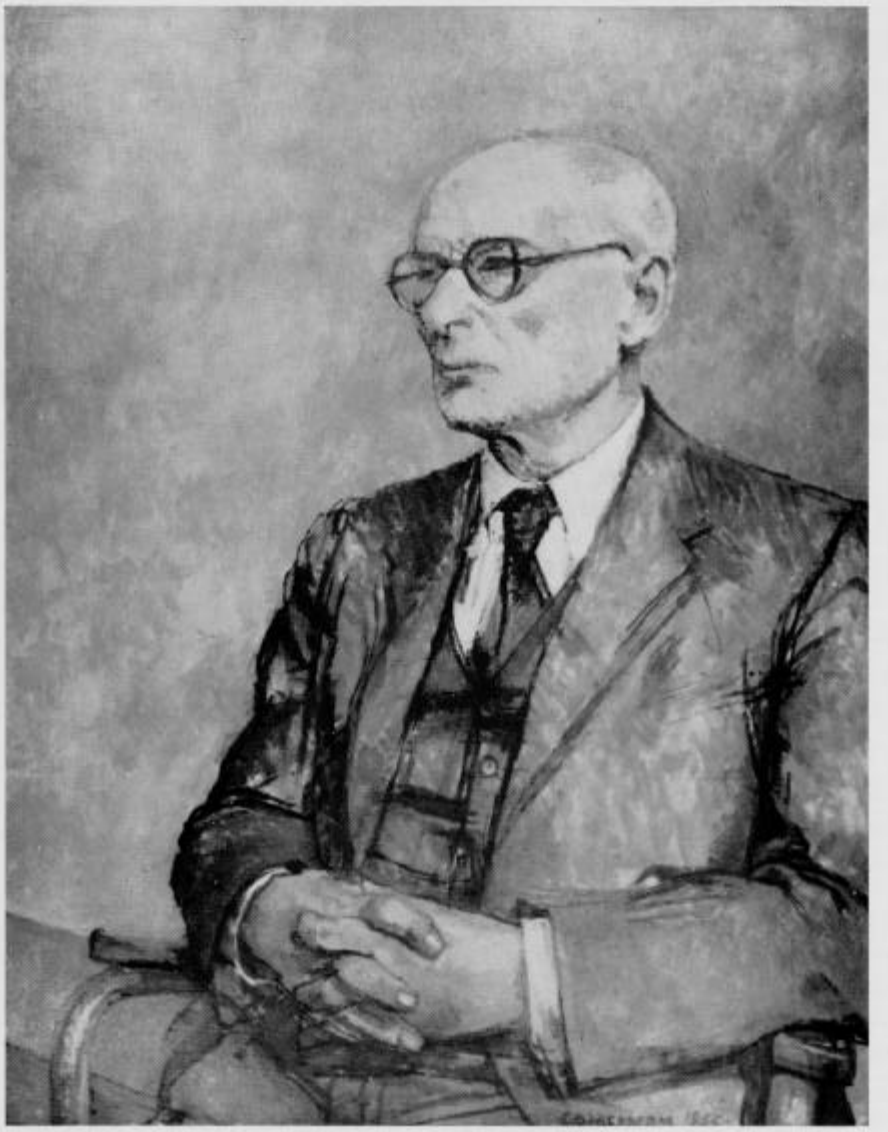
PLATE XXVIII



From the portrait by Sir William Coldstream, 1955

SIR ALEXANDER CARR-SAUNDERS, K.B.E.

SIR ALEXANDER MORRIS CARR-SAUNDERS

1886–1966

IN his Hobhouse Memorial Lecture on 'The Biological Basis of Human Nature', Carr-Saunders paid tribute to Sir Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin: 'like his cousin', he said, 'he belongs to that distinguished group of Englishmen who, though holding no academic post, and thus in a sense falling within the class of amateur, have done so much for the advancement of science'. Carr-Saunders himself spent most of his life in academic posts, valued the discipline they imposed, and held that those who sought freedom in withdrawal were in fact able to produce less. Yet in detachment of mind and range of consuming philosophic interest he was in the lineage of those two biologists whom he so deeply admired.

