

THE THREE WARRENDER SISTERS

by Mary Pache

Resting quietly near the lych gate of St Martin's churchyard is the memorial stone of Alice and Eleanor Warrender. They were of a family of six siblings with aristocratic roots in Midlothian. Their father was Sir George Warrender, 6th Baronet of Lochend and Bruntsfield, and they inherited Highgrove in 1894 from their mother's step-father, Sir Hugh Hume-Campbell. Seeing that the sisters are linked in burial it might be assumed that they lived together with brother, Hugh, at Highgrove. However, the lack of evidence of Alice's presence there suggests that she lived elsewhere, possibly with the third sister, Margaret, in Bruntsfield House, Midlothian or Wilton Crescent, Mayfair.

Eleanor is remembered as a committed benefactor of the people of Ruislip and for her energetic hands-on contributions to the social life of the neighbourhood - 'her generosity was a byword'. Her practical approach added a great deal to the value of her patronage as the lady who lived at the big house. She was a leading figure in the Guide Movement, and funded the Institute opposite St Martin's and the Church Rooms in Bury Street, both now demolished. She nursed on hospital ships in the South African War and was awarded the Croix de Guerre for her work with the French Red Cross during the First World War. There is a photograph in the Society's archives of the moment it was pinned on her uniform. Like her sister, Margaret, she became a Catholic and funded the building of the church of the Most Sacred Heart, first in Ruislip High Street where John Sanders now stands, then to its present site in Pembroke Road.

Alice was a private person and little is known about her except for the legend on the tombstone which records that she was the founder of the literary prize. She was born in Walter Scott country in Dunbar, a coastal town in the Midlothian region which also

encompassed Hawthornden Castle. She was a lady of letters, devoted to literature and to the work of the poet William Drummond of Hawthornden in particular. His life spanned the 16th and 17th centuries and although not well-known is sufficiently distinguished to have earned inclusion in the *Oxford New Anthology of Poetry* and Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. It is possible that Alice met his work in the latter volume as it was the poetry Bible of the Victorians and much cherished. The examples in the two anthologies tend towards a melancholy attitude to life and are unlikely to have lifted spirits in cold, dark northern winters. In *Summons to Love* he describes the world as a lover sees it through highly rose-coloured spectacles, then dismisses it as worthless because 'She' is not there. In *The World a Hunt* he presents a gritty metaphor of the World as a hunter who sends the greyhounds of 'Lust, Sickness, Envy, Care' to bring us poor mortals down, and if we manage to evade those Old Age is in hot pursuit casting its ruthless nets.

Alice instituted the prize in 1919 making it one of the UK's oldest. It is administered by the Hawthornden Trust and the terms of the award are as she set them down. The winning piece of literature can be in any form as long as it is imaginative and by a writer whose age is under forty-one years. The candidates are chosen by the judges, submissions are not considered. An unattributed comment in Wikipedia remarks that the works adjudged are 'middle of the road'. The prize money has been adjusted generously over the years and the present rate is £10000. It has been awarded to novels, natural history, biography, travel, art, poetry and drama. Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia*, a biography of John Clare, the collected poems of Vita Sackville West and Sir Michael Levey's *Early Renaissance* are a selection of the winners. The 2010 award went to a poet, Alice Oswald, for *A Sleepwalk on the Severn*.

Henry Williamson was one of the early recipients for *Tarka the Otter* in 1928. He relates how he bought a field, Ox's Cross, in North Devon with the £100 prize, the going rate in the twenties. In the spirit of the Writers' Retreat in present-day Hawthornden Castle he built a hut on the land that enabled him to write 35 books in peace and quiet, away from his five young children. He describes the ambience of the place: 'Away to the south rose the dim blue tors of Dartmoor, while eastwards rose the curves of Exmoor, lilac in the air of early evening.' A good hundred pounds' worth?

I made the suggestion that Alice might have lived with her other sister, Margaret, on the grounds that they were both of a literary bent. Margaret is known to have spent most of her life at Bruntisfield House, Midlothian but she died in Wilton Crescent, Mayfair.

She wrote *Illustrations of Scottish History in the 16th Century* in 1889 and *Walks Near Edinburgh* published in 1890 with her own black-and-white illustrations. *Marchmont and the Humes of Polwarth*, a history of the family, was dedicated to her benefactor, Sir Hugh Hume-Campbell of Marchmont, also, as we know, of Highgrove. The Society's archives contain photographs of Marchmont, a prestigious manor house in Midlothian which had been called Bruntisfield House and Warrender House at various times. The estate was called Bruntisfield in earlier years and became contracted to Bruntisfield through usage. It was restored to its traditional title by the 8th Baronet in 1942.

Research for this article has made me aware that there can be a wealth of material behind bald facts on a gravestone.

Sources

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