

## PASTIMES



Churchill's paintbrush and palette.

It was at Hoe Farm that Churchill discovered what would become the single most sustaining passion of his life, after his wife and children. Watching his sister-in-law, Lady Gwendoline, painting at her easel one Sunday in June, he became fascinated. Noticing this and hoping to distract the shattered Winston from his troubles, Goonie suggested to him that he try painting something himself using her six-year-old son Johnny's box of watercolors. Churchill agreed.

He would never stop. For the rest of his life, painting would give him solace and a perfect retreat from the stresses of his day-to-day world. He found that he could concentrate on painting with the same intensity that he gave to politics, but to the exclusion of politics and everything else. As Edward Marsh, who witnessed Churchill's initial Hoe Farm forays, later observed, painting "was a distraction and a sedative that brought a measure of ease to his frustrated spirit."

After using his nephew's watercolors at his sister-in-law's instigation, Churchill, by the weekend's end, was anxious to try painting in oils. On Monday morning, following a Dardanelles Committee meeting at 10 Downing Street, he purchased his first easel, a mahogany palette, oil, turpentine, paints, and brushes at Charles Roberson's noted "colour shop" in Long Acre (where the customers had included Turner, Whistler, Sargent, William Morris, Walter Crane, Queen Victoria, and Churchill's own mother, Lady Randolph).

This was the Churchill style: immersion (he would revisit Roberson many times more over the ensuing weeks). On July 2 he returned for a weekend at Hoe Farm.

"The palette gleamed with beads of colour," he later wrote of his first outing in oils. "Fair and white rose the canvas; the empty brush hung poised, heavy with destiny, irresolute in the air. My hand seemed arrested by a silent veto. I mixed a little blue paint on the palette with a very small brush, and then with infinite precaution made a mark about as big as a bean . . . so subdued, so halting, indeed so cataleptic, that it served no response."

Painting as a pastime might have ended right there but for a fortuitous sudden arrival. A motorcar was heard in the drive. Out of it stepped Hazel Lavery, wife to the eminent Irish painter Sir John Lavery—soon to become Churchill's artistic mentor.

"Painting!" Mrs. Lavery cried out. "But what are you hesitating about? Let me have a brush—the big one."

Hazel Lavery's fearless aggression with paint inspired Churchill. "Splash into the turpentine," he later wrote, "wallop into the blue and

the white, frantic flourish on the palette. The spell was broken . . . I seized the largest brush and fell upon my victim with Berserk fury. I have never felt any awe of a canvas since."

In the 1950s Churchill traveled everywhere with his painting gear, though the act of using it "sometimes . . . was rather a pantomime," as one of his bodyguards, Ronald Golding, later recalled. After locating a choice spot with a spectacular view, Churchill would ask for his easel to be brought. Slipping on his white smock he then began to paint, often with an audience of locals gaping close by. After some time, however, he often turned to Golding and requested that a photographer be fetched. "The photographer was persuaded to take a photograph of the view . . . at the exact angle Mr. Churchill was making his painting," noted Golding. "This procedure was always followed when WSC knew he would not be at a place long enough to complete a painting. With a good photograph he would be able to complete the canvas later, using . . . an old fashioned magic lantern."

When Golding on one occasion suggested to Churchill that this "looks a bit like cheating," Churchill replied: "If the finished product looks like a work of art, then it is a work of art, no matter how it has been achieved."



The painting studio at Chartwell.