This way of life and thought was the heritage of an unusual upbringing. He was born in 1886, the son of a wealthy underwriter, and by some fifteen years the youngest child. An elder sister, married to Admiral Slade, was much abroad, and her two daughters, little older than he, shared his nursery at times. One of them was to become Gandhi's disciple Mira Behn. But he did not remember them as close companions; his childhood seemed lonely in retrospect; others saw him at the time as quiet and withdrawn. Yet the interests of his later life owed much to his family. He was proud, in his quiet way, of his descent from Roger Morris, the eighteenth-century architect after whom he was named, Master Carpenter to the Board of Ordnance, designer of the White Lodge in Richmond Park and the Column of Victory at Blenheim, and builder of the Palladian bridge at Wilton. He was conscious also of his affinity with two other kinsmen—his great-uncle William Wilson Saunders, a sapper who became an underwriter, collected pictures with a fine discrimination until they had to be sold in his bankruptcy, and was elected to the Royal Society for his spare-time studies in entomology; and Edward Saunders, also an entomologist and an F.R.S., whose *Hemiptera Heteroptera* remains a standard work to this day.

Carr-Saunders was sent early to a preparatory school, and was unhappy there, but that was as nothing to the misery of the sadistic bullying he suffered in his house at Eton. Shane Leslie, who bore it with him, was to describe it in his novel *The Oppidans*.

'Alec and I were "saps" ', he has written since[1], 'and soon rose into Fifth Form, but the underfags endured an appalling time.... I described the whole house as Liberty Hall but Alec insisted that it was more a convict ship.' The memory of those days was painful to him all his life: it may have been they that engraved those lineaments of dejection and reserve that were so often to mask his quick awareness of all about him. For all that he rose in the school, he said he could learn nothing during term; and he left when he was only 16.

He went to Paris and then to the French Alps. Mountains he had seen for the first time when his parents took him to Scotland, and the prospect had been a revelation, a falling in love at first sight. He went now to the chalet of Mme Charlet-Straton at Chamonix. Miss Straton was a pioneer who had climbed unaccompanied save by a guide, and bad weather having forced them more than once to pass the night in bivouac, the conventions of the time required them to marry. Carr-Saunders's father had become one of Mme Charlet-Straton's trustees. He himself now responded with joy to her invitation to stay at Argentière. There he learned the craft of the mountaineer, and became an authority on the Aiguilles Rouges, on which he was later to read a paper to the Alpine Club.[2] The discipline of the mountaineer, with its intense but calm attention to detail, its sensitivity to the grain of rock and ice, yet also its broad strategic compass and the exaltation of the transcendent prospects it affords, must have strengthened what were already his proclivities.

At least when he went up to Magdalen he made his own way. He kept apart from the clubs: with his friend D. C. Somervell, the historian, he would scull or sail on the upper river. Likewise he made his own choice of his course of study. He had read Darwin, and decided that it was in biology that the mind of man would make its greatest advances in the years ahead: he elected therefore to read biology. That meant starting at the beginning, with much learning that remained laborious even when his knowledge had accumulated. Somervell has left a picture of him in his room hung with photographs of the Alps, 'his energies divided between such uncongenial tasks as learning the names of the bones in a frog's skull and such congenial tasks as mastering (and explaining to me) the philosophy of Spinoza'. But at the end of four years he took his First in zoology, and was

[1] In a letter to the present writer, 17 July 1967.

[2] *Alpine Journal*, xxxvii, 241, 1928.

elected to the Naples Biological Scholarship. From his year's tenure of this he returned to Oxford as a Demonstrator in zoology.

Yet his mind was moving away from the laboratory. He had gone far enough to realize the difference between the accretion of knowledge particle by time-consuming particle in the work of the ever more specialized scientist, and the sweep of philosophic principle, the opening of vast new prospects, that had stirred him in Darwin and Galton. It is significant that between Naples and his demonstratorship he had travelled across Siberia to Peking, walked for three idyllic weeks in the mountains of Japan, and returned across Canada. Though to the end of his days he retained the scientific habit of mind, he felt now that the field of the experimental scientist was too confined for him to spend all his days in it. He had no need to put himself under its constraints. He was conscious of unusual powers; and he had private means. 'After all,' he said, 'Darwin was never a professor.'

