Dawn: […] Alright, so thank you again for being here today. As I said before, the first thing I’d like to do, if we can, is for you to just say a little bit about your research background with respect to portraiture.

Interviewee: Yes, let’s say I came to portraiture quite late, insofar as my main career has been in cultural history and biography, and obviously portraits feature quite largely in biography to illustrate the subjects. But mostly, prior to joining the NPG, I had researched texts and manuscripts and other written materials and not so much visual material at all. But when I came to be working on the [redacted] I had to learn how to view and assess pictures - all sorts of different pictures, not just portraits - so I came to Art History quite late in my career, and had to learn up the protocols of Art History and particularly with portraiture. [When I?] [sound disturbance] on the [redacted], then I had really seriously to address portraiture and I have to say that, although the subject is very interesting and wide-ranging and there’s quite a lot of theory about portraiture in existence, what we did in the [redacted] was simply the practical issues: who - who was the sitter, who was the artist; when was it done; where was it done; how was it done - what kind of medium and time frame; what was the purpose of it - why was it done, and how - in terms of whether it was done from live sittings or from photographs or from sketches or from what. And then finally, the reception history. So it’s a very practical address to portraiture, not very theoretical at all.

Dawn: Okay, thank you. That’s brilliant, thanks so much. So the next thing I’d like to do is just to ask you a series of questions about portraiture based on the examples of portrait-sitting accounts, so they’re in this document if I just scroll on. So each question is made up of two parts. First, I’ll ask a very general question, and please feel free to answer that with respect to any periods or portraits that you see fit, and I’ll then follow that up with a question that relates to the specific accounts that are on the sheet. So the first question I’d like to ask is, who participates in portrait sittings, in your view, and what are their various roles?

Interviewee: The artist, or artists, possibly some assistants of some kind, not often very much. And then there’s the sitter, which can be a single sitter or several sitters, depending on whether it’s a group portrait. And if you extend it into photography or print, then [the people?] who reproduce it can have an input, although not necessarily purposeful but just happen to. So, it’s a collective effort but it’s mostly artist and sitter. At least, I have to say that my knowledge of portraiture is very much confined to the period from 1850 to about 1920, so outside that, portraiture in, say, the Elizabethan era was quite different. Certainly I think in the seventeenth century it was also, and eighteenth century, [sound disturbance] [not as similar?] as it was in the late Victorian period, so I’m not [sound disturbance] speaking generally [sound disturbance] period, at which stage, if it’s an oil painting, it’s normally an artist and a sitter, singly. [Sound disturbance]

[…]

Dawn: […] Thank you for that answer, that’s really helpful. So thinking about those roles, in the account on this sheet in number one here, I’d like to know, how would you describe the role of the artist here, and how would you describe the role of the sitter?

Interviewee: In respect of what?

Dawn: Thinking about what we just said about the roles that are involved in portrait production, I wondered if this is what you’d expect from the role of artist and the role of sitter, in number one?

Interviewee: That suggests quite a sophisticated understanding on the part of the sitter of how portraits emerge. Not very common, I think. That is, that the sitter can determine… In this quotation, Churchill [seems to be?] saying that he can determine, or rather, Sutherland seems to be suggesting that Churchill can choose to determine what kind of result will emerge. I don’t think [sound disturbance] of that.

Dawn: […] thank you for that. Let’s move on to number two. So the more general question is, thinking about the various roles in portrait production, how would you understand the role of author? Who would be the author of the portrait?

Interviewee: The artist.

Dawn: Mhmm, sure. And in each of these accounts in number two, so this one and this one, who would you say is the author of the portrait and why?

Interviewee: I would say that Sargent was always the author of the portraits.

Dawn: Okay. And in this second account of the Royal Family?

Interviewee: Again, the artist is in charge there. The sitters have very little to do with the... They have to be there, but they don’t have much active agency at all.

