

Chapter 2.27

HARRY AND ELINOR GOFFEY

1871 - 1952



Madonna with Child and Two Angels. This large (35x38 cm) print of Botticelli's well-known work is a mezzotint engraving by Harry Goffey and is the only item of his work that is mentioned in his will. It would have been printed by Harry and his brother Alfred at their premises in Boxmoor.

Chapter 2.27. Harry and Elinor Goffey

Harry first appears in the historical record in the 1881 census, as a “*scholar*” aged ten, living at 268, Upper Parliament Street, Liverpool, with his parents Alfred and Mary Goffey, his sisters Mabel and Daisy, his brother James and a female domestic servant. He is shown as having been born in Walton, indicating that he was almost certainly born at 10, Gray Road, Walton-on-the Hill, the address of Alfred and Mary Goffey at the time of the 1871 census. By strange coincidence, in 1881 Elinor’s Semple relatives - great aunt Sarah, aunts Sarah, Ann, and Jane, uncle John and cousins Theodore, Adriana, Herbert and Jane - were living just down the road at 23, Upper Parliament Street.

Shortly after the 1881 census Harry would have started at Merchant Taylors School in Crosby on the northern edge of Liverpool. At this time his father’s wholesale grocery business at 56 Whitechapel is assumed to have been keeping the family in a reasonably prosperous style. As described in Chapter 2.22 we do not know what happened to the business after the death of Alfred in 1887, when Harry would have been 16 years old. Some time between 1887 and 1892 Harry went to Australia and worked on a sheep farm; neither the location of the farm nor the identity of the farmer are known but information from the late Kevin Goffey of Bellmere, Queensland, suggests it was not a farm belonging to any of the extended Goffey family.

By 1893 Harry was back in Liverpool and was awarded in that year the Royal Humane Society bronze medal; Harry “*at great personal risk, saved Crawford Strain from drowning at Warrenpoint, County Down, on 30th July 1893*”. The R.H.S. records of case no. 26630, describe the near-drowning of 22-year old student Crawford Strain at Warrenpoint, County Down. Harry, then a bookkeeper of Rake Lane, Liscard, Cheshire, and Horace Fleming, also a bookkeeper, of Walton Road, Liscard, were seen by an eye witness to rescue Mr. Strain – *Mr. Strain was unable to swim and whilst bathing was carried out of his depth – nearly high water – 50 yards from shore, depth 12 to 15 feet, strong wind blowing. The saviors (sic) both dived in off a lighter and swam out to the drowning man – both seized him one on either side and brought him to the lighter then to the beach.* Horace Fleming would seem almost certainly to have been one of Harry’s friends; possibly they were on one of Harry’s sailing trips to Ireland that are mentioned in my father’s records.

As Harry’s occupation in 1893 is given in the R.H.S. citation as “*bookkeeper*”, it must have been soon after that event that he entered the Chelsea Polytechnic School of Art. Elinor Semple (pictured right) was also a student at the Chelsea Polytechnic and the pair were married two years later at the Tunbridge Register Office, on 15th June 1895. As is well-known in the family William and Mary Semple did not



approve of their daughter's choice of husband, to the extent that Harry was not allowed in the Semple house and Elinor was disinherited by her father. The reasons for this are not clear, but Harry and Elinor's marriage in a register office was not in keeping with the Presbyterian traditions of the Liverpool Goffeys and it seems unlikely that any members of either family were present, or if they were they chose not to sign the register as witnesses. Harry's address on the certificate is given simply as *Bidboro'*, a small village between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, while Elinor's is Clay Hill, Bushey – the address at which their first child, John, was born in late 1897. Elinor's parents at this time were living in Putney.

The exact moves of Harry and Elinor in the ensuing few years are not clear. In the 1901 census Harry is shown as an artist/painter aged 29 with Elinor also aged 29, sons John aged three and Philip aged one and a female domestic servant living at 1, Egerton Grove, Liscard, Wallasey, Cheshire, just across the Mersey from Liverpool. Also appearing in the census record is Agnes M. B. Semple, Elinor's 22-year old sister who is recorded as a university student, although whether she is a visitor or resident in the house is not clear. The enumerator's record has been modified in another hand, presumably Harry's, to add "*sculptor*" to his occupation and to add "*Oxford*" to his sister-in-law's university.

Note: According to my father, "Aunt Barbara" (A.M.B. Semple) was Adriana Mary Barbara Semple. This appears to have been an error; in view of the additions made to the enumerator's record referred to above it is likely that Harry read through and corrected the enumerator's record so that enumerator's error can be discounted and the correct first name must be Agnes.