More than this: there appeared in him now that zeal for right action in the affairs of men, which likewise marked all his later life. The exciting part of biology for him had been the recent discovery of Mendel's paper of 1865, and Bateson's inquiries into heredity. His imagination was fired by the possibility of providing a scientific basis for the policy of eugenics that Galton had advocated without at that time knowing much more about heredity than that like breeds like. When he left Oxford for London in 1910 he began to study biometrics under Galton's friend Karl Pearson. 'From my undergraduate days', he said later, when the Eugenics Society made him the first recipient of its Galton Medal,[1] 'I have believed that in the long run nothing matters more to the human race than the possession of a sound genetic environment.'

Of Karl Pearson he spoke[2] as 'a man in his way as outstanding as Galton himself, and of great personal charm, to whom as a former pupil I should like to pay a tribute of deep respect'. It may well have been Pearson who inspired his defence of the lecture, when in 1959 he spoke on 'English Universities Today':[3]

> The lecture is potentially the greatest medium of education. Those know this if, like myself, they have had the good fortune to sit under

[1] *Eugenics Review*, xxxviii. 1, 1946, p. 37.

[2] In his Hobhouse Memorial Lecture, *The Biological Basis of Human Nature*, 20 May 1942 (O.U.P.).

[3] 11 Dec. 1959; published by the London School of Economics.

a master of his subject who, after careful preparation, addresses his audience, visibly searches for the best order of presentation, seeks the necessary qualifications and appropriate terms, and so makes a personal contribution to each member of his audience, arousing in them the tension of the faculties which he himself is experiencing.

At the first meeting of the course, his attention was drawn by a small, dark-haired student, his eyes singularly bright behind gold-rimmed glasses, his goldbanded pen moving with singular rapidity—Harold Laski. Out of his work in Karl Pearson's laboratory came a paper[1] on 'Pigmentation in relation to Selection and to Anthropomorphic Characters'. When later he spoke with such scorn of the racialists, it was not on some ideal premiss of human equality but on the negative findings of inquiries into the association between pigmentation and mental potential that he was proceeding.

While he pursued these studies he also read for the bar, and was admitted at the Middle Temple. He began to reside at Toynbee Hall, of which in 1912 he became Sub-Warden. To the *Toynbee Record*[2] he contributed a paper on the dock strike of 1912, a paper of which the opening sentence demands quotation, so typical is it of the *pianissimo* in which so often he would interpret his own themes—'To all of those living in the East End during the last six weeks, the dock strike cannot fail to have been in some measure a matter of interest.' In December 1912 he was elected to represent the Middle Whitechapel Ward on the Stepney Borough Council. Participating in a general move further east from Toynbee Hall, he joined with some friends in taking a house at the water's edge in Wapping Old Stairs.

What would he have done if it had not been for the war? We know that at this time he was collecting material for a book on certain aspects of the population problem. On the day war was declared he and his four friends at Wapping enlisted in the ranks of the London Scottish. When the battalion was under canvas that autumn it was addressed by a staff officer who explained to the men as they sat round him on the grass the need to get on with our French allies, odd fish though they were, and called on those who could speak French to raise their hands. So by January 1915 he was commissioned as Lieut.-Interpreter, Army Service Corps. But the activities of that Corps were many,

[1] *Biometrika*, Feb. 1912.
[2] July–Sept. 1912.

and his first posting was to a bakery at home. There he earned the disfavour of his superiors by putting under arrest a sergeant baker who was in the habit of drinking all night to the detriment of the dough: he was suddenly moved to France, where for a year he commanded a party conducting supply trains up the line. The work was uninteresting: hearing of a prospective descent on Salonika he volunteered for service in those parts, and was sent to Egypt. There he was present at the Commonwealth forces' last defensive battle, at Romani in August 1916; but he went down with sand-poisoning and was posted to the depot at Suez. He tried to get back to Allenby's army, but wrote that like Moses he had been forbidden to enter the promised land. At Suez he remained till the end of the war, routing stores from the east to the European theatres, and issuing rations locally—with gold as well as rations for T. E. Lawrence's felucca. It was a post that gave him considerable independence, and some time to himself. He explored the Metopic branch of the Nile; and received regular supplies of books from the London Library. He must have pondered then what he would do after the war. As we see it now, he had been following the Attlee line of country: how far along it would he have gone had he returned to his seat on the Stepney Council, perhaps even been chosen for the Whitechapel constituency? But his concern for welfare was too discriminating to be dyed in party colours. Nor was he ever a socialist: in later life he would say that he had always thought of himself as a radical, but at the same time been opposed to collectivism, mainly because of its inherent propensity, as he saw it, to deny freedom of thought. In Suez, moreover, his mind was engaged with the population problem, extending it to horizons as wide as those around him there in time and space, enlarging the essay of 1913 into an attempt 'to view the whole problem . . . from an historical and evolutionary standpoint'.[1] He came home none the less to a state of depression and indecision, a state in which he accepted an invitation to return as Demonstrator to the Department of Zoology in Oxford, and so put on again the yoke from which he had chosen to withdraw eight years before.