Dawn: Sure. Okay. So once again, thinking about the various people or parties involved in portrait production, who do you think benefits from portrait production?

Interviewee: It depends on what kind of benefits you are talking about. Mostly, it’s the artist who benefits with a fee. Possibly a fee for the actual production of the artwork and also possibly a fee for [the reproduction rights?], if, as in the nineteenth century, the likenesses were reproduced in print form and the artist sold the print rights and therefore earned money from the reproduction. The artist also, in theory at least, gains from the reputation. And the reputation of the artist in the late nineteenth century partly depended on the social and public status of the sitter. So, if an artist painted or portrayed a very famous and much-admired individual then some of that fame [sound disturbance] or was gifted, in a way, to the artist, who could then charge a higher fee if someone else wanted their portrait painted. So the sitter benefits from the fame - it’s partly to do with celebrity and the extension of fame, so public standing really. And the more portraits of a celebrity that are circulated or were circulated in this era - the first really serious era of the multiple circulation of celebrity imagery. There had been limited amounts of circulation in the eighteenth century, and certainly royal portraiture obviously from the very beginning was... But in the nineteenth century it was very much tied up with celebrity culture and the creation of the celebrity culture. So, the sitter benefits from celebrity culture and the artist benefits both from celebrity culture and from the fees, from the earning power.

Dawn: Brilliant, okay, thank you. That’s brilliant. So in these examples then, keeping in mind what you’ve just said, who do you think is benefitting from portrait production in each case, and what makes you say that? There we go, the ones under three.

Interviewee: I actually don’t know whether Marie Tempest did benefit as much as she seemed to be suggesting by doing Nicholson a favour, but it was a very popular portrait, not least because of the little dog. So she benefitted, or her status did certainly rose. But of course her status was mostly concerned with being an [actor?] and so I think that’s a fair assessment of the mutual gains from the enterprise.

Dawn: Great, thank you. And would you like to comment on either of the Epstein portraits?

Interviewee: I don’t know the Epstein bust of [W. H. Davies?] [Sound disturbance]

[…]

Interviewee: I assume that Davies benefitted because his fame was fairly erratic. He wasn’t a huge celebrity. So he probably needed that exposure as a portrait sitter, from… But a little bit different from an oil painting or even an oil sketch because it’s not really possible to reproduce it in the same multiples of ways, and it’s with the multiple reproduction of the likenesses that the sitter’s fame expanded and was consolidated. However, a bronze bust was quite a status symbol, so presumably that is one reason why Epstein… Did Epstein request that Davies sat to him? Did he offer? Was it a mutual thing? [Sound disturbance] Epstein would say, ‘If I produce a bust of you, you will live on to posterity’, sort of thing?

Dawn: Thanks, it’s very helpful actually to raise anything that you think is missing from the accounts that you need to know, so…

Interviewee: Yes, it would be useful to know whether Epstein requested Davies as a sitter because he thought his head was so sculptural, and because he liked the challenge of reproducing Davies’ head, first in clay and then in plaster and then in bronze. We need to know if Epstein said, ‘If I sculpt your head and I put it in an exhibition in the Royal Academy, or something, you will become so famous that all your books will sell, and everyone will read your poetry.’

Dawn: Mhmm. Well that would be great, I’d love to read an account if there was one like that!

Interviewee: [Sound disturbance] So one would like to know [sound disturbance] went on. But obviously Davies asked, ‘How many copies will there be of this bust?’ and Epstein said, ‘[sound disturbance] [will?] be an edition of six and I can’t [sound disturbance] you one, because [sound disturbance], but I’ll give you one at cost price’, which is an interesting part of a negotiation. With Michael Balcon, I’m trying desperately to summon up an image of this Balcon person. But Hitchcock commissioned it, [so?] he paid Epstein to produce the bust of Balcon, yes?

Dawn: Yes, that’s what I get from the account, yes.

