

A Taste of Conflict

. . . art without empathy is art without an audience.
From 'A Memorable Fancy', Ruskin, 1789-93

The only sin is ugliness. . . . That is why I believe art is so much more than either economics or philosophy. It is the direct measure of man's spiritual vision.
From *The Meaning of Art*, Herbert Read, 1968

In a private collection, I gazed for some days at the portraits of miners; proud, erect. There was little doubt now looking at these works that Sutherland had a gift for portraiture in spite of his earlier lack of skill in the life class at Goldsmiths.

The late Dr. John Hayes made the point that, 'Some of the finest and most elaborate of the Welsh landscapes were painted during the freezing winter of the war, when the Sutherlands were offered hospitality, away from the potential danger zone of Kent, at Tetbury House, in Gloucestershire, which had been rented by their close friend and patron, Kenneth Clark. The results were exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in May 1940. . . .'

In January 1941, Sutherland was invited by Frederick Ashton to design the sets for *The Wanderer*, a ballet with Margot Fonteyn, Michael Somes and Pamela May and with Robert Helpmann as the Wanderer. The designs were based on Pembrokeshire landscapes and bicycle trips to Crickhowell, Abergavenny, the surrounding countryside and Brecon. Sutherland wrote,

Yesterday we were spellbound at sunset by the effect of the sun coming through holes in the clouds and making orange red patches on the blue black mountains. (GS to KC, December 27 1939)

When asked later why he didn't do any further ballet sets, he replied that he hadn't been asked. Theyre Lee-Elliott shared a cottage with Margot Fonteyn and her mother near the Clarks at Upton. Fonteyn was to dance the lead in the ballet, with Frederick Ashton creating the choreography. Sutherland sometimes went to Sadler's Wells to immerse himself in the ballet with Theyre Lee Elliott. This he used to do with his friends at Goldsmiths too.

In 1943, he designed the cover for issue no. 9 of *Poetry London*, which also contained his lithographs inspired by Francis Quarles' 'Hieroglyphics'. The lithographs were done especially for the issue and were printed at the Baynard Press on the front and back of a single sheet of paper. Sutherland had been introduced by David Gascoyne to the poetry of Francis Quarles and that of the Jesuit emblemists of the seventeenth



Graham Sutherland and Lee Miller, by William MacQuitty, 1943, National Portrait Gallery

century shortly after the beginning of the war. What he admired above all in their work was the visual images they projected (see Alley, Ronald, *Sutherland*, Tate Publishing, London, 1982, p. 90-91).

Sutherland had enjoyed Kenneth Clark's patronage for several years when, in 1939, the Sutherlands found themselves in financial difficulties. They decided to live in a caravan and sublet their rented house in Trotscliffe rather than go to live with Sutherland's mother. Clark bailed them out. He invited them to stay with his family at Upton. In fact, he lent them £500. Every letter from Sutherland to Clark throughout their lives is full of gratitude for Clark's help and advice.

He found the period staying with the Clarks in Gloucestershire very wearing. "They entertained a great deal: actors, Duchesses, Gaby Pascal, Willy Walton, Eddy Sackville-West, Oxford grandees such as Maurice Bowra and Air Force Chiefs. I did a good

deal of work mostly of studies made in Wales. Finally I could stand this somewhat high life no longer. K very nobly told Jane that I should like to return to Kent. This caused displeasure' (Notes Sutherland to Berthoud, end of January 1980, TGA 9011).

Clark was chairman of the War Artists Advisory Committee, a body he had set up to commission pictorial records of every aspect of wartime activity, similar to those commemorating World War I, housed in the (then) newly founded Imperial War Museum. Clark asked Sutherland to become an official war artist and Sutherland accepted (Hayes, John, *The Art of Graham Sutherland*, 1980).

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II in 1939 came the closure of the Chelsea School of Art and the end of Sutherland's regular teaching career. He did, however, occasionally teach at the Ruskin, and he became a visiting lecturer at the Slade and at Goldsmiths, the latter post taken over by Adrian Ryan when Sutherland relinquished it. In a sense, the war terminated the first phase of Sutherland's regular visits to Pembrokeshire, although there were occasional forays when he could escape. He had already faced problems when his print market collapsed in the 1930s as a result of the Depression. Now only a decade later, circumstances forced him to limit his visits to Wales and, for a while, his continued discovery of nature.

The public acceptance of the status of the War Artist was even more ready in 1939: no one was surprised to learn that an Artists Advisory Committee had been set up in November, and to hear its chairman, Sir Kenneth Clark, advise painters that it was their duty to stick to their easels. Official artists were assigned to the three services early in 1940, and began looking for themes appropriate to their office; but though there were War Artists, there was as yet no war.

Then, almost a year after its declaration, the war began. Horror loosed its grip upon the soldier, and seized on the civilian; and now it was of the artists of the great fires and the crowded shelters that a comparable portrait of the second war might be expected. But while the images of greatest significance were those painted on



'House in Wales', *Devastation*, 1940, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

the home front, and the few original, unknown talents which the war discovered were among the Civil Defence artists, not even the best of these can bear comparison with the painters . . . of the 1914 war.

. . . There was the development of photography, and particularly of cine-photography, since the first war – devices more effective for creating poetic documentary realism than a paintbrush. Then – surprising as the thought may seem to us – the bombed city was not the all-embracing tragic symbol of civilian war: the concentration camps, and the roads and huddled cities with their countless uprooted refugees, are as much the real counterparts of the earlier symbol of the Western Front; but these were places of which our artists knew nothing, or caught only fleeting glimpses. From a pictorial point of view, the painters of the second war were not so well equipped. Surrealism was the only new device they had acquired since 1918; and surrealism with its doctrinaire striving to systematise the imaginative life . . . with its self-conscious images, whose impact lost strength at every repetition, was already a spent force by 1939. And most of all, as I suggested at the outset, the 1939 war caused a less profound psychic wound than

did that of 1914: the artists, already disillusioned, could no longer paint their agony at man's fall from grace, and nature's violation.

