

An Interview with Churchill and Pemberley

The following is the unedited transcript of an interview with Mrs Churchill and Miss Pemberley conducted by Mrs Montague of the Dorset Senior Ladies Guild for its monthly periodical *Women of the Westcountry and their Wonderful Work*. The abridged version was published in July 1932.

Good afternoon Ladies. You have embarked on your private detective career in your later years, what did you do before?

Churchill: I was busy being married to Detective Chief Inspector Churchill of the Metropolitan Police.

Pemberley: And I worked for Mrs Churchill's predecessor, Mr Atkins. Until his untimely death in Africa, he was considered one of the best private detectives in Dorset.

Churchill: I don't suppose that's too difficult, there can't be many private detectives in Dorset.

Pemberley: Actually there are quite a few, you'd be surprised. And before I worked for Mr Atkins, I was a companion to a lady of international travel.

You must have travelled to some interesting places, Miss Pemberley.

Pemberley: Yes, a great many places indeed.

What was your favourite place?

Pemberley: Goodness, there are so many to choose from! We were quite taken with the Mongolian steppe.

Churchill: Really? Surely there's very little there?

Pemberley: Gazelles and nomads mainly, but it was good enough for Genghis Khan.

Churchill: I'm not sure that it was, didn't he go off and conquer most of Asia? That shows you how bored he must have been with the steps.

Pemberley: Steppe.

Churchill: I should add, my dear interviewer, that I wasn't merely just a wife to a chief inspector and that I did a great many other things too.

Did you travel as well, Mrs Churchill?

Churchill: Yes, we used to enjoy the Lake District.

Anywhere outside Great Britain?

Churchill: The trouble with travelling too far is the food, you see, one doesn't always get decent portions abroad. And one must be terribly careful when drinking the water on the continent. Aside from travel, I was treasurer to the Richmond-upon-Thames Ladies Lawn Tennis Club and that wasn't an easy task, I can tell you.

What experience do you have of sleuthing?

Pemberley: I acquired a reasonable amount of experience whilst working for Mr Atkins.

Churchill: And I was married to a sleuth. He often used to discuss his cases with me and I proffered an opinion here and a suggestion there. In fact I practically solved some of his cases for him. He cut his teeth on the Jack the Ripper case you know.

You didn't manage to solve that one then?

Churchill: Of course not! No one did. Were you not aware?

It was a little joke.

Churchill: I see. Oh very good, yes.

How did you two ladies first meet?

Churchill: Miss Pemberley came with Mr Atkins' business when I bought it.

Pemberley: I was one of the fixtures and fittings.

Which?

Pemberley: A fixture I think.

Churchill: Definitely a fixture. And I'm very happy to have Miss Pemberley as a permanent fixture in Churchill's Detective Agency.

Pemberley: Oh thank you, Mrs Churchill.

What are your tips for solving a case?

Churchill: Goodness, where to start? Well I think one must have a nose for these things, if one doesn't have the nose for it then one is disadvantaged from the very beginning.

Pemberley: Take time to establish every single fact of the case at the start.

Churchill: I was just about to say that, Miss Pemberley, when you interrupted me.

Pemberley: Don't allow personal judgement to dictate the course of the investigation.

Churchill: And I was going to say that too, why are you getting in before me?

Pemberley: You were talking about noses, Mrs Churchill.

Churchill: That was merely a little preamble to state that detective work requires some innate skill. I was then going to give Mrs Montague here a list of my tips.

Pemberley: Which are?

Churchill: The ones which you just said.

Pemberley: Remember that the clue can often be in what someone doesn't tell you, rather than what they do.

Churchill: Are you talking to me, Miss Pemberley, or was that another tip?

Pemberley: Another tip.

Churchill: I see.

Pemberley: No evidence of a crime doesn't mean that a crime wasn't committed.

Churchill: Very profound.

Pemberley: Always look at things from as many points of view as possible.

Churchill: Yes, some of these tips are common sense really.

Pemberley: If something seems too good to be true then –

Churchill: It probably is. Yes, thank you, Miss Pemberley, Mrs Montague is no doubt aware of that old chestnut. I will add that one must always have a pair of stout walking shoes at the ready, you never know when you need to hoof about somewhere.

Pemberley: I thought you would mention rapport.

Churchill: Oh rapport! Thank you, Miss Pemberley. Yes I pride myself on good rapport with clients and culprits alike. You can't get what you want out of people without a bit of rapport.

Pemberley: Except when it's Inspector Mappin.

Churchill: We don't want to name names in front of Mrs Montague, Miss Pemberley, we can't have her publishing that in her publication. Our relations with the local constabulary are excellent, Mrs Montague.

Many women in their later years pursue a life of rest and repose. How do you find the stamina to solve complicated cases?

Churchill: First and foremost, good sustenance. And a good night's sleep.

Pemberley: I don't sleep very well.

Churchill: Nor do you eat very much, Miss Pemberley. I think it's safe to say that my assistant is sustained by the air around her and very little else.