But it gave him the opportunity to pursue his study of population. It is a mark of his great powers of concentration and rapid execution that the grand design was accomplished and his book appeared in 1922. What was distinctive in it was his marshalling

[1] From the Preface to his *The Population Problem: a Study in Human Evolution* (Clarendon Press, 1922).

of the evidence to show that human societies had not generally allowed their numbers to rise until they pressed against the means of subsistence, where those only could survive who were fittest to snatch a living in a war of all against all: on the contrary, primitive man usually had good health, a leisured poise, and fine physique, and those societies were most likely to survive that enabled their members to remain in that state, by limiting their numbers to the size that could make the fullest use of the resources of their territory.

> Long ago [he was to write later][1] I became sure that human evolution could only have happened given limitation of family size and adjustment to available food supply . . . a consequential restatement of Darwin who, having read Malthus 'for pleasure' attributed unadjusted family size to man and animals. But Malthus was in fact generalising from the experience of 'civilized' man, and it looks as though 'civilized' man (until recently in the West) was an exception in that he did not adjust his family size to food.

Forty years and more after his book appeared, it is recognized as having anticipated the modern development of ethology in its stress on the group and not the individual as the unit of survival, and its attention to the territory occupied by each group, and the conventions and rituals as well as the fighting by which that territory was denied to outsiders. 'Most men,' he once remarked, 'only have one idea in their lifetime: and that was mine.'

But it was little noticed at the time, as Wynne-Edwards has remarked in his *Animal Dispersion in Relation to Social Behaviour* (1962)[2]:

> Carr-Saunders' theory came thirty or forty years before its time, and its unique contribution to the understanding of human population-dynamics (to say nothing of those of animals) has never been properly recognised, far less acclaimed.

Carr-Saunders gave his own account[3] of why that was so.

> Until the publication of Wynne-Edwards's book I had long ceased to give any serious thought to early population history. I did not come across any evidence which made me doubt that my thesis was, broadly speaking, well founded, but it excited no interest. The data I used was derived from the work of anthropologists and prehistorians. The former are interested only in the functioning of societies which they study while

[1] In a letter to Professor J. E. Meade, 9 Dec. 1964.
[2] V. C. Wynne-Edwards, op. cit., p. 495.
[3] In a letter to Professor J. E. Meade, 22 Feb. 1965.

the pre-historians are interested only in artifacts which throw light on no more than technology. That is why my thesis, whether correct or not, evoked no discussion.

While he was writing this book he was doing his teaching in the Department, and in 1921 he took part, with Charles Elton and Julian Huxley, in the Oxford University expedition to Spitzbergen, being himself responsible for the marine biology at the base. But if he had been asked he might have said that he cared for none of these things so much as for farming.

> I don't find difficulty in explaining Alec's addiction to farming [D. C. Somervell wrote later].[1] However it may have been in later years . . ., he hated big towns, he disliked institutions, universities, and donnish and professional types. He loved the country; he loved solitude; his ideal life was that of, say, Charles Darwin, a man of learning and a country gentleman. He intensely respected the farmer, as such: 'the man who does the only job that really matters', as he once said.

At first he lived outside Oxford at Garsington, and farmed in partnership with Philip Morell. The partnership broke up, and he moved to Tubney on the Berkshire side, and took into a second partnership a young Canadian back from the war, a poet, and a specialist in milk production and marketing in the Institute of Agricultural Economics—Frank Prewett. There was some talk of his being drawn into the School of Rural Economy.