The two most celebrated evocations of the civilian struggle are, of course, the shelter sketches of Henry Moore and the series of 'devastation' paintings by Graham Sutherland. In the work both artists did before the war there was a strong element of prophecy of the coming disaster: in Moore's lonely figures confronting their own banishment from the womb of society, and in Sutherland's portrait of nature writhing with premonition and distress. But it seems to me that, when the war came, these artists no longer dominated their theme, that they painted the fulfilment of their prophecy in a passive, acceptive spirit – with woe, but almost with fascination. The shelter drawings portray the dreadful anonymity of the entombed victims and the 'devastation' pictures the Armageddon that has descended on the doomed cities overhead. And what has always struck me about the drawings of both artists is how pretty they are, how inappropriately attractive: how decorative the corrugated shapes of Henry Moore's waiting figures, how tasteful their backgrounds of pink,

green, and mauve; how luscious the orange flames of Graham Sutherland's consuming fires, how theatrical the purple ruins they destroy. . . .

One veteran of the first war repeated his triumphs in the second – Paul Nash. His pictures of airplanes (which may be considered as pictures of an aspect of civilian war, since Nash was not interested in combat flying and was too ill himself ever to leave the ground) have the same strange quality as those he had done of the battlefronts: just as he had imparted a living spirit to inanimate nature, so did he now create 'huge mammalian carcasses' out of the bombers. 'Airplanes', he said ' . . . seldom resemble birds in form or habit. Their natural equivalents are to be found among the denizens of the earth or the sea, or more often in the monsters of pre-history . . . '. (McInnes, Colin, *Encounter*, November 1956, p. 38)

The War Artists Advisory Committee, chaired by Sir Kenneth Clark, was composed of eminent figures in the art world and representatives of various government departments including the armed forces. They prepared and considered lists of artists, and with the financial backing of the Treasury the scheme was put into effect. A small war artists section was created within the Ministry of Information, headed by the committee's secretary, E.M. O'Rourke Dickey, a former His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) from the Board of Education and himself an artist. It was his task to ensure that the artists could obtain the facilities they required to carry out their commissions. This was not always easy; supplies of paper, canvas and other artists' materials were subject to severe restrictions in wartime and a permit to sketch issued by one authority might not be recognised in another area. Graham Sutherland was one of many artists who kept in regular touch with Dickey about problems of this kind and about the progress of his work; the file of correspondence between them, held in the archives of the Imperial War Museum, gives valuable insights into Sutherland's feelings about the subjects he was tackling.

There were several different ways in which the committee acquired its pictures. Artists might be employed on a salary for a fixed period, usually two to six months at a time, during which period everything

they produced would become the property of the government. Alternatively, they might be asked to paint a certain number of pictures for an agreed sum. Other possibilities were for an artist to submit work speculatively in the hope that the committee might make a purchase, or for the committee to buy individual pictures from an exhibition. Sutherland's work came under all three categories.

A painting of *Camouflaged Bombers* that he completed early in 1940 was shown in a Leicester Galleries exhibition; *England in Wartime*, completed in May 1940, was later recommended for purchase by the committee for the price of fifteen guineas. Sutherland was subsequently interviewed and offered a special commission at fifty guineas 'to undertake for the Ministry of Information pictures of damage which may be caused by enemy action'. Being on the point of taking on a job as a munitions gauge maker, Sutherland cautiously asked how long he would have to work for the fee and how much work he was expected to produce. Dickey's reply gives a useful indication of the very open attitude that the committee took; 'our plan has been to leave it more or less to the artists to produce what they think is fair for the fee in cases of this kind and to get the work done at a pace which suits them best. I need hardly say that we have had to take strong measures from time to time in order to prevent artists from being too generous'.

The Committee were [*sic*] careful to ensure that whenever possible artists were given subjects which it was thought they might react sympathetically. . . . It is profoundly symbolic that the sharp lines of the splintered and twisted beams in Sutherland's drawings of shattered houses recur later in his thorn bushes and studies for the crucifixion.

Sutherland worked on his first 'Devastation' series, in the South Wales area during September 1940. Dickey arranged for a special petrol ration to enable him to reach isolated places by car and on 25 October 1940 no less than thirty-six works were delivered to the Committee. They were enthusiastically received and early in November Dickey was able to write offering Sutherland a six month contract as a salaried artist for £325. This



'Old Masonic Hall, Swansea', *Devastation*, 1940, The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery/Bridgeman Images

contract was in fact, renewed every six months until the end of the war so that Sutherland became one of the small number of artists employed on a full-time basis throughout the conflict.

This state of relative financial security undoubtedly came as a great relief to him so that he was able to absorb himself more and more completely in the new experiences that he was recording some of which were to have a lasting effect on his work. He wrote to Dickey on 16 May 1941: 'I am now immersing myself in the East End of London and finding it profoundly interesting and moving. In addition to making drawings I would like to take some photographs as supplementary material. . . . I wondered if it could be arranged without too much bother for you. It would be a great help as it is difficult to draw in some places without raising a sense of resentment in the people'. A letter from Dickey discussing which of Sutherland's pictures should be included in one of the touring exhibitions produced a reply from Sutherland giving a sidelight on how he himself regarded these works. 'I was clear about the so-called "abstract" (I'm glad you used inverted commas as it is really a very close and accurate study of what these nasty bombs do – apart from perhaps the colour!!!!)'.