[…]

Interviewee: […] ‘I was so ashamed of the 100% profit’. Of what? Oh, I see. Hitchcock paid Balcon. Yes? No. No, no. I’m sorry, I can’t quite work [out?] what’s going on.

Dawn: No that’s alright. This is a little bit of a complex, three-way transaction. I think there’s actually…

Interviewee: Oh, I see. So Hitchcock somehow made £250, yes?

Dawn: […] Hitchcock makes money off Balcon, and Balcon uses the profit to commission Epstein, is my understanding.

Interviewee: No, Hitchcock commissioned Epstein.

Dawn: Yes, Hitchcock commissions Epstein. Sorry, is that not what I said? Apologies.

Interviewee: There’s somebody else involved, isn’t there?

Dawn: There is - someone who sells the script in the first place, yeah.

Interviewee: Someone who’s not Balcon, yes. But Balcon wanted the script and the rights.

Dawn: Yes.

Interviewee: And so Balcon bought it for 500 and Hitchcock [sound disturbance] [paid?] 250 so he [invested?], or he took it upon himself to ask Epstein to do a bust of Balcon. [Sound disturbance] he gets a bust of himself, without having to pay any money. Hitchcock doesn’t particularly benefit, I don’t think, from the commission. Unless Hitchcock gets the bust as well. We need to know a bit more about actually the practicalities of this deal.

Dawn: Okay, great. Thank you. That is a complex one. Okay. So, if we’re thinking about the people and the parties involved in portrait production once again, how helpful do you think is the idea of power or power relationships in describing their interactions?

Interviewee: Hmm.

Dawn: Or if you prefer to discuss in relation to some examples, there are the ones in number four.

Interviewee: Yes. A portraitist like Sargent, who was the [sound disturbance] portraitist of his era and whose portraits tended to be very celebrated and very widely reproduced and therefore the sitter acquires some reflected glory from Sargent [sound disturbance]. So to that extent Sargent is the most dominant figure in the interaction. But in Garrett Anderson’s case it was her husband who commissioned the portrait. Anderson did not, I think, wish to sit, particularly. She wasn’t vainglorious. And so she would have been perfectly happy not to have sat to Mr Sargent. But her family and her friends wished for her achievements in [medicine?] to be reflected in a portrait by the top portraitist in the land at the time. She [sound disturbance] particularly because Sargent was a fairly quick, speedy painter, and there was this dispute about how she should be portrayed. And of course Sargent’s female sitters were typical social celebrities or rich and famous wives of, and so on, and were usually painted in their finery, whatever fashionable or their ballgowns or whatnot, and of course Anderson neither wore, nor wished to be shown in, such fancy outfits, so she wanted to be portrayed in academic and medical garments and Sargent, whose forte was finery and jewellery and colour and so on, and really stupendous flair and almost Baroque in rendition, really didn’t wish to paint, even… he didn’t think very much of her looks [but?] he did take the commission. So then we get the small necklace and, more to the point than the hands, I think, Sargent had transformed her sober academical gown into a kind of floating chiffon – it was black of course – but sort of floating chiffon party dress, in which she sat in the middle of [sound disturbance]. He made it as glamorous as he could. Because of course he was painting her face from life but the rest of it was not. The thing to know about portraiture is that most of the painting is done in the studio without the sitter being present – the pose or the gestures and so on. And I think the same thing happened with his painting of the hands. It was never Anderson’s hands. That was done afterwards.

Dawn: Who do you think holds the power in a negotiation such as that one? Do you think that power relationships are a useful concept to describe it, or not so much?

Interviewee: Not in this case I don’t think, no. The only power a sitter has really is to refuse to sit. They can’t really determine how it’s going to turn out. Even when they agree that she won’t be wearing a ballgown, he managed to portray her as if she were. [Gertrude?] Jekyll – yes, it’s pretty much the same, isn’t she? She’s resisting and Nicholson is persuading. So she’s showing up. A bit sad, to say that ‘ugly people had better not be painted’, but that’s... She was quite right that all she had to do was to sit. Because unless the sitter is actively engaged, committed and in a way, actively involved in the whole project, the artist is the only one who does any work.