But when in 1922 he received an unsought invitation to a Chair, it was in Social Science, and at Liverpool. Neither the subject nor the city might seem congenial to the demographer and country lover, even though his second farming partnership had lost money and come to an unhappy end. But the work he was now offered attracted him in two ways: it drew him back to the interest in social structure and human betterment that had led him to the East End before the war, and it brought him the challenge of building a department and a school. What had drawn him to farming was partly that it was practical, that it was creative: now he discovered in himself the sources of what were to be the deepest satisfactions of his working life, in the achievements of the administrator. Surprised, amused even to find himself in a Chair, and a Chair of Social Science at that, he entered for the first time in his life on a role so satisfying that

[1] In a letter to the present writer, 17 Sept. 1957.

he had no thought of changing it. 'I never found anything I could really do,' he would say later, 'until I was 36.'

The main task of his new department was to train social workers, and he had had no experience of the teaching of any of the social sciences; but he studied the practice of other universities, drew on the experience of his assistant Ellinor Black from the London School of Economics, and developed methods of his own. He entered readily into the personal relations of a civic university, dining with the merchant princes of the University Council, gathering students in his flat, walking with them in the Welsh hills. If he still carried with him something of the air of detachment that had shrouded him from his Oxford colleagues, it went with a friendly bearing, and a conscientious attention to his duties; and in the Senate it added weight to his judgement.

When he had been demonstrating to first-year scientists in Oxford his students had included Teresa Molyneux-Seel from the School of Rural Economy. She was now farming near Liverpool: they met again, and in 1929 they married. They made their home at Water Eaton Manor in the fields beside the Cherwell above Oxford, and there they raised a family of two sons and a daughter. They shared a delight in pictures, and the gift of serendipity, buying pictures for a few pounds, cleaning and patiently identifying them—'if that isn't a Wilson it's very very close'. Carr-Saunders himself said that his first sight of Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican had opened a new world to him. He was later to contribute a paper to the *Alpine Journal*[1] on Francis Unwin's etchings of mountains.

In his Chair meanwhile he moved from inquiry into action. His biology had led him to eugenics, and he was unflagging in his support, indeed his leadership of the Eugenics Society, for all his impatience with 'the tiresome chatterings of busybodies' in its ranks. His imagination kindled to the possibilities implicit in the sharp fall of birth-rates in the inter-war years. 'Voluntary parenthood', he declared, 'is the greatest innovation that the race has ever made', and he called for a policy of positive eugenics—'not an attempt to breed a race of supermen, but to raise the fertility of those who are not definitely subnormal until at least they reproduce themselves.'[2] His *World Population* (1936) was a textbook, written to meet a need rather than to release a

[1] lvi. 274, 1947, p. 43.

[2] 'Eugenics in the Light of Population Trends', the Galton Lecture, delivered before the Eugenics Society, 16 Feb. 1935 (*Eugenics Review*, xxvii, 1935–6).

tension of the mind. But when in 1936 he became Chairman of the Population Investigation Committee, he set out on a course of stimulation and guidance that was to continue through his chairmanship of the statistics committee of the Royal Commission on Population in 1944, and establish demography as a discipline in British universities. Meanwhile he advanced into sociological territory by typically calm, observant, and detailed descriptions of the British social structure. Chief of these was his study, with Paul Wilson, of *The Professions* (1933), a pioneer account of history and structure, without equal in any language in its time, and still a standard work. In 1946 Keynes was to term him 'in common estimation today the most distinguished sociologist in the country'.[1]

Yet when in 1937 a second wholly unexpected invitation came to him—to become Director of the London School of Economics—he accepted it without hesitation. He told William Robson at the time that he disliked lecturing and enjoyed administration. He was in fact now to identify himself with an institution as never before, and administer its affairs for twenty years with equal devotion and success. Yet as an administrator his was the art that conceals art. He sat as a scholar among scholars. His colleagues—for it was as such he saw them—accorded a respect to his learning and his standards that dispensed with all need to assert the authority of his office: his control was as unquestioned as it was inconspicuous. He had a searching eye, and in private his contempt for whatever he found pretentious, devious, or muddleheaded was outspoken; but in meetings he dealt with everyone with the same patient objectivity—unless it were that he gave more rope to those he found tiresome. Everyone trusted him: he had no party and no opposition. He would seldom argue a case himself, or take a stand: where something inescapable was in danger of being hidden under words, he would bring the discussion back to it, but because he set out from the assumption that his colleagues shared his purpose he did not feel the need to defend or impose it. His great intellectual confidence enabled him to transact business quickly in the office, but it was a confidence in reason, not in himself, and it left him ready to change his mind when a good case was made out. Coming to a School riven in discord below under rough riding from above, himself incapable of *bonhomie*, and seemingly reserved in personal relations to the point of inscrutability, he restored harmony and won confidence

