Sitter

**Alfred Ward Carter, 1872–1954 [Draft 3]**

Carter is the subject of a bronze-patinated plaster head bust by Elsie March (1884–1974) in the Bromley local collection, signed and slightly unclearly dated 1931 on the back of its integral rectangular plinth, the front of which bears the monogram ‘AWC’, clearly intended as its title. It may be a form of initial signature the sitter himself used and was the starting point for retrieving his lost identity, confirmed through other images of him found in the process.

Alfred Carter was born in Bradford on 28 February 1872, as fourth son of the seven children of Bennett Carter (1829–1912) and his second wife Eleanor (nėe Green, 1841–1912). Bennett was successful in the wool trade in Bradford. He served for 25 years as cashier for Jacob Behrens & Son and then set up his own manufacturing firm but gave that up to spend the last 20 years of his working life as company secretary and accountant of the St George’s Hall Company. The motive was his interest and ability in music, including as a church organist and a member of the Bradford Choral Society, and his enjoyment of musical company. Built in 1853 the St George’s Hall was, and remains, one of the largest concert venues in Britain. Bennett met many of the great musicians of the time who came to play there and was best known for running its subscription concerts for the 15 years up to his retirement in 1898. He had four children by his first wife Betsey (nėe Green, 1825–60). Eleanor, her younger sister, was already living as one of the family at the 1861 census and she and the widowed Bennett married in 1865. In 1898 their eldest child, Sydney (b. 1866) succeeded his father in his St George’s Hall roles and it is likely that the Carters were a generally musical family, Alfred being an amateur cellist.

Both Alfred and his immediately elder brother, Edward, became art teachers in Bradford by 1891. Where they trained remains to be found but surviving papers show Alfred at some early point spent time in Cheltenham. In or about 1898 he went to teach art at Hymers College in Hull and at the 1901 census was listed as an ‘artist sculptor’ in Sculcoates, a suburb where the March family then also lived. He met his Hull-born wife, Lucy Thornton Smurthwaite (1877–1965), through their joint membership there of an amateur orchestra, though she may have played professionally since she had trained as a pianist and viola player in Leeds, and qualified as LRAM.

Carter was appointed art master of St Dunstan’s College in Catford, south-east London, from late in 1901 and on 30 December that year married Lucy at Holy Trinity Church, Hull, prior to her joining him there. They had two sons: John ‘Jack’ Kenneth (1904–1974/8), was born in nearby Forest Hill and Edward Oliver (1906–92) in Catford: only the latter is known to have married, in 1936. At the 1911 census, the family address was ‘Somerleyton’, Keston, Kent (in easy reach of Catford by rail), where Mrs Carter taught private music pupils, as she had probably done since marriage. By 1911 Elsie March and her artistic siblings had also moved to the same area, their studio and foundry being at Goddendene, Locksbottom, about a mile away.

Carter continued to teach at St Dunstan’s and work primarily as painter himself until his retirement in 1932. Although called a ‘sculptor’ in 1891, there is no further evidence for it but he also designed the St Dunstan’s First World War memorial, a series of carved panels executed by Messrs Gawthorp & Sons and unveiled in 1922. On retirement he and his wife moved back north to Beck House, Acklam, Malton, Yorkshire where they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1951 and he died on 27 February 1954.

Elsie March, or others of her family, may have first encountered Carter in Hull but by the time of the 1901 census (when she was 16) the Marches had moved to Battersea, London, and it is more likely that they met as artistic Yorkshire neighbours in Kent. In 1932 March showed a piece, presumably a bust, entitled ‘A. W. Carter Esq.’ at the Royal British Artists autumn exhibition (no. 468) and another as ‘Alfred Carter’ in their winter show of 1935 (no. 226). It may have been made to mark Carter’s retirement, the plaster at Bromley likely to be the cast that March exhibited in 1932 and retained, since Carter’s family still has what was presumably his copy. They also report that a bronze was also made but sold to a buyer in Switzerland at an unrecorded date. This is likely to have been the one exhibited in 1935, priced at £25.

In autumn 1981 there was an exhibition of March family works at the Grosvenor Hotel in Park Lane, London, and on 2 August 1982 a studio sale (182 lots) at Sotheby’s Belgravia of the remaining sculpture and paintings by the late Elsie March and five of her deceased siblings. This, or an unsold portion, may be the source of at least some of the March material at Bromley but remains to be confirmed or not.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion on the Elsie March bust in the Bromley Historic Collections, LDBMP:97.60*

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