Anxious to ensure that their artists were kept as free as possible from the bureaucratic worries inherent in any branch of Government service, the War Artists Section also dealt with such questions as their income-tax returns and applications for exemption from National Service. Graham Sutherland being employed on the Home Front was officially classified as class D – a professional or technical appointment in the civil service – accepted by the Ministry of Labour as a reserved occupation. But many artists were, in fact, serving in the forces, and from time to time the committees were able to get agreement for a painter to be released for a certain period in order to carry out a particular work. Several of the salaried artists held special commissions in the army, navy or Royal Air Force or wore uniform and travelled widely overseas. In style the artists employed by the committee ranged from the *avante [sic] garde* to the traditional, and from the famous to the unknown. Clark himself suggested many names, and sometimes an artist would hear about the scheme by chance and write to the committee asking for a job. Many artists were close to scenes of action . . . and three were killed on active service.

It was stipulated that all pictures accepted by the committee should be eye-witness accounts, although the main intention of this restriction was to avoid getting imaginative reconstructions that had been printed on the basis of hearsay evidence, which could easily lead to inaccuracies. It did not prevent an artist treating a subject in his own personal style, however idiosyncratic. In fact, less difficulty was experienced with individual artistic styles than in the First World War. Clearly, the content of the War pictures had to be easily identifiable, but the problem of having to compromise, the more extreme abstract tendencies of some artists with the illustrative qualities required by the committee hardly ever arose. This was, perhaps because at that time English art in general was much less volatile and experimental than it had been at the time of the First World War. (Andrews, Julian, *Sutherland: The War Drawings* [exhibition catalogue], The Imperial War Museum, 1982)

Writing to Edwin Mullins about the bombed masonic hall, Swansea, Sutherland says:

And while it is true that at the root of my work is memory, plus the sudden unaccountable emotion which modifies and transforms facts, none the less these facts – these objective vocabularies – are invariably for me the necessary starting point. (*Daily Telegraph Magazine*, no. 359, 10 September 1971, private collection, France)

The pictures produced by the war artists were usually exhibited as soon as possible after they had been delivered to the committee. The National Gallery had been evacuated before the outbreak of war and so provided an ideal temporary exhibition space for the war pictures.

The press, especially the more exclusive weeklies like the *Illustrated London News*, were encouraged to publish photographs of the pictures and features on the exhibitions. The committee also arranged for the publication of postcards, prints and booklets, which were sold in large numbers. While it is always hard to assess the overall value of such activities in terms of their effect on the war effort, it appears that they did help to strengthen morale at this difficult time, and the committee received a stream of letters of appreciation about the exhibitions.



Bomb damage in London, 1942, photograph by Gilbert Adams F.R.P.S.

In spite of the many difficulties and inconveniences, Sutherland's own morale was high. In September 1941, he wrote to Dickey about his new commission at the Guest, Keen and Baldwin steelworks in South Wales: '... the furnaces themselves will afford plenty of scope ... at all events I am going to have a look round and I am very excited. ...' The furnaces, the tin mines and the outcast coal workings were all very different from his pre-war landscapes in Pembrokeshire, but the results proved that the committee chose these subjects with considerable foresight and a sympathetic understanding of the artist's very personal vision.

A brief glance at *Devastation*, 1942, pencil, pastel and gouache on paper, instantly allies the work to

Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, yet on closer scrutiny it fails to match the power of Picasso's iconic image. Sutherland said he wanted to get the feel of the place: man and nature.

He was storing up details in his mind. Those mysterious shifting tunnels enabled the artist to express his feelings and create poetry.

At first it was difficult to decide what function I might undertake as a war artist and I couldn't properly call myself one for some time. My first job was to make drawings of camouflaged aeroplanes. I couldn't make much of them, I am afraid. After that (and still the bombardment from the air had not yet started) I was sent to a gun testing site near Melton Mowbray and again I tried to find my way towards



Devastation, 1941

making something of the subject – this time guns, gun barrels and breach blocks. But I did nothing with any kind of heightened feeling. The people on the range were all helpful and the commandant played Bach to me in the local church in the evening. (Sutherland, Graham, *The War Drawings*, 1971; Imperial War museum, 1982)

When confronted with this new pressure, Sutherland at first found it difficult to adjust. The artillery ranges at Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, which he was asked to visit, did not inspire him. A magnificent, fluid, steel-grey watercolour, *Breach Blocks in the Shop at Gun Testing Range*, 1940, proved, however, that he was more than adequately equipped to interpret mechanical subjects and adapt to new challenges. This painting demonstrates how effective his early training in engineering had been and it foreshadows the passion he later had for using machinery to form part of a large composition. With the limited materials available to him, Sutherland not only completed a great number of war works but thought

seriously about the arrangement of each work. His familiar use of crayon, pencil, wax crayon, watercolour, gouache, body colour, pen, ink and graphite gave the works depth and interest. For instance, in *Devastation, An East End Wrecked Public House*, 1941, his composition is masterful, his colour incisive. Whereas Sutherland rarely shows a sense of perspective, he has done so in this work and in the *Quarry Railway*, 1943, similar in concept to the Ashmolean Museum's *Pembrokeshire Landscape*, 1939. Edward Wadsworth's *A Limestone Quarry*, 1942, displays a similar subject in a more naive manner and is eventually more convincing.

'I wanted to get the feel of the place. I stored up details in my mind. Some drawings were made in sketchbooks, others from memory. The sky is black; the drama would have gone if I had made it light. The picture is built round a central idea. There are mysterious shifting tunnels'. The artist expresses his feelings. (Craigie, Jill, *Out of Chaos*, 1947, 8049 951 BFI)



Open Cast Coal Production, 1943, private collection

During 1943, Sutherland was asked to illustrate excavations of opencast coal mining near Abergavenny, works which appear to be and are considered somewhat sketchy and uneasy. *Outcast Coal Production*, 1943, a more formal and structured study is, however, closely related to inspiration gained in Pembrokeshire.

