**Gertrude Emily Devenish Walshe, 1831–1907 [Dr 4]**

This amateur female sculptor was the seventh and youngest child, and fifth daughter, of Joseph Andrew de Lautour (1785–1845), and his wife Caroline Young (*c.*1793–1869), a granddaughter of the 5th Lord Elibank. Joseph Andrew was born in Madras. His father, Louis-François Joseph de Lautour (1730–1808) had come to England from France at some early point and then went to Madras where he made a fortune as a banker and merchant. The family probably returned to England after 1793, since Louis-François – who in England appears to have been known as Francis – was reportedly prevented by the Napoleonic Wars from then going back to France but sent financial help to relations there.

Joseph Andrew was the eldest son of three, with four sisters, and it is clear that the wealth of their father established his children in English society: the sons gained army commissions or entered the East India Civil Service, the daughters made advantageous marriages, including into titled families. Joseph Andrew was initially in the Grenadier Guards but subsequently of Hexton House, Herts., which he inherited on his father’s death at Bath in 1808, and later also Windeford House, Hants., with a London residence in Harley Street. The Harley Street address was probably derived from his father-in-law William Young, who had also lived at Gloucester Lodge, Weymouth, former residence there of George III, so was also apparently a man of wealth. Gertrude’s eldest brother, William Francis Joseph, originally a captain in the Grenadier Guards, inherited their father’s Hexton estate and in April 1870, following the death there of their mother, Caroline, gave notice of changing his surname to Young, in accordance with conditions of her father William Young’s will. From 1862 his mother had been defendant in a family suit in Chancery (Lautour *v*. Lautour), no doubt over inheritance, which continued into at least the late 1870s, drawing in her heirs as successor defendants: they included her daughter Gertrude’s second husband, who was one of her executors. These circumstances may have been one of the elements in ‘the declining fortunes of the family’ that led to William abandoning Hexton House: it fell into disrepair over some thirty years prior to his death in 1899, though it had by then been bought and restored by someone else (obituary, *Luton Times*, 17 Nov. 1899).

The Lautours were Roman Catholics. Gertrude was born at Hexton on 12 June 1831 and on 21 June 1859 was married to David William Mitchell of Barton House, Beds., at St George’s, Southwark, by the Catholic bishop of Southwark. Mitchell (b. 1803), a widower with one daughter, was a well-known zoologist and illustrative artist who had been secretary of the London Zoological Society for twelve years. On 1 November 1859, however, only four months later and while engaged on a new French zoological gardens project, he committed suicide by shooting himself at Neuilly-sur-Seine near Paris. No clear reason was established.

Gertrude remarried on 8 May 1862 at Brighton to Edward Frederick Devenish Walshe (1826–1903), son of the late Eustace Walshe MD of Spring Garden, Co. Kildare, a physician and son of a surgeon himself. Edward was a successful Catholic property developer and at about the time of his marriage to Gertrude, he bought up large tracts of land in Berkshire, subsequently developing what became South Ascot and the Walshe estates in Sunninghill and Sunningdale. In 1883 he became one of the directors of the Westminster Land Company, formed to build Westminster Cathedral (constructed 1895–1903) after its former-prison site was purchased by other wealthy Catholic benefactors for the purpose.

In 1888 he himself donated land for building the new Catholic church of St Francis at South Ascot, where the Walshes lived and he became a magistrate. They also appear to have spent much of their time on the French Riviera, with a villa at 27 Boulevard Carabacel in Nice from some point before 1891. Social reports in French newspapers of the 1890s suggest they were by then part of a wealthy and aristocratic circle found at parties on yachts and ashore, and entertained lavishly themselves.

How and when Gertrude became a sculptor is not clear but information gathered by Pierre Sanchez for his *Dictionnaire de l’Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs* (2010) includes that she was a pupil of Hélène Bertaux (1825–1909) and a ‘M[onsieur] Mattei’, as yet unidentified. This suggests she perhaps only trained in France, probably from the 1860s. Current earliest mention of her exhibiting is at the Paris Salon of 1889 where *La Vie Mondaine* of 7 February praised her ‘St Christopher’ terracotta bas-relief (no. 450) and a figure of a dog, ‘Joy’, belonging to Princess Lucie Dolgorouki.

At the Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs in Paris early in 1891, she showed three pieces (nos. 10–12): a terracotta of a horse wearing a hat; ‘Lilas blanc – Portrait de la Baronne L. de N.’; and ‘Portrait de Mme La Comtesse L. R…,.’. Reviewing the show on 23 February the European edition of the *New York Herald* singled out ‘Lilas blanc’ for special mention. This appears to be the marble portrait bust of a beautiful young woman wearing a lilac corsage, signed and dated ‘Nice 1891’, and now in the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, where it was long known as just ‘The Countess’. The separate socle bears a monogram (the principal letter being ‘N’) under a baronial coronet but, despite that, the poor fit casts some doubt on whether originally made for it. Gertrude’s exhibiting address in 1891 was the Nice villa and on 4 November 1897, reporting the Devenish Walshes’ return to it for the winter, *La Vie Mondaine* called her ‘a sculptor of the highest class.’

Gertrude was 60 in June 1891 and the quality of ‘Lilas blanc’ is evidence of her skill and apparent experience. She clearly worked in clay but it is possible that, since well-resourced, may have had studio assistance in marble if she only did a few pieces in it based on clays: more need to be found to form a better view. It is also curious that ‘Lilas blanc’ seems to have remained with her, not its sitter, since it is in the Russell-Cotes collection as an unreclaimed loan deposited in 1928 by a Miss Lautour (certainly a so far unidentified relative).

The *Reading Mercury* and *The Tablet* of 25 April 1903 reported the death on the 14 April of Edward Devenish Walshe, aged 78 in his ‘flat’ at Nice, suggesting the couple had by then left the Boulevard Cabacel. *The Tablet* gives his English home as ‘La Tour’, South Ascot, where his body was returned to lie in St Francis before his funeral there on 23 May. Gertrude, died at Marseilles on 11 October 1907, when her address was given as ‘Ballencrieff’, South Ascot, but exactly where she and her husband were buried – or if together in England – is not yet known.

*Summarised from Art UK discussions (1) on the identity of the sculptor of the bust in the Russell-Cotes Museum, previously read, from the signature, as by ‘C.E. Devenish Walshe’ and misdated 1897 and (2) in March 2021 on the identity of the bust as of ‘Mme la baronne L. de N.’*

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