Dawn: Sure, okay, thank you. That’s a useful view. And do you have any thoughts on the power relationships in the third sitting? If not, we can move on, that’s fine.

Interviewee: No, is this the [general?] Montgomery? I don’t know the painting.

Dawn: Yes, it’s Field Marshal Montgomery, yep. I should say it’s no problem if you don’t know these paintings. I’m thinking about working from the accounts, what we can take from them, so...

Interviewee: Monty commissioned the portrait himself. I presume then, the power is his. Because he is paying, isn’t he? So he can… He is paying and he’s also… ‘delighted particularly that Monty had signed and given him the campaign map featured in the ground of the portrait’. I’m not sure that power is a particularly useful concept here. He is a fan of Monty. A fan of the military celebrity that Monty represented. Monty can organise an air flight for him. Salisbury was having fun. I don’t know anything else about Salisbury or why Monty would have… I suppose Salisbury because Salisbury had painted the Royal Family, so some [sound disturbance] rub off on Monty, in that sense. If you think of yourself as very important but perhaps not getting the acclaim that you really deserve, then you would want to be portrayed by an artist who had a track record of painting celebrities, of one [kind?] or another, because that would enhance your own celebrity status.

Dawn: Mhmm, okay. So perhaps status rather than power, would you say, is a more helpful…

Interviewee: Yes I think so. I think mostly about status [rather than power?]. Because if you think about it, what power does the sitter have? [They?] can hardly even determine what the portrait’s going to look like. Unless they’re paying, in which case they could pay for an oil painting or they could pay for a pastel portrait or they could pay for a sculpted portrait. And all those medium have their different values, financial- and critical status-wise, so if [sound disturbance] in the business of commissioning a portrait of themselves then those things would come into play.

Dawn: Great, okay. Thank you. That is great. So let’s move on to number five. So the more broad question is, is the portrait sitting an ordinary or an extraordinary event?

Interviewee: Huh! Have you asked a sitter? For an artist, it’s a fairly routine one.

[…]

Dawn: […] so my question was, is the portrait sitting an ordinary or an extraordinary event? And if you’d like to answer in relation to the accounts – and it’s fine to just talk more generally or based on any portraits you might like to refer to – but if you’d like to refer to the accounts, do you think these sittings are ordinary or extraordinary events in the lives of their participants? And what would make you say that? How do you draw the conclusion?

Interviewee: For an artist, it’s a fairly ordinary event, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was part of the job. And the more portrait sittings you could [sound disturbance] the more income you had and the more status you had. So it was really part of…. Just as someone today [sound disturbance] makes television programmes and they are fairly ordinary events in their professional life. So for the artist it’s an absolutely ordinary part of the whole business and it was particularly so in the nineteenth century when there was much less emphasis on the artist’s [endeavours?] as original, inspirational productions [sound disturbance] the main bread and butter work of an artist. And those who did not acquire portrait sitters were actually rather despised rather than [sound disturbance] so one like Sargent or Millais had huge status but they did produce hundreds and hundreds of portraits, very stylish portraits, and that was their stock-in-trade, as it were. So for the artist it’s an ordinary event [sound disturbance]. For many of those people it’s a very ordinary event to sit for a portrait, a very necessary part of professional business. For other people, who are not so in the public eye, it’s a more extraordinary event. And for some people who are entirely private and don’t enter the public world at all, it’s an extraordinary event? No, it may just be something that happens! Sometimes, and then it’s not particularly extraordinary, it just… [sound disturbance]

Dawn: Sometimes extraordinary things happen, yeah!