Sutherland was faced with destruction of a massive scale and his evocative powers of illustration exactly chronicle the terrifying results of bomb damage. After the raids on Cardiff and Swansea, he was made a salaried artist.

Roberto Tassi in his introduction to the catalogue of the 1979 Milan Exhibition of Sutherland's War Drawings, points to his earlier works – *Gorse on a Sea Wall*, *Green Tree Form* and *Interior of Woods* as 'great

examples of invention'. In wartime, invention was not appropriate. The war drawings had at least to tell the story and convey the experience of conflict.

Katharine and I could never bear to be separated; neither could I contemplate leaving her alone, even in Kent. We stayed in a small village just outside Swansea because the damage was both there and around the nearby aerodrome. In the bedroom over the shop in which we lived the bed backed on to a window and I remember that each night I covered this with my drawing board against the possibility of flying glass.

Swansea was the first sight I had of the possibilities of destruction as a subject. The architecture was florid and Victorian. At first I made as complete a record as I could of what I saw. I hadn't yet begun to feel a sense of what these remains really looked like. Later, as I have said, some were to become like great animals



Two Studies of miners, 1942, private collection, Italy

who had been hurt. After making my studies I would go to a farmhouse we knew to work them out. Finally I delivered six or seven; a large painting of some gouaches.

My feeling at the beginning of the war from the point of view of my work was one of being thrown down in a totally unfamiliar field. There was I who, up to then, had been concerned with the more hidden aspects of nature . . . But now I was a paid official – a sort of reporter – and naturally not only did I feel that I had to give value for money, but to contrive somehow to reflect in an immediate way the subjects set me.

In the autumn [1942] I went to Cardiff to work in the steel works. The conception of the idea of stress, both physical and mental, and how forms can be modified by emotion had been, even before the war much in my mind. It was crystallised and strengthened by my understanding of Picasso's studies for 'Guernica'. Faces became distorted by tears and mouths as in fear. Even a hand supporting a head creates a distortion, as does the placing of food in the mouth. I had seen aspects of this idea in certain kinds of destruction. So did I too in the steelworks. As the hand feeds the mouth, so did the long scoops which plunged into the furnace openings feed them, and the metal containers pouring molten iron into ladles had great encrusted mouths.

Kenneth Clark had a lot of suggestions, one was mines. All the tin mines were being opened in Cornwall – there was a great scarcity of tin which had been, in peacetime, obtained from overseas. Now it had to be found within the British Isles. To make drawings of the mines had only the vaguest relation to the war but I was certainly presented with a new world – and a world of such beauty and such mystery that I shall never forget it, there was none of the urgency of war in all this unless you call mining a perpetual war.

I was put through some hair-raising tests to establish my [nerve]. One goes down the pit, normally, in a lift to the bottom. I was afraid I would experience terrible claustrophobia (when I was an engineer, I was trapped in a locomotive boiler for hours, so I hate enclosed places). The man who first took me round said 'Look now, we'll go down on the bucket, not the lift – put your feet either side of the bucket and we'll hold on to the rope'. We went down, 1300 feet like a bullet and I didn't like it at all. I disliked even more the fact that the last

floor of all, the 14th, was not served by a lift. One had to go down through a trap door in the floor and down a ladder. The captain said, 'You go first because I have to close the trap door'. I thought to myself as my legs began to tremble – pitch dark and underneath 100 ft of ladders – I know I am going to faint. What he didn't tell me was that there were stages every so often and I couldn't possibly have fallen the whole way.

Once down and walking through the various tunnels – some a mile long – the problem was to avoid getting lost. I would mark up my way in chalk on the walls. Later I found the geography of the place easier. Far from the main shaft the sense of remoteness was tangible and the distances seemed endless. Faintly, far away was the sound of work on other levels.

Underground I did a number of portraits. This was mainly to distract the attention of the miners from what I was really drawing. I did not lack customers and the poses struck were splendidly incongruous in the environment. The heads I did were small and naturalistic, as suited their purpose, but the deeper significance of these men only gradually became clear to me. It was as if they were a kind of different species – ennobled underground, and with an added stature, which above ground they lacked, and my feeling was that in spite of the hardness of the work in the nether world, this space held for them subconsciously perhaps – an element of daily enthrallment.

The search for the diagonally descending vein of metal took the miners through a hole in the floor of the level tunnels, via a high and narrow passage shored with struts, terminating through a similar hole in the roof of the tunnel on the level below. This passage revealed precipitous perspective of extraordinary and mysterious beauty in which the men, brilliantly lit, would be seen from above. On a lower level tunnel, from an opening in the roof would emerge a crouching figure, often too one would come across a miner sitting in a niche in a wall – like a statue, immobile. The distant sounds of a miner or trucks approaching would herald itself long before arrival. One would flatten oneself against the wall when trucks passed. In places the tunnels would converge in a central junction where all was light and where there were many figures and tracks. All was humid; the walls dripped water and the only light normally was from the acetylene lamps



Tin Mine, Emerging Miner, 1942,
Leeds City Art Gallery

fixed to each man's helmet. Even today the smell of acetylene transports me immediately to the mine. (Tassi, Roberto, *Sutherland: The War Drawings*, translated by Julian Andrews, Gruppo Editoriale, SpA, Milano, 1979)

Sutherland described to the author with gripping exactitude an illuminating yet terrifying walk at the Port Talbot steelworks, as he walked along a narrow parapet with blazing furnaces either side (GA/RT archive).

In the depth of the chasm which appears infinite . . . we descend. . . [T]he noise from the drills in the confined



Tin Mine, 1942, Temple Newsam House

space is shattering, the silence when the drill is turned off equally so. A group was looking large and dignified – all miners look enormous underground. (GS to Eric Newton)

Chris Stephens suggests:

Sutherland's Blitz paintings were seen as some of the most successful works emanating from the WAAC scheme. They helped to further the artist's reputation by revealing a new aspect of his work and introducing it to a much wider audience while, more generally contributing to a persistent image of the Blitz.

