

THE CARTERS AND LAMBERTS OF TELHAM COURT



Telham Court occupies an impressive position to the south of Battle, with a view to the Abbey across the sunken Powdermill Lane and beyond it to the town. It is now owned by a commercial organisation but for a while it was not just a farm on the estates of the Abbey Websters but a country house in its own right.

The Quarry Hill farm emerged from Abbey ownership in the mid-nineteenth century when the Webster family fell on hard times. They were compelled to sell the Abbey itself to the future duke of Cleveland, but before then they had sold the Quarry Hill area. This was no small estate: it ran the length of Battle Hill and Hastings Road from the railway to Telham Lane, and included Loose, Telham and Downbarn farms; north of Hastings Road its lands stretched almost to Marley Lane. In the 1871 census it was recorded as having 553 acres and employing 15 men and 16 boys.

The buyer was Samuel Carter (1805-78), a native of Coventry. He had qualified as a solicitor with his uncle at Birmingham at just the right time, for the firm was engaged as solicitors to the new London and Birmingham Railway in 1831 and then to other railways too. He moved to London in 1850 and retired ten years later. He bought Quarry Hill and rebuilt the house in 1857 but he also had property in Kenilworth and Coventry (for which he was briefly MP in 1868). He sold the Battle estate in 1875, moving back to the Midlands. He died in January 1878 at his house close to Sussex Square in Bayswater. His widow Maria died there two years later.

Carter was not just a business man. He was a committed Unitarian and had considerable interest in art and literature. He married Maria Concordia Ronalds of Highbury at Chiswick in 1833, and they had four children. Maria was the sister of Francis, later Sir Francis Ronalds, the meteorologist and inventor whose account is given in the Sciences section of this website.

The Carter family had no further connection with Battle. Maria's niece Julia, who looked after her uncle Francis Ronalds, left Battle after his death in 1873. Samuel and Maria's children all did well. Their eldest son Alexander became a barrister but did not practise and died at Kenilworth in the same year as his father. John was also a barrister, marrying at Lichfield in 1876 and becoming well-known for his books, particularly on electoral malpractice; the pair had no children. Jane married the barrister John Martineau Fletcher at Battle in 1868. They had five children, all born in Surrey.

Another son, Hugh, became a well-known portrait-painter. His portrait of his uncle Francis Ronalds is in the National Portrait Gallery. The DNB refers to his exhibiting at the Royal Academy between 1859 and 1902, and at the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours. It states that he created mainly subject paintings, and that his work shows delicate colouring and subtle delineation of character. Hugh married Maria Bottomley in Kensington in 1866 and they had several children, all in London.

The next occupants of Telham Court were the Lambert family. Originally from Gloucester, Thomas Lambert made considerable money from his engineering business, “hydraulic and gas engineers, patentees and manufacturers of high pressure valve cocks, closets, pumps, sluice valves, wrought iron tubes and fillings” at his works in Lambeth and Walsall.¹ This allowed his sons a good education and an even better inheritance. One of them was Edward Tiley Lambert (1844-1908), who bought the Telham Court estate from Samuel Carter. He married Jane McLaren of Fife in 1877 and had two sons. The elder was Henry McLaren Lambert (born 1879), who might have been expected to inherit the estate. He joined the local volunteers² and then became a professional soldier, serving as an officer in the second South African war of 1899-1902, being then posted to India where he was an ADC to three successive viceroys and being promoted Captain. After 1908 he spent most of his time in East Africa, where he must have mixed with the cream of the colonials of Kenya described in many places, for example (mainly in a later war) by James Fox in *White mischief*.

Lambert returned to the colours in 1914 but did not survive long. He was killed in the Second Battle of Ypres in May 1915. His name is on the Battle memorials and on that of the Muthaiga Country Club at Nairobi. This club was opened on New Year’s Eve 1913, so he must have been a very early member.

A memorial service for him was held at St Mary’s in July 1915. His estate was later in the year valued at £26085; this can at best have included only an estimate of the value of his art collection, which went under the hammer at Christie’s two years later and appears to have done rather well.³ Lambert was unmarried.

Telham Court did not long remain in the Lambert family. Reginald (1881-1968) was for a short time a gentleman cricketer for Sussex and also served in the war; he was then a councillor in Battle. He sold the estate in 1928, but by that time the property was down to little more than 120 acres thanks to earlier disposals, for example for housing along the Hastings Road. Reginald and his wife Evelyn Dick Cunyngham moved to Wiltshire. He died at Shaftesbury in Dorset early in 1968. The house was used as Glengorse Preparatory School for some years and is now owned by the Holmes Property Group. There were three sisters. One died young, but the other two married the same man, one after the other: Sir John Gilmour, a baronet and a prominent Scottish Conservative politician.

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See Sir Francis Ronalds

¹ Post Office Directory for London, 1882

² His appointment as Second Lieutenant (Extra Supernumerary) in the 1st Cinque Ports Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment is given in the London Gazette on 3 May 1899.

³ Hastings Observer, 21 April 1917.