



FACE TO FACE WITH A MASTER

YOU MUST be right the first time, or you are no good — the words of Chiswick sculptor Alec Dearnley.

And, with more than half a century of acclaimed work behind him, Mr. Dearnley must be right.

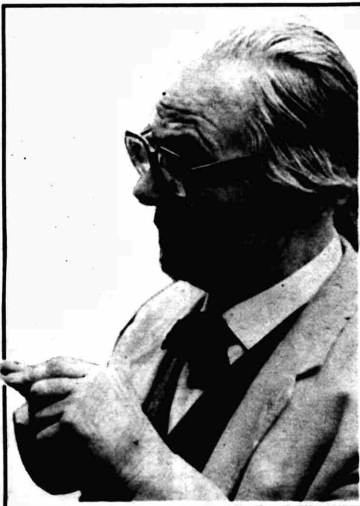
His models have included Lord Hirst, Vivien Leigh, Sir Henry Wood, Sir Newton Moore, Sir Lewis Casson and Ann Casson. And his latest work is the portrait bust of Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Robert Mark.

The bust, to commemorate Sir Robert's coming retirement, stands erect in the spacious, homely studio. Staring at you from shoulder height, its resemblance to a living person is uncanny.

But Mr. Dearnley thinks not. "I'll show you how to make it look even more lifelike", he chuckles. "We'll give it a drink".

And with that, a mug of water is thrown over the immortal figure with gay abandon. The effect is to give that well-known face a moist and supple expression, far removed from the accepted limits of a lump of clay.

It is this magic touch with such a raw material that has carried Mr. Dearnley to the top in his long and successful career. He left school at the age of 15 and joined the Royal Navy as a boy seaman. His life on the ocean waves



lasted five years and included trips to Turkey and sporting hours as a boxer. But his home town of York, where he was brought up with 13 other brothers and sisters, called him back and he went to study at a school of art.

This in turn led him to London where he worked under the direction of Chelsea sculptor Richard Goulden.

"In those days there was not a great deal of interest in portrait sculpture and I concentrated on scenery for films and stage".

This aspect of his career took him into the lives of many great stars, among them Gracie Fields, whose little car he later bought and cherished for many years.

He has created scenery for Covent Garden, whale boats for the film *Moby Dick*, an adventurous facade for Leeds University, and

film settings for countless plots. "I enjoyed myself to the full when I was working for the film and theatre industry. We would sometimes work day and night to finish something but it was such fun", he reminisces.

With such a varied and hectic past, it is hard to believe that this charming and eccentric artist had time to channel his talent towards one end.

Yet it is portraiture for which he has become so well-known, and which has enabled him to "catch the spirit" of so many great minds as they sat before him in his studio.

Mr. Dearnley believes it is necessary to watch the spirit and the character behind a face in order to depict it accurately.

And his feeling for personality is clearest as he speaks, every other sentence being interrupted by a personal comment apt to unravel the most confident of us.

He describes the process of sculpting in the words of his teacher: "Clay is the life, plaster is the death, and bronze is the resurrection".

And this disturbing comment seems as profound as Mr. Dearnley's whole outlook, as he speaks of "easy faces" needing only a "few bashes at a lump of clay" to resurrect.

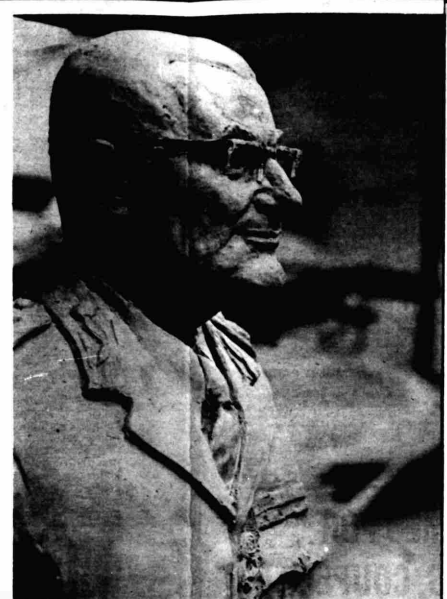
His bust of Sir Robert Mark took just four hour-long sittings and is destined, at Sir Robert's request, for the Hendon police academy.

Other works remain in the studio, together with a vast coat of arms he is creating for the facade of the Kensington store, Barkers.

After so many years of talented industry, he sees retirement in the near future. He would like to create perhaps two more busts, and favours those of the Duke of Edinburgh and Eamonn Andrews.

This confusing choice, relates, says Mr. Dearnley, to the fact that both men have "good faces".

And good faces are something he knows how to preserve; not as a beautician pretends to know, but in the timeless beauty of one immortal medium — art.



Face to face with a great man — enough to make most people



Sculptor's secretary Miss Pat Hutchesson beside herself in



Lord Hirst comes to life under the watchful eye of young Mr. Dearnley.

Story by Claudia Cooke, pictures by Peter Smith