In particular, in *Devastation, City Panorama*, 1941, he worked up what appears a Manhattan skyline but with innumerable nuances and suggestions that only Sutherland could have conceived.

An *East End Street* is on thin paper laid onto 3/16 in hardboard with office paste. The board had already sustained damage to its corners and seems to have had fragments of paper attached to it, these may relate to the fact that it had been used for an earlier painting as the inscription on the back suggests. Small areas of missing paper and a tear, bottom right, probably occurred during

mounting. The paper which is now coloured was trimmed after it was attached to the board and characteristically squared up. Though some of the design was drawn in soft pencil or charcoal, much of it also displays a free brush-marked technique. Ink was applied using pen and brush and in places the paper was torn by the vigour of the pen work. Much of the image is of aqueous washes which, in places, were thrown off by the resistant surface of white and yellow crayon. The consequent mottled effect and the emphatic linear element that results from the re-drawing of the basic design in ink are the two most basic characteristics of the style Sutherland shared with Moore and Piper. (Stephens, Chris, Tate Gallery, London, November 1998)

Sutherland himself describes his reaction:

During the bombardment of London, on a typical day I would arrive there from Kent where I had resumed living, with very spare paraphernalia – a sketchbook, black and two or three coloured chalks, a pencil – and with an apparently water-tight pass which would take me anywhere within the forbidden areas. It wasn't water-tight at all. I was arrested several times,

especially in the East End. And once there I would look around. I will never forget those extraordinary first encounters, the silence, the absolute dead silence, except every now and again, a thin tinkle of falling glass – a noise which reminded me of the sound of the music of Debussy.

The first place I went to was the big area just north of St. Paul's. I suppose about five acres – which had been almost completely flattened: here and there. Within this flattened field remains were left. Sometimes fires were still burning. Everywhere there was a terrible stench – perhaps of burnt dirt; and always the silence. There was nobody about, just the few police. Very occasionally there would be the crash of a building collapsing of its own volition.

I would start to make perfunctory drawings here and there; gradually it [occurred to] me amid all this destruction how singularly one shape would impinge on another. A lift shaft, for instance, the only thing left from what had obviously been a very tall building in the way it had fallen; it was like a wounded animal, but their movements were animal movements. One lift shaft in particular, with a very strong lateral fall, suggested a wounded tiger in a painting by Delacroix.

At the beginning I was a bit shy as to where I went. Later I grew bolder and went inside some of the ruins. I remember a factory for making women's coats. All the floors had gone but the staircase remained. . . . And here were machines, their entrails hanging through the floors, but looking extraordinarily beautiful at the same time. And always there was this terrible smell of sour burning.

The city was more exciting than anywhere else mainly because the buildings were bigger and the variety of ways in which they fell more interesting. But very soon the raids began in the East End – in the dock areas – and immediately the atmosphere became much more tragic. In the city one didn't think of the destruction of life. All the destroyed buildings were office buildings and people weren't in them at night. But in the East End one did think of the hurt to people and there was every evidence of it.

I don't really know what I expected but even a mattress that had been blown out of a house into the middle of the street looked more like a body than a mattress. From butcher's shops which had been hit the meat spewed on

the road and I remember feeling quite sick when seeing this for the first time because I thought that here was a body that hadn't been picked up. I became tremendously interested in parts of the East End where the shells of long terraces of houses remained; they were great – surprisingly wide – perspectives of destruction seeming to recede into infinity and the windowless blocks were like sightless eyes.

On the few occasions when I stayed the night in London I was concerned with the city. I took a room at a railway hotel and I made my way from there to St. Paul's (which was to be my centre when I *needed it*) on foot. If there was a raid I took to my heels; not belonging here I was not familiar with the shelters. Once I went on to the roof of St. Paul's, the gathering place of authorities and others – architects and businessmen, who had volunteered to be there to put out incendiaries – was the gallery round the base of the dome. This passage between the walls was probably the strongest place in the cathedral. All, when not on duty, slept or lolled on deck chairs and I remember thinking that it was like being on an ocean liner. (Tassi, Roberto, *Sutherland, The War Drawings*, translated by Julian Andrews, Gruppo Editoriale, SpA, Milan, 1979)

His devastated buildings have a wild crucified poignancy that gives the war a new meaning while his 'motifs' crumpled steel and eviscerated machinery seemed . . . like poems wrung from the bowels of destruction. (Newton, Eric, *In My View*, Longmans, London, 1950, p. 117)

Whilst the difficulty of the war photographer's task must be dealt with immediately, the painter has the opportunity to assimilate later, working up sketches into the final painting. The conditions under which Sutherland made his original sketches were often of extreme discomfort. His output was prolific but many of his works were executed away from the scene, mostly in gouache and coloured chalks, wax crayons and pencil. This had been his way of working in nature. *Trucks in the Quarry, Limestone Quarry* and *Limestone Quarry Trucks* of 1943 are compositionally created on the scale of early Italian-French seventeenth-century painters such as Poussin and Claude.

After that I began to feel drawn towards basic industries such as furnaces, mines and later by quarries. These things seemed so symbolic . . . the constant conflict between the forces of man and nature. In the quarries the chaos of form was bewildering, I had to find for my pictures an ordered chaos, which still retained characteristics of chaos. . . . [I]t was the idea of a quarry and what it stands for transcending nature, and formed by the mind and emotion which interested me. (Letter to Eric Newton (undated) critic and friend with notes on war pictures in general and quarry paintings in particular; NMWA)

Shortly after D-Day on 6 June 1944, Sutherland – like many other artists – asked whether he might be sent to France to record events there.

