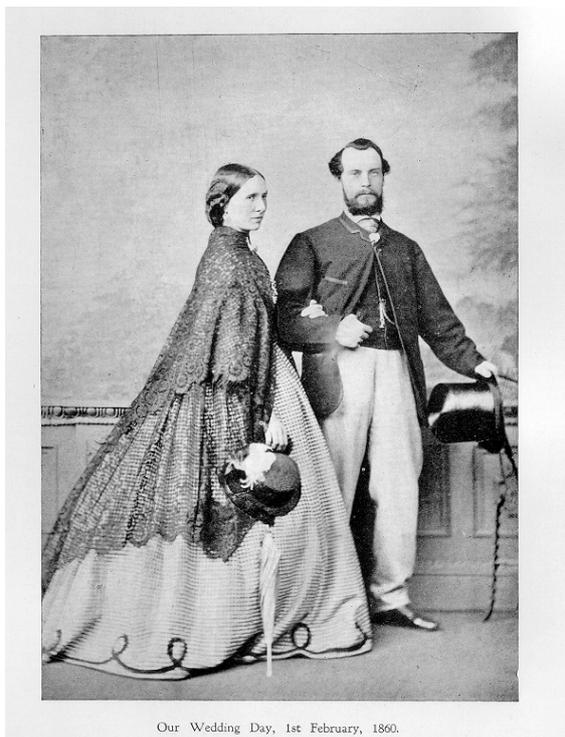


The Family of Merton Russell-Cotes and Annie Nelson Clark



Merton Russell Cotes was born in May 1835 to Samuel and Elizabeth Cotes of Tettenhall, Staffordshire, and was the youngest boy in a family of ten. His father died intestate when Merton was 7 years old and the entire estate was inherited by his eldest brother. Merton was cared for by his sister, Clara, and her husband, James MacEwan, who raised and educated him in Glasgow. In 1854 Merton met Annie Nelson Clark, daughter of John King Clark and Ann Nelson. They married on 1st February, 1860, at St. Jude's Episcopal Church in Glasgow.

Merton and Annie had five children. Their first child, Ella Annie Elizabeth, was born on 5th October, 1860 at Paisley Road, Glasgow. Merton then took up a position with the Scottish Amicable Society which involved a move to Dublin, where Clara Georgina Emily was born on 23rd July, 1862. After several years in Ireland, the job took the family to Bowden in Cheshire. Anita Mertona was born there on 14th January, 1866, followed by Charlotte Alfreda on 26th April, 1867. Sadly both girls died at a young age; Anita died in the house in which she was born in 1870.

At some time before this, Merton took up a position as a Wine and Spirit merchant, as well as the manager of a hotel in Glasgow. It was here that their only son, Herbert, was born on 25th September, 1870.

On 21st July, 1874 Charlotte died of hydrocephalus, aged only 8. She was followed two months later by Annie's father, John King Clark.

Once a wealthy man, it seems John suffered some financial hardship. He was listed as a bankrupt in Scotland in 1847 and 1854 respectively. His will of 1874 names Annie as executrix which she declined. Her cousin, James Hutton Watkins, a solicitor, took over the duty. