

Kitson was born in England in January 1926. His father was distantly related to Anthony Trollope, the novelist; his mother, who died when Kitson was eight, was a descendant of Sir Peter Lely, the 17th century court painter.

Kitson was educated at Gresham's School – an appropriate choice as art was well taught. There he gave his first talk on painting at the age of 16; and that year, 1942, in the school holidays, he made an oil painting of St Paul's Cathedral, then surrounded by bomb damage.



As a cadet being prepared for National Service in the army, Kitson became an undergraduate at King's College, Cambridge – being half soldier, half student. In the Royal Engineers he was posted to Cairo and was very soon seconded to Service Intelligence Middle East.

When he was demobilized he returned to King's to read English, with Dadie Rylands as his tutor. The generous scope of the Cambridge English tripos allowed him to develop lifelong interests in theatre and other arts, and the Fitzwilliam Museum was a great resource. In Cambridge he began writing art reviews for the local press.

After graduating in 1950 he married his contemporary at Cambridge, Annabella Cloudsley, and that autumn began his study of the history of art at the Courtauld Institute of Fine Art in London. The Director, then Anthony Blunt, had a very small staff and growing student numbers, but at the time there were no funds for another appointment; he conferred with Sir William Coldstream, Director of the Slade School of Art, and Kitson was as it were 'kept on ice' at the Slade as assistant lecturer until he could be appointed to the Courtauld permanently.

During this interregnum Kitson was able to win over art students who did not always take kindly to the art historical approach, and to gain insight into the methods and attitudes of contemporary artists. Thereafter Kitson remained on the staff of the Courtauld until, as professor and Deputy Director, he resigned in 1985. From the 1960s onwards other chairs were offered to him – but he could never face the thought of the British Library and the galleries in London being more than a brief bus-ride away. From 1986 to his retirement Kitson was director of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and made frequent visits to America as visiting professor at

Yale.

All his life a very great deal of his energy went into helping his students – perhaps beyond the call of duty; and perhaps adding to the strain of an immensely busy life.

By the 1960s he was already much in demand as a reviewer of art books and exhibitions on radio and television and in periodicals: to all this he gave minute attention despite other pressures. He delighted in the researching and hanging of exhibitions, such as those for the Arts Council of Great Britain (see chapters 8 and 10). These involved much travel, to the great houses in Britain and abroad. He was never tired of London, nor of life, which was too short for all he wanted to do.