‘I had never been abroad in my life. Before the war I hadn’t been able to afford it and before that I was living a really insular English life. When we were children, it was thought by my family too much of an upheaval to travel abroad. I suppose my natural inclination is to resist a thing until eventually I taste it; when I do, I like it the better perhaps.’

At first he was told that there no chance of this and that he was required on the Home Front in any case, but he persisted and eventually in October, it was agreed to send him over to draw some of the flying bomb sites recently located and captured. He was sent the latest regulations regarding compensation for injuries etc. for artists going abroad; and after a series of frustrating delays, he finally reached Paris on 9th December, returning to England again on Christmas Eve. During an extremely busy fortnight he found the official allowances hopelessly inadequate for the cost of food in the immediate post-liberation period and even had some difficulty in locating his subjects. ‘When I went out of Paris as I did to Trappes or St. Leu-d’Essert daily, I had no messing and had to eat where I could. I was far too rushed trying to engage my own transport . . . and trying to find where the flying-bomb depots were (None of the Air Ministry contacts I was given could tell me – believe it or not!)’. Nevertheless, the works that the Committee later received (three oils and a series of gouaches) showed that Sutherland’s vision of the tormented landscape of France bore an uncanny affinity to that of his fellow war artist, Paul

Nash, whose scenes of destruction on the Western Front had been influential when they were drawn for the first official War Artists’ Scheme nearly thirty years earlier. By the end of the war when the War Artists’ Commission was wound up, nearly two thousand artists had been considered, of whom over three hundred were successful. In 1946 the pictures accumulated during the war – nearly six thousand altogether – were distributed among national and provincial museum and art galleries. By far the largest collection, including twenty three works by Graham Sutherland, is at the Imperial War Museum where representational pictures by all the war artists may be seen, either in the public galleries or by appointment in the reserve collection. A further eighty-seven works by Sutherland carried out for the committee are located in twenty eight different museums and art galleries in Britain, and there are three works in Australia. (Tassi, Roberto, *Sutherland: The War Drawings*, translated by Julian Andrews, Gruppo Editoriale, SpA, Milan, 1979)

In France my brief was to draw both the devastation of marshalling yards and to find out what the flying bomb sites looked like. They hadn’t even been photographed then. In fact the RAF had finished bombing them only a few weeks before. The advancing troops had liberated Paris, which was my base only recently.

Inside the hills the French had made caves – in which had been grown ‘champignons de Paris’. The Germans had used these caves and fortified them to store their flying bombs. This was the place the RAF was intent on bombing; it did so very successfully. It was fascinating to look inside the caves and see blue sky. I’ve never seen such a panoramic piece of devastation in my life – for miles the bridges and remnants of houses on either side of the river were like black spokes. A lot of Germans had been killed inside the caves and there was a terrible sweet smell of death in them. (NMWA)

Sutherland summarises his time in Paris in a letter to Kathy from the Hotel Bedford, (undated, but undoubtedly 1944):

My dearest, here I am at another address. I’ve a lot of waiting about to do. Maddening. I can’t say that anyone in the R.A.F. has been very helpful and the whole thing so far has just been one long muddle. I saw Wing Commander



Picketed Aircraft, 1941, Imperial War Museum



A Flying Bomb Depot, The Caves, St. Leu-D'Esserent, 1944, Imperial War Museum

Ogilvie: (Blackburrow's recommendation) on Sunday morning and he referred me to Group Captain Houghton who was out of Paris but who made an appointment for 4.30 to-day and kept me waiting. While waiting to-day for this appointment I went to see Bignore who was quite pleasant (he showed me a very good Picasso) and who asked me in to-morrow for a drink at 6. He says that its [sic] no good his introducing me to P. Because P is madly suspicious of dealers but he is going to arrange for me to see him (perhaps) at the house of some French people who have been in America. That was this morning. After lunch I went to the Bibliothèque Nationale and mustered up enough French to ask for the Cabinet des Médailles and H's N.le Gentilhomme. He was out: but I left a letter and an address. Group Captain H was somewhat bored by having a War Artist on his hands and said what on earth had they sent me to France for and of course particularly here as most of the F bomb sites are reachable from Brussels only. He said however that there is a marshalling yard near Paris very badly bombed by R.A.F. with Railway Engines piled on top of one another and I said I'd have a [look] at that to-morrow. The 'Scribe' was really out of bounds for me as I'm only a 'phoney' war correspondent. It was full of journalists, mostly U.S.A. and the noise was awful. Also they were distinctly unfriendly and apart from a few words with my roommate, who was intelligent and knew Bawden, Hemingway and so on I can't say I said a word to anyone for about 48 hours at least. Sunday aft. Went for a long walk and tried to find my way about. Went to the Louvre, Rue de Rivoli – Jardin des Tuileries, Rue de la Paix etc. I went to 'Guerlain' to-day and they think they will have some MITSOUKO in to-morrow and I will call if I have time i.e. if I can get there before going off to this drawing place. They will only let me have one bot. So old Kenmare will have to go without. Its [sic] jolly tiring walking about a city as you know I always hate doing so in London. I've got a map and unashamedly flaunt it.

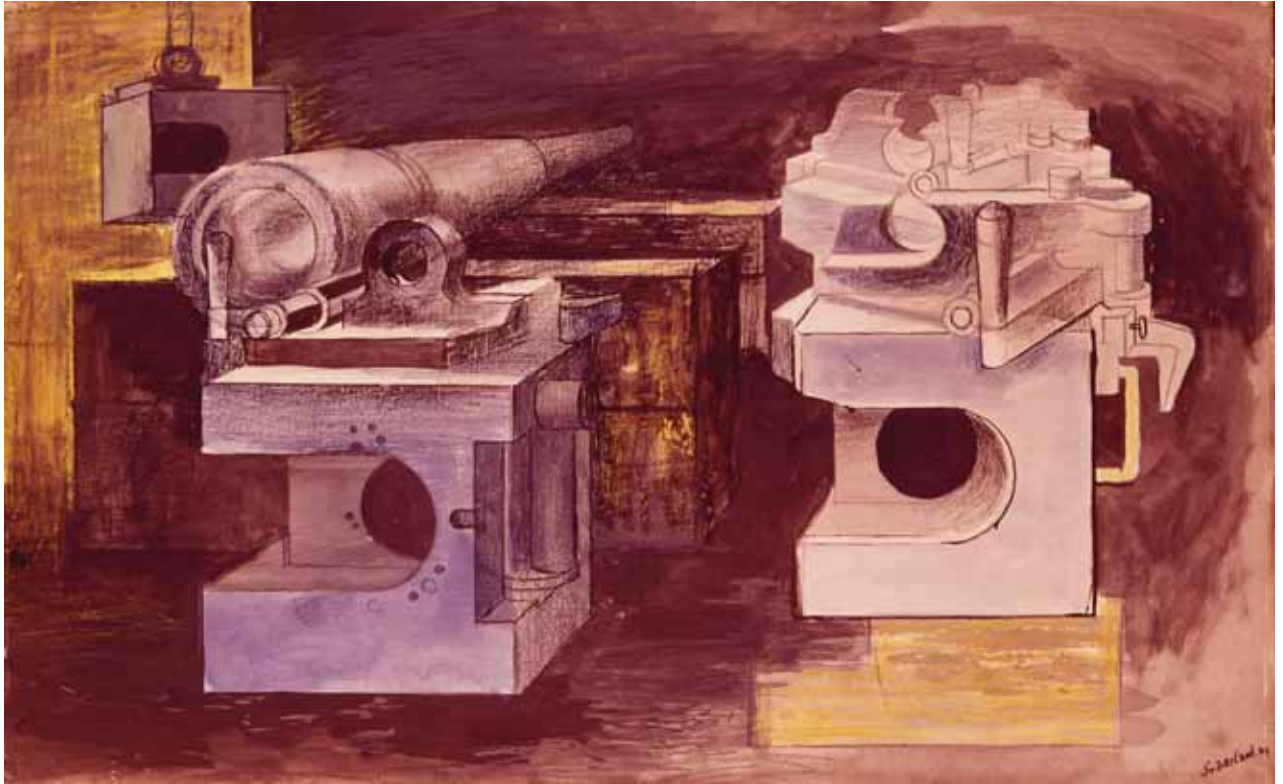
Of course I miss you madly and just can't let myself dwell on it; the pain is so bad, I had no need to realise how much you mean to me but if I had, this be it. Living here (outside the mess, that is) is just too wildly expensive for words. Taxis are absolutely [too] prohibitive for words, if you can get them. I think the cloths [sic], at least in the shops are wonderful. I don't know what Cecil [Beaton] means. Schiaparelli [are] I think the worst, but I've seen Chanel selling and others and they've got the goods especially

in stuffs 1200 to 4000 fr. Is nothing for a scarf. Jewellery [sic] modern is quite good and cheaper. Brandy about £3 Champagne about £1.50. I've been pretty careful so far until I find out what I can bring back. St. Honore [sic] Paris to be called for in the way of token gifts which I believe are allowed. Sweetest [illegible] I've been with you every minute of the [illegible] time and wondering how you are. I haven't felt too bad or too good. There has been a pretty good sense of panic at times but this hotel is quieter and with fewer people – far from sophisticated like the journalists. And it might be better. I don't feel like going on to Brussels and shall try and explore avenues with a view to looking at, say, the Pas de Calais. . . . I don't really know what they were up to in London? This letter is just newsy. It doesn't say or convey all I feel for you. I'm, not too keen on some dreary censors prying eyes. But all my love dearest and you know what that means. Your R (AC–NMW)

That was really the end of my work as a war artist. The visit to this place and to the marshalling yards at Trappes virtually marked the end.

Looking back on it, undoubtedly the war had an important effect on my consciousness. I never saw the concentration camps. I should in some ways have liked to have seen them. . . . I remember receiving a black-covered American Central Office of Information book dealing with the camps. It was a kind of funeral book. In it were the most terrible photographs of Belsen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald. These photographs were to have a great effect on me. I saw them just before I received a commission to paint a Crucifixion. (Conversation with RT, GA/RT archive)

Several paintings emerged during the period of Sutherland's war work, as he was making a personal and profound endeavour to move into the portrayal of people. These include *Studies of Gypsies*, 1939; *Landscape with Figures*, 1944; *Woman in a Garden*, 1945; *Study for Woman with Apple*, 1945; *Woman on a Chair*, 1945; together with a number of studies of his wife; *Man and Field*, 1944, *Triple-Tiered Landscape*, 1944; *Smiling Woman*; and *Woman Picking Vegetables*, 1945. They suggest that these years were far more exploratory and far-reaching in terms of his own portrait experiments than Sutherland would later have us believe, especially when he discussed at length the *Standing Form Figures*.



Breach Blocks at Gun Testing Range, 1940, Imperial War Museum

Two later landscapes, *Landscape with Stones and Grasses*, 1952 and *Rock Shelter*, 1972-74, include in their composition recollections of *Moulds Iron Foundry*, 1942. Howard Hodgkin has written persuasively that ‘Memory comes back in another form’ (Conversation with author, April 2011).

Sutherland stored images in his mind and amassed sketches and photographs which then re-emerged on superior-quality paper like recurring dreams. He discovered a theme, shaped it, constantly explored its possibilities and practical function in a composition, and re-established its purpose in a subsequent design. We are seldom, however, left with the feeling that the final shape is overworked. Freshness and vision are retained; the sensation is that of the original experience.