Soon after 1901 the family returned to Bushey on a permanent basis, according to my father "*the attraction being the School of Art in Bushey founded and dominated by the wealthy dilettante Count von Herkomer.*" The other five children were born in Bushey - Dennis in 1904, Mary in 1905, Cecil in 1906, Patrick in 1908 and James in 1910. The family moved to Berkhamsted in 1910, principally on account of the schools, moving into a large house called *St. Mildred's* at 95, Cross Oak Road. The



photograph above shows Harry and Elinor in their garden, possibly at 95, Cross Oak Road. The six sons all attended Berkhamsted School, while Mary went to Sandwell School in Finchley (run by Elinor's cousin Adriana A. Semple) and Berkhamsted School for Girls. From my father's recollections of his childhood, the family were not well off since Harry's income was unpredictable, and money had to be borrowed on occasion – apparently from Guy Semple, Elinor's brother, to buy food. After the death of Harry and Elinor's youngest child, James, in

Australia in 2005 we learnt that James's future in-laws' view of the Goffeys in the late 1920s – early 1930s had been “*too much education, not enough food*”. After commuting to Bushey on a motorbike for some time, Harry expanded his skills into etching and mezzotint engraving and set up, in partnership with his younger brother Alfred, a fine art printing business in Hammerfield, Boxmoor. Harry exhibited his works at the Royal Academy on several occasions, one of his engravings is in the Royal Collection, some are held by the British Museum, some in the museum of the Bushey School of Art and a self-portrait in oils hangs in Berkhamsted's old Town Hall. Unfortunately oil painting was not Harry's forte, although his etchings and engravings can still be found in galleries and for sale on the internet. Along with some income from photography, the business kept the family in “shabby gentility” (my father's words) for many years.



Elinor Semple in the late 1930s. A lithograph by Oliver Pemsel, her son-in-law.

I remember my grandmother from 1944 when we moved to Berkhamsted after spending the war years in the Pemsels' house in Yorkshire. She would have been in her early 70s then and was very much my idea of a granny, being humorous, very tolerant of small grandsons who liked to play in her large garden and was always reading; she would even have a book in her hand while in the kitchen doing the cooking. Elinor, her sister Agnes and her cousin Adriana were all insistent about certain aspects of their ancestry. Firstly they insisted that the origins of their branch of the Semple family go back to 1585 and the marriage of John Semple, a son of Lord Sempill, to Mary Livingston, one of the “four Maries” (maids) of Mary Queen of Scots. Coincidentally, the only work of Harry's in the Royal Collection is a large (49x26cm) colour mezzotint engraving of the memorial portrait of Mary Queen of Scots (ref. RCIN 618312) commissioned after Mary's death by a devoted lady-in-waiting.

It is a fact that a number of Semples are buried in vaults under the nave of the now-ruined Holyrood Abbey. However, to date nothing of the Semple ladies' claim can be substantiated as the earliest record we have of John Semple (Chapter 3.13) dates from 1785.

Elinor, her sister Agnes and her cousin Adriana additionally claimed that their grandfather, William Moore, was a descendant of a younger son of the earls of Drogheda, a now extinct Irish title. This connection is covered in some detail in Chapter 3.12; the claim is in my view a myth. However there is no doubt that the Semple family was well connected in Scotland. Elinor's father, William Semple, was a nephew of his father's business partner James MacInroy, the 1st baron MacInroy of Lude, and would also have been aware that his cousin Adriana MacInroy had married well, acquiring the title of Lady MacDonald of Dalchosnie. He would probably have been disappointed, to say the least, at his daughter's marriage to a penniless artist.

When Harry died on 1st January 1952 at Napsbury Hospital, St. Albans, his wealth was far from that of his Liverpool uncles; his estate amounted to £176 14s 6d to be divided into fifths between brother Alfred, daughter Mary, and sons Dennis, Patrick and James. Why the other surviving son, Philip, was not included is a mystery. Items specifically mentioned in the will were a framed colour mezzotint of Botticelli's *Madonna with Child and Two Angels* and a framed colour etching *Three Horses' Heads* by Lucy Kemp-Welch. The house at 95, Cross Oak Road, Berkhamsted, is still there; it is a large three-storeyed Victorian semi-detached with a large room on the top floor which Harry used as his studio for painting and photography. I can still remember having a photograph taken there with Ann in 1944 or 1945; we had to stand still as Harry fumbled about with a black cloth covering both his head and a very large plate camera until the flash of magnesium powder going up in smoke signalled that we didn't have to keep still any longer.



Alfred Goffey (right), Harry's younger brother and partner in their fine art business, with Philip Goffey on a winter walk to Marlin's Chapel, probably in the 1930s