Sitter

**Alfred Ward Carter, 1872–1954**

Carter appears to be 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’ (or in another order), clearly intended as its title. It may be a form of initial signature the sitter himself used. Carter was born in Bradford, reportedly trained at the Slade School, and by the time of the 1901 census was an ‘artist sculptor’ in Sculcoates, a suburb of Hull, where the Marches then also lived. Later in the year he was appointed art master of St Dunstan’s College in Catford, south-east London, but on 30 December was back in Hull to marry Lucy Thornton Smurthwaite (1877–1965) at Holy Trinity Church. They had two sons (John Kenneth and Edward Oliver) who were 7 and 4 at the 1911 census, when the family address was ‘Somerleyton’, Keston, in Kent (in easy reach of Catford by rail), where Mrs Carter also taught private music pupils. By that time Elsie March and her artistic siblings had also moved to the same area, their studio and foundry being at Goddendene, Locksbottom, only about a mile away. Carter continued to teach at St Dunstan’s and work primarily as painter himself until his retirement in 1932. There is so far little evidence of sculptural work but he also designed the St Dunstan’s First World War memorial, a series of carved panels executed by Messrs Gawthorp and 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.

It seems likely that Carter and March were long known to each other and probably friends. In 1932 she showed a piece 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). The plaster bust now at Bromley may be a retained studio version of a commissioned presentation bronze marking Carter’s retirement, with one or other being the (unpriced) piece shown at the RBA in 1932. If so, the bronze has yet to be relocated. Since the 1935 portrait was priced at £25 it was for sale but might also have been the finished Bromley plaster or another copy, or a separate piece of the same sitter despite absence of the ‘W’ initial.

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*

PvdM 29.12. 21