Without comparing too profoundly Sutherland’s war work with that of his contemporaries – for each artist was invited to render his or her own personal

vision – when Sutherland went in 1944 to St. Leu in France to record the effects of British bombing, there is a distinct relationship between his painting and Paul Nash’s representations of battlefields and the oceans of metal shown by him in World War I, yet there is also a clear division between Nash’s delicate free handling of watercolour and gouache and Sutherland’s bold black and white images relating inherently to the defined hilly landscape in Wales.

Noble Frankland, director of the Imperial War Museum (1960-82), wrote in 1964 about the war artists:

The resulting artistic record naturally tends to conflict in exactitude of detail, and sometimes abruptly so, with the photographic record. It may, because of this, tend to conflict with the image of the war in the eye of the beholder. If this is so, it is because these works of art have no stereotype. On the contrary, they enshrine the individual imaginative responses of many artists whose differing impressions were inspired by their

having witnessed, and in many cases experienced, the incidents they depicted. There is little doubt that this authenticity, which was always the primary criterion on the Ministry of Information's War Artists' Advisory Committee, will in time prove of greater value than what might perhaps have been the more immediate appeal of overstatement . . . It is of interest to call attention to the extent in which the expressionism that is a noticeable part of the best of the 1914-18 work has been replaced by a much more matter of fact reportage . . . The riven countryside, the blasted towns and torn men no longer appeared to produce in artists sophisticated by modern times that sense of courage so apparent in the earlier war paintings of Paul Nash and C.R.W. Nevinson. (Frankland, Noble, *A Concise Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture of the Second World War*, Imperial War Museum, 1964, p. V)

Edward Sackville-West sums up Sutherland's war experience:

His work, since 1940, as a chronicler of England at war, is a pointer. His first essays in a genre foreign to his nature were, I seem to feel, strikingly unsuccessful: his vision too personal to accommodate itself easily or at once to reporting on lines that the untrained eye could recognise. Then the blitz came, and with it devastation: Sutherland visited Wales (his country of adoption, remember), and quite suddenly he seems to have found his way into a new realm. Drama returned to the landscape, and with it perspective, the visual equivalent of drama. His big devastation pictures of 1940-41 are terrible in their accuracy and ruthless virtuosity; the engineer's apprentice had not learnt his job in vain! (Sackville-West, Edward, *Graham Sutherland, The Penguin Modern Painters*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1943)

And Douglas Cooper comments:

In his views of bomb-destroyed streets he has recourse for the first time to the dramatic device of sharply receding linear perspectives such as one finds in the early work of de Chirico. This enables him not only to suggest vastness, solitude and a sensation of pathetic melancholy,

but more particularly helps him to convey a sense of lifelessness and total silence which descended on such areas after their inhabitants had departed. Whatever the solution adopted, however, Sutherland produced an image which was personal, as for example in 'Burnt Out Paper Rolls', which after their destruction continue to evoke the log piles from which they originally emerged. (Cooper, Douglas, *The Work of Graham Sutherland*, Lund Humphries, London, 1961)

Sutherland's own past also played a role in shaping his wartime pictures. The prosaic and detailed manner which he adopted in his handling of buildings – these had not appeared in his work since 1930 – derived from an ingeniously simplified constructional drawing of St. Davids Cathedral in Pembrokeshire, which he had made by way of experiment in 1937. At the same time, one finds Sutherland's early training as an engineer influencing not only his style of drawing – which suddenly becomes firmer, with the emphasis on the sharpness of angles, the regularity of curves and the symmetry of forms – but also his choice of subject matter. For when he chose to paint furnaces, hydraulic presses and disembowelled railway engines, he was looking back to the world of his apprenticeship in Derby.

Sutherland was not entirely satisfied with his group of war paintings because he felt that, with more time, he could have purged them of the element of directness and immediacy and arrived at a more detached – rather than abstract – pictorial treatment. The strength of these paintings as war pictures lies in precisely the fact that they were produced under the pressure of events, that they are clear and concrete, and that for this reason they communicate something of the reality of the time not only to ourselves who lived through it but to those who came after it and will want to understand.

In 1944, on his several visits to Pembrokeshire for the purpose of his own painting (see John Hayes), he was joined by friends Lucian Freud and John Craxton at Lleithyr Farmhouse, the home of the James' family. Perhaps it was because he finally



The Lamp, 1944, Richard Green Gallery

felt liberated on these visits from the constraints of having to make as exact a representation as possible of a war scene that his palette was looser, lighter; colour was used with greater sensitivity and more delicacy; deep alizarin, concentrated areas of black,

purple, ochre, orange, yellow skies, pale ultramarine overlays that overrode the acid green, lemon yellows and cerulean – at least for the time being. Examples of this fluidity of colour and brighter palette can be seen in *The Lamp* of 1944, a painting done from a

paraffin lamp which stood on a side table in another guest house that he and Kathleen stayed in at Sandy Haven and *The Bull* painting of the same date.

The Pembrokeshire paintings made during the war were emerging as less explorative, less experimental with colour. Sutherland's painting was becoming more assured. His war work did enhance his relationship with the landscape.

As a result of his first exhibition at Rosenberg and Helft in 1938, described earlier, another at the Leicester Galleries in 1946, and the British Council exhibition

of contemporary British art for the British Pavilion at the New York World Fair 1939-40, Sutherland was slowly beginning to emerge as the foremost exponent of the neo-romantic movement in England.

In 1944, he exhibited at the Redfern Gallery along with Paul Nash, Henry Moore and John Piper and in 1945 at Lefevre Galleries with Francis Bacon, Frances Hodgkins, Henry Moore and Matthew Smith. Sutherland's war drawings, together with his Welsh landscapes, were now showing signs of a maturing genius.

SAMPLE