**Gertrude Emily Devenish Walshe, 1831–1907**

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 Francois 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-Francois – 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 at 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: these 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 (*c.*1825–1903), son of the late Eustace Walshe of Co. Kildare. Her was a successful Catholic property developer and at about the time of their marriage, possibly partly with her money, 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 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 also lived and he became a magistrate. They also appear to have spent much of their time in later years on the French Riviera, with a property in Nice. 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 unknown but there is a marble portrait bust of a beautiful young woman, signed and dated ‘Nice 1891’, in the Russell-Coates Art Gallery and Museum which shows that she was a technically accomplished one. On the socle it bears a monogram (the principal letter being ‘N’) under a baronial coronet and has the received title of ‘The Countess’, suggesting the sitter may be of aristocratic European connection. On 23 February 1891 the European edition of the *New York Herald*, printed in Paris, also singled out ‘Mme Gertrude E. Devenish Walshe’s “Lilas Blanc”’ for special mention among sculpture shown at the Ladies’ Salon. Since she was 60 that June, both works suggest she was by then of long experience. The Russell-Coates bust is an un-reclaimed loan deposited by a Miss Lautour in 1928 –certainly a relative of Gertrude’s – but other works by her remain to be found.

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, the latter giving his English home as ‘La Tour’, South Ascot. His body was returned to lie in St Francis before his funeral and burial there on 23 May. His widow Gertrude, by then of ‘Ballencrieff’, South Ascot, died at Marseilles on 11 October 1907.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion on the identity of the sculptor of the bust in the Russell-Coates Museum, previously read, from the signature, as by ‘C.E. Devenish Walshe’ and misdated 1897.*

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