Pemberley: I like cake.

Churchill: And if only you liked it a little less then there'd be more for me!

Pemberley: If I didn't eat cake I'd probably fade away.

Churchill: As would I, Miss Pemberley. I've never understood the expression, *you can't have your cake and eat it*. That makes no sense at all. Fancy having a slice of cake on a plate and allowing it to sit there uneaten!

Pemberley: The saying means to eat something twice. So you *have* your cake, which means you eat it and then you can't eat it because you've already eaten it.

Churchill: No, it still makes no sense. Have you another question for us Mrs Montague?

What advantage do you think an older lady detective has over a younger gentleman detective?

Churchill: That's the second time you've made reference to our age during this interview. I'm not sure that it's quite necessary.

Pemberley: Ladies make better detectives because people don't expect them to be detectives.

Churchill: Now I like that answer, Miss Pemberley! Very good.

Pemberley: I think gentlemen detectives stick out like a sore thumb. They wear a pork pie hat cocked just so and a long overcoat and generally skulk about being quite sure of themselves.

Churchill: Was Mr Atkins like that?

Pemberley: No, he was different altogether. But Mr Atkins was an exception. I think your common-or-garden detective can be spotted a mile off.

Churchill: And on the point of age, the older one is then the wiser one is. As a rule.

Pemberley: But not always.

Churchill: No, not always. But maturity brings the benefit of having a rich tapestry of life experiences to draw upon.

Pemberley: Why would you want to draw on a tapestry?

Churchill: I speak metaphorically, Miss Pemberley.

Pemberley: When I was a little girl I once drew on a tapestry of my aunt's and received ten lashes.

Churchill: Let's not bore Mrs Montague with tales of your Victorian childhood.

Pemberley: They're not boring, I think they would make for a very good novel one day.

Churchill: By Charles Dickens perhaps?

Pemberley: Yes, except he's dead now.

Churchill: Even I know that, Miss Pemberley. I was having a little joke. We await the publication of *The Memoirs of a Victorian Waif* with great excitement.

Pemberley: Who's that by?

Churchill: You. When you've written it.

Pemberley: I don't have time to write a book. And besides, I'm no good at writing. I get stuck after three or four sentences.

Churchill: That's because you haven't found the muse, Miss Pemberley. Once you've found the muse you're away.

Pemberley: Is that so?

Churchill: Oh yes, there's nothing to it I hear.

What hobbies do you like to pursue when you're not solving cases?

Churchill: Tennis.

Pemberley: When do you play tennis, Mrs Churchill?

Churchill: I used to play it a lot.

Pemberley: At the Richmond-upon-Thames Ladies Lawn Tennis Club?

Churchill: Exactly, Miss Pemberley. But now this detective agency takes up quite a bit of my time. Ballet was quite a hobby of mine once upon a time too.

Pemberley: That was fifty years ago.

Churchill: Enough Miss Pemberley! Mrs Montague doesn't need to know exactly when. What are *your* hobbies?

Pemberley: I paint a little and dabble in the violin.

Churchill: I've not seen you do either of those things.

Pemberley: That's because I do them in the privacy of my own home.

Churchill: You play the violin?

Pemberley: I dabble.

Churchill: Either you play it or you don't, I don't see how one dabbles with it. Is that the last question, Mrs Montague?

I have one more. Can you describe your character in three words?

Churchill: Principled, dogged and determined.

Pemberley: Helpful, loyal and kind.

Churchill: That makes you seem much nicer than me, Miss Pemberley. I think I should have mentioned something like that too. Can I change mine, Mrs Montague?

Yes.

Churchill: Principled, dogged and kind.

Pemberley: But I've already said kind.

Churchill: We can both be kind.

Pemberley: Can I change mine too?

Yes.

Pemberley: Helpful, loyal and thoughtful.

Churchill: Can I change again?

Just one last time.

Churchill: Compassionate, selfless and benevolent.

Pemberley: Your description is now completely different to the first one, Mrs Churchill.

Churchill: Well I can't help who I am, can I Miss Pemberley? I am all of those things.

Pemberley: I don't think it's quite fair, because you've had seven words now.

Churchill: I think you can have one last go, Miss Pemberley.

Pemberley: I don't want one, I can't think of anything else.

Churchill: Well I think you chose very well in the first place.

Pemberley: Oh thank you, Mrs Churchill.

Thank you for your time today Ladies.

Churchill: And thank you for yours, Mrs Montague. When will this interview be published?

Next week.

Churchill: Oh how wonderful, I shall look out for it and send a copy to Lady Worthington. I'm sure she'll be very keen to hear how life is treating me in Dorset.

Pemberley: And I shall send a copy to Baroness Fellowes.

Churchill: You know a baroness, Miss Pemberley? How?

Pemberley: Just someone from my rich tapestry of life experiences.

Churchill: Well we must stop off at the tea shop on our way home and you can tell me all about her. Fancy knowing a baroness and not slipping her into conversation on a daily basis! You never fail to surprise me, Pembers.