

So Many Secrets: Supplement Four

One of the clients of the electrical company, T.F. Lummus and Co., at whose home I worked, was : Col. Ebenezer Pike C.B.E. and M.C. of Dale Park, Madehurst, Near Arundel, West Sussex. As an electrician I worked there on several occasions. His wife for her art's sake went under her maiden name of Olive Snell. Her artworks have become collectable and she is an internationally 'listed' artist. They purchased in 1942, the house only, in this park. It was a large mansion on the top a hill surrounded by an extensive acreage administered by a team of estate workers. It was remote in the English countryside and ideal for the recuperation of men engaged in the rigours of war. This was a very common activity during the war, among some of the richer members of British society, not well remembered today, by households capable of such accommodation. This couple's typical wartime contribution was to entertain in their home, American airmen on furlough from duties with the U.S. 8th. Air Force and the US Fighter plane groups. In the course of them staying with the family, Olive Snell would sketch and paint portraits of the men. I happen to know this because of local legend and for proof, in my art collection there is a signed drawing in charcoal by her of three such airmen. This may have been a therapeutic pastime for them to forget the ghastly business in which they were normally engaged. The names of the three are inscribed as: Lt. Col. Geo. T. Walker, Maj. Joe Gillespie and Maj. Leo. R. McCurdy. Interestingly, all their upper lips are drawn as 'wings': angel wings perhaps? Each drawing is signed: Olive Snell. These were not the only artworks she engaged in; she was one of the established artists allowed to enter military establishments to record by painting, things related to the war effort. It is known, for example, that she painted Spitfire pilots inside the airfields at Tangmere and Westhampnet, Near Chichester, West Sussex. These portraits in oil rarely come on the market. There is one famous painting by her of a dozen officer pilots lounging outside of the Tangmere Officer's Mess.

This charcoal work of art was by me discovered in the course of restoring an antique kneehole writing desk; it was in the bottom of one of the drawers and used as a lining. I had purchased the desk from someone in 1967. He told me the story of the demise of Olive Snell; she left the house about 1955: I know not if she was deceased at that time, however, other people cleared out her studio and I was told that some of her artworks were actually and unfortunately sent to the local dump. Her desk at that time was somehow acquired by the person who sold it to me.