[1] *Eugenics Review*, xxxviii. 1, 1946, p. 39.

by the complete selflessness of his concern for scholar and teacher, and for the School as their community. It was a further gift that he could love detail as a craftsman does without trying to keep it in his own hands. Where quick and resolute action was needed he could take it: he waged one implacable struggle to save the School from dispersion and lodge it intact in Cambridge in 1939, another to bring it back to its own home in 1945. But his academic administration was efficient most of all because efficiency was not his aim: what he cared for was the advancement of learning, and the well-being of those who would learn.

It was in this cause that he carried out a task in his later years that would have made many a man's lifework in itself. In 1943 he joined the Asquith Commission on higher education in the colonies. From that time until long after his retirement he was to devote himself to the foundation and development of universities in the dependent territories overseas. He created and for years directed simultaneously the two agencies by which this work was accomplished—the Committee of Senate of the University of London which watched over the colleges 'in special relation' in East Africa, the Sudan, Central Africa, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and the West Indies; and the Inter-University Council in which all the universities of the United Kingdom joined to help the new colleges together with the universities of Malta, Malaya, and Hong Kong. One commission of which he was chairman in 1947 led to the creation of the University of Malaya, another in 1953 to that of the multi-racial University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In 1962, six years after his retirement, he carried out the survey of the manpower requirements of African universities for the Tananarive conference, and took a leading part in the foundation of Ahmadu Bello. After his return from Suez he had travelled little abroad, but he had climbed Tryfan more than a hundred times: now he showed the wiry tenacity of the hillman in journey after tireless journey to his beloved new foundations. Sometimes he drove them hard, but his demands on them sprang from a passionate belief in their purpose and a spontaneous sympathy for the people, above all the African people, whom they were to serve; and when they needed defence, it has been well said, he was a tiger.

Not sound learning only, but true religion. He had grown up in the tradition of the Victorian rationalists such as Huxley, and the Church of England was among the institutions for

which in his younger days he had had scant respect. But his profoundly speculative and wide-ranging mind joined with his unremitting concern for right action to draw him to the study of religion, and then to a personal commitment to a faith in the central tradition of Anglicanism. He became interested in the varied manifestations of religion, whether in a new liturgical movement of the Church of England, or the American evangelist Billy Graham whom he went to hear in the arena. Religion for him was the natural fruit of freedom of thought, as atheism was the concomitant of its denial. He would discuss no subject more eagerly than theology. It was in his nature to find no assurance in it that all was well with the world: there must, he held, exist 'a strain of tragedy in the Godhead'. But though he would dwell on what was disturbing and saddening in the human condition, that only deepened his concern for betterment, and at the London School he gathered a group of teachers and students around him to discuss the bearing of the Christian faith on the affairs of men.

When he met his end, it was among his beloved hills, hard by Grasmere. He was of the company of the Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains—'the Shepherds, I say, whose names were Knowledge, Experience, Watchful and Sincere'.

HENRY PHELPS BROWN

Many relatives and associates of Carr-Saunders have given indispensable help in the preparation of this memoir. Besides the members of his family, I would mention especially his undergraduate and lifelong friend, the late D. C. Somervell; Professor J. E. Meade, on his concern for eugenics; Dr. Walter Adams and Sir Christopher Cox, on his work among the universities overseas; Miss Eve Evans, who as Secretary of the London School of Economics worked in close sympathy with him during most of his Directorship; Professor David Glass, on his contributions to demography and sociology; and Mr. Raymond Chapman, on his personal faith, and his meetings to discuss religious issues with teachers and students of the London School. The reference to 'the strain of tragedy in the Godhead' is taken from a memoir by Peter Archer, M.P. in the *L.S.E. Magazine*, Jan. 1967. There is an account of his work for the Eugenics Society and at Liverpool University in the *Eugenics Review*, lix. 1, March 1967. To the London School is owed permission to reproduce the portrait by Sir William Coldstream.