

CHRISTIE'S

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ARCHIVE OF TONY BENN ACQUIRED FOR THE NATION

NEGOTIATED THROUGH THE ACCEPTANCE IN LIEU SCHEME WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF CHRISTIE'S

The archive of Tony Benn (3 April 1925 – 14 March 2014), Labour's longest-serving MP, has been negotiated to the nation, accepted in lieu of inheritance tax and permanently allocated to the British Library, in accordance with the condition attached to its offer.

The thorough archive was accumulated by Benn during his lifetime, beginning in his early youth, when he first started to keep a formal diary and associated papers (the earliest volume was written by Benn at the age of 9). It then spans the rest of his life, providing rich documentation of his active political career as well as a substantial collection of source material reflecting the history of the UK during this time.

"We are pleased that this substantial archive with its considerable research value will be added to the British Library collections of contemporary archives, available to all those interested in post-war British politics and society, into the Labour Party and the Labour movement, as well as into the long and influential career of Tony Benn himself," commented Ruth Cornett, Director, Heritage and Taxation Advisory Service, and Thomas Venning, Head of Department, Books & Manuscripts of Christie's.

Benn was a Member of Parliament for 47 years and served as a Cabinet minister in the Harold Wilson and James Callaghan administrations in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1960 he inherited a peerage on his father's death (as 2nd Viscount Stansgate), which prevented him from continuing to serve as an MP. This spurred his campaign to renounce his title and remain in the House of Commons, leading to the creation of the Peerage Act in 1963.

In the Labour government of 1964-7 he served as Postmaster General and then Minister of Technology. In 1971-2 he was Chairman of the Labour Party, and during the Labour government of 1974-9 he returned to Cabinet, first as Secretary of State for Industry and then as Secretary of State for Energy. Throughout the 1980s, when Labour was the opposition again, Benn emerged as a prominent figure on its left wing, during which the term "Bennite" was coined and used to describe those associated with radical left-wing politics.

When Benn eventually left Parliament in 2001 he became President of the Stop the War Coalition, which he led until his death in 2014. He has been described as "one of the few UK politicians to have become more left-wing after holding ministerial office".

The archive is especially rich in audio and video content, with thousands of hours of audio diaries recording Benn's fresh, unedited impressions over many years. It represents a uniquely valuable resource for biographers, researchers and historians, particularly in the context of the British Library's [extensive oral history collections](#) relating to UK politics and government.

Christie's has been instrumental in the negotiation of this work to the nation. For nearly 50 years, Christie's Heritage & Taxation Advisory Service has built up extensive experience, helping numerous Christie's clients with transactions that have resulted in over 10,000 chattels of pre-eminent national interest being acquired by public museums, galleries or institutions, through a private treaty sale or in lieu of inheritance tax or other death duties.

The acceptance of this archive settled £210,000 of tax.

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