Interviewee: Yes, yes. So obviously for Montgomery it was quite important. He obviously must have wished for a portrait of himself [sound disturbance] quite unusual for people to commission their portraits of themselves, although once the idea had been mooted in the late nineteenth century, then it might be a question of who would you like to paint you? Who shall we commission? And then there’d be some negotiation. And one portraitist would say ‘Sorry, I’m busy from now until Christmas’ or a better kind of excuse, sometimes the portraitist would say ‘I can’t see myself doing you justice as a portraitist’ and would get out of it in a more polite way. Sometimes they’d absolutely refuse. But mostly they’d say, ‘I’m too busy’. Someone like Clara Ewald... In that case it was Clara Ewald who proposed the portrait I think, that’s how I read it, and that… ‘partly to cheer him up’. She was an artist. He was staying in their house. That’s often what artists do. They think ‘Oh, here’s an interesting figure, an interesting head’. Even if they’re not an interesting face, some artists are often on the lookout for people to paint. Just because they do that every day. Their painting is everything. Much like Clara Ewald might have gone out and painted a landscape, she painted Brooke as a visitor and a friend of her son. That’s a fairly ordinary type of event. And it was probably quite ordinary for Brooke too, who knew that he was fairly glamorous to look at. There was a phrase that his Cambridge friends used about him, about the most beautiful [student?] in Kings or something like that. You’ll find it in the NPG account of the painting [sound disturbance]. So he knew [sound disturbance] [accustomed?] to being sketched and drawn by friends. I don’t think he ever sat for a professional portraitist but he did sit for some professional photographs.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Dawn: That’s a very interesting take on what might make the sitting ordinary. So ordinary for someone of particular looks.

Interviewee: Mmm, yes. And William Rossetti, he was very accustomed to sitting because he, having been one of the [founder?] members of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood at a time when they were all young artists, they needed sitters for any number of figures because in those days, a figure group scene like [sound disturbance] narrative with some story behind it needed [all kinds of sitters?] [sound disturbance] [attitudes?] So they’d be kneeling [or singing?] or clapping or smiling or whatever and William Rossetti was very accustomed to taking on whatever pose was required. He wasn’t quite as flexible as that, but he was very accustomed to sitting still while his brother and his friends drew him mainly because obviously most portraits begin with a drawing rather than a painting. And so Rothenstein – this is the portrait of William Rossetti in old age – and so Rossetti was quite accustomed throughout his life to sitting because also his two daughters had painted him too, and his son, and so, that was a fairly normal kind of thing for the Rossetti family.

Dawn: It might feel more and more ordinary as you sat multiple times, great. Okay. So let me ask you now, how would you define a portrait?

Interviewee: How would I define a portrait? […]

Dawn: […] So we’re moving on to number six and the more general, overarching, question is: what is a portrait? And, subsequently, do you think the painting to which this account refers is a portrait? Why or why not?

Interviewee: [On?] the basic level, a portrait is a likeness that is recognisably identified with a particular individual. Not [necessarily?] [sound disturbance] recognisable for various reasons [sound disturbance] recognisable not because it was a likeness but because it was a portrait of Charles II or something. We know it’s Charles II because of the things he’s wearing or carrying or the pose he’s got. Monarchs and suchlike tended to have portraits which had very little to do with their actual physiognomy, or might not, so it’s an odd kind of likeness sometimes. It’s a likeness because it’s been identified and labelled with someone’s name. And that is always one of the issues about historic portrait because particularly for portraiture in the sixteenth and seventeenth century [sound disturbance] around in family homes and so on where the labels, the name of the sitter, has become detached from the artwork. And the knots that both the public [sound disturbance] viewers, go to, to try to identify a sitter, when there is actually no documentary evidence, are long and difficult and often unsuccessful. And there are an awful lot of orphan [sound disturbance] portraits, where they’re very nice portraits, particularly of women, but they have no names attached to them. So they all become Mary Queen of Scots or Lady Jane Grey or something, or... And then in the nineteenth century of course we have this proliferation of Jane Austen portraits, none of which are Austen. So that’s what a portrait should be: a documented likeness of a person.

Dawn: Do you think you can tell whether something is a portrait from reading a text such as this one in six? Or do you need more information?

Interviewee: That’s a good start, isn’t it? If you get the sitter making an opinion about a portrait then at least you know that she sat to him. The first thing to ascertain is whether these two people met in the same room. And very often you can’t do that. So the first thing is, where are they? Were they both in the same room? Is it a portrait from life? Is it a portrait from a photograph? Is it a portrait out of their heads? All sorts of questions come up. And has it always been recognised as a portrait of Caroline Blackwood? She says it was, so that’s a good… I mean no reason to doubt that that is a portrait. Unless [it’s?] one of those cases in which she’s impersonating some dramatic character, so that is where we have a problem with many of the [sound disturbance] paintings where you have someone like Elizabeth Siddall or Annie Miller in costume, as it were, portraying some literary character. And that is not a portrait of the sitter, but it is an image of her. Just the same way as an image of a film actor in a role, it is not a portrait of them in the sense that’s not their selves, but it is an image of them because they were in that character [sound disturbance]. So there’s all that kind of complexity of who’s portraying what. And then of course the artist. Is it the artist [sound disturbance] representations or is it the viewer? So there are many aspects to this portraiture business.

Dawn: Yes, quite! Thank you, that’s brilliant. So this is the final question in this sort of format. And it is, how would you define the portrait sitting? So we’ve talked about how you’d define the portrait, but what constitutes a portrait sitting, do you think?

Interviewee: A portrait sitting is defined by the fact that the artist and the sitter are in the same space.

Dawn: Okay, great. Alright. And so these accounts […]

Interviewee: If they’re not in the same [space?], it’s not a sitting.

Dawn: Okay, great. And these ones in number seven, these accounts here, would you call them accounts of portrait sittings? And why or why not? So in this case I’m thinking about the extent of the portrait sitting, when it starts and ends.

Interviewee: Yes, it’s very important to try to find out how many sittings took place for a particular portrait. It’s very seldom that it’s just one. It’s not like a snapshot photo. An oil painting and certainly a sculpted bust is quite different, usually takes several sittings. But they also, both artists and sculptors, use photographs to assist with the final result so that they’re not only dependent on sittings, because sitters get incredibly bored and fed-up of sittings, particularly if they have to maintain the same posture or aspect. And very often the artist does not really want to chat. So the sitter has to concentrate on sitting still and yet doesn’t have anything apparent to do [or to say?] so it can be a very tiresome thing and many portrait sitters did remark on it in the nineteenth century. I think they thought it was going to be more glamorous or more active than it actually usually is. ‘A great relief when finished’. Yes, because even if you’re sitting [sound disturbance] to have your photograph taken in a photobooth or something, you get restive. Your sitters would get restive. So I don’t know about Anderson and Sargent and Anatole France…

Dawn: Do you think that’s relevant to the portrait sitting or not particularly?

Interviewee: It proves that there was… One would like to know how many… Sargent was [sound disturbance] very professional [sound disturbance] he didn’t necessarily need a lot of sittings, that was one of his skills. There were portraitists like De László who were even speedier, who just [mimes painting very quickly] painting *alla prima* and getting a sense, a bit like cartoonists in that respect, and a cartoonist can do a quick portrait sketch, which captures some essence of a sitter very quickly. But mostly big oils take several sittings and this quotation does use ‘portrait sittings’ of Anderson and [sound disturbance] their conversation about reading matter. So you get some sense of a social relationship evolving through that. And I think most… I don’t actually have any personal experience of portrait sittings - I should have said this at the beginning - I’ve never sat for one, never painted a portrait; I’ve never witnessed a portrait sitting. But I imagine that the verbal exchanges between artist and sitter gradually to put the sitter at ease because if they sit very rigidly – and often you can see this in a portrait, they’re sat, very bored, and they’re sat, rigidly, in their academic robes or something, if they’re being painted for a commissioned portrait, and they grasp the arms of their chair rather fiercely, and you can sense there’s no real social interaction between the artist and the sitter. You wouldn’t necessarily know that [sound disturbance]. So it’s quite interesting when a sitter or an artist does describe some element of the social interaction between the two of them. At least you know that they were in the same room. And as I said, it was quite often, and in fact an awful lot of the Edwardian era portraits were done sometimes after death but from photographs, so don’t imagine that this is a portrait from life, ever, unless you’ve got some real reason for thinking it. For a public figure type portrait. Now the De Morgans were an interesting couple. William sat to Evelyn for two portraits that we have, two oil portraits, one when he was younger and then the more famous one where he’s holding one of his wonderful pots and his [sound disturbance] novels are visible in the background, so that’s foregrounding his work as a ceramic artist and his work as a novelist and it’s telling posterity, this is William de Morgan’s professional achievement. The earlier one is simply with no accessories and simply in a kind of artist’s smock rather than anything fancier. Now the two portraits were requested by the publisher of… It can’t have been of his novels. It can’t have been of his autobiography. I wonder what it was… [Sound disturbance] Anyway, typically, books, and particularly biographical authors, biographical books in the late nineteenth century, one of their main features was a… what is it that I [mean?]?

Dawn: A frontispiece?

Interviewee: Frontispiece, yes, a frontispiece portrait. Just to show who is the author or the subject of this book without that [sound disturbance] publicity of who it is. And there were two volumes, so the publisher, Heinemann, I think, wanted a portrait of William de Morgan. And not the only ones but the chief ones they had were the two by Evelyn.

Dawn: Do you think that would be part of the sitting, that request?

[…]

Dawn: I wondered if you would consider that request as part of the sitting or not?

Interviewee: Oh I see. Not in this case, no. But often a portrait, mostly a photograph but sometimes an engraving would be commissioned to go as a frontispiece, if no other portrait existed. So that was a very common thing in the nineteenth century. And in fact [sound disturbance] eighteenth century [sound disturbance] [things like?] Equiano’s autobiography, it has an engraved portrait [sound disturbance] as an authentic likeness. Sometimes they were a bit inventive if the sitter was not very famous or was recently dead or something. So I don’t think in the De Morgan’s case, I don’t think Evelyn painted the one with the big pot with a view to it being reproduced in the book. And then they both said ‘We only want one portrait. To have two portraits in the book smacks of pride, really’. Of course you’ve always got to think, in the nineteenth century particularly, to publish a portrait of oneself or to have portraits of oneself in the public domain was often seen as incredibly prideful but also sinful in many ways because there were several communities such as the Jewish community and certainly today the Islamic community where portraiture is not promoted, and to indulge, and certainly to advertise yourself by the means of portraiture was sinful. And the Quakers, very much, are very against [portraying?]… In the nineteenth century there are very few serious portraits of Quakers [sound disturbance] the question always was [sound disturbance] in some ways going to be paid to make this portrait, let us put the money towards relief of the poor or proselytising or some good cause, not enhancement of X’s celebrity. So those elements come into it. But then when you get into the 1880s and the celebrity culture, particularly in showbiz becomes [sound disturbance] celebrity culture really becomes very very powerful and the more portraits of you the better. And people bought them in reproduction form and put them in albums, almost as if they were family members. So any famous [portrait?] [sound disturbance] was something to collect. So there’s that to consider in terms… And so people were, I think, rather reticent about talking about their own portraits. It was seen to be rather boastful in an age… Although celebrity was prized, boastfulness was not.

Dawn: Thank you. Alright, that’s brilliant. There’s so much to go into there and I should say, I’m trying not to respond because I’m aiming to get your views and not mine in this case but some really great food for thought. […]

[…]

Dawn: Okay, thanks so much. So the next question I wanted to ask is about credibility. I wondered what would lead you to believe that a particular textual account of the portrait sitting is credible or not credible? What kind of things would you be looking for?

Interviewee: The credible things would be: where they were, who else was there, anything practical that you could actually verify from some other source if possible, when, how long the sitting took. So practical questions give more credence to… and more useful than anything assessing the results, as both the sitter and the artist are not good judges. […]

[…]

Dawn: Okay, no that’s great on credibility. Could you maybe say something about how you use these in your research? Do you come across them frequently, or… so people writing about portrait sittings?

Interviewee: Not as frequently as one would have liked, I think is the answer, yes, and in fact the NPG has over the years, or in more recent years, not in the Victorian era, has made an effort to document accounts of portrait sittings so that the process is better understood, the practicalities of it and everything. No, one could use a lot more personal accounts, if only because then you can actually say, this did happen.

Dawn: Yep, okay, great. Are there any of the accounts we’ve talked about today that you found surprising or particularly interesting and why was that? […]

Interviewee: Yeah, I don’t know, it’s a long time ago since I did all that work.

Dawn: That’s fine, if nothing stands out.

Interviewee: Yes. I think the Sutherland and Churchill exchange is most interesting, the fact that both of them understood what kind of image was coming from the way that the sitter portrayed himself, because mostly sitters did not understand that they could be portrayed in one sense or another, although I suppose that actors often could, but I don’t remember any accounts of straight portraits of actors where you get the sense that they are portraying themselves in a particular way because they’ve been having a straight portrait painted but it must have happened. And politicians too, they know how they are presenting themselves because they’ve done it a lot, in public.

Dawn: Yep, okay, brilliant. And the final question of this part three, as I called it - are there any other domain experts you might want to consult about this material in order to understand it better?

Interviewee: I would get on to [redacted].

Dawn: Oh sorry, I don’t mean individuals’ names, I mean different areas outside of art history that might help you understand portrait-sitting accounts. Sorry, I did appreciate your recommendations but for anonymity’s sake I’ll avoid mentioning any names.

Interviewee: Sorry, can you rephrase the question then?

Dawn: Sure. So obviously we’re coming at these portrait-sitting accounts from the perspective of art history. But are there any other disciplines you think you might draw on in order to understand them?

Interviewee: You could use political history, yes definitely; you could use biography as a theoretical project; you can use costume history, that’s often a big part of portraiture. So various forms of history, yes. [Economic?] history of course. Because the whole question of the cost and value of the portrait is one thing we haven’t really discussed but that is very much a very significant element of portraiture and has always been. So the economic relations involved in…

Dawn: So you said, an economist? Or did you say an economic historian, sorry?

Interviewee: Economic historian, probably. [Sound disturbance] economic history rather than… but you could try an economist, yes, and see [what they think?] And I suppose you should also ask an anatomist, who are concerned with physiognomy and physical features. That would be quite an interesting area to explore with [sound disturbance]. They used to call themselves… Professors of anatomy anyway, but now they’re all medics. So that would probably [yield?] something.

Dawn: Okay, thank you. Brilliant. Okay so just to finish up, I wanted to just give you an opportunity to reflect on what we’ve talked about so far and to raise anything I might have missed. So I was going to say, are there any other questions you think I should have asked, or is there anything you’d like to add about the accounts, or anything that we’ve spoken about?

Interviewee: No, because without seeing your project in the round, I don’t actually know exactly what you’re after. So I think you’re going to just have to use what you’re gathering from whoever and whatever you read and take it forward with your own judgments.

Dawn: Sure, okay, no worries. In that case, I’ll just say thank you very much again for speaking to me today. It’s been really wonderful to get your thoughts on the portraits and on these topics. […]

[…]

1. Post-interview, the participant added: He was famously or infamously handsome and recently sat to a portrait photographer for some 'celebrity' images. One, showing the sitter with bare shoulders, was known to Brooke's friends as 'your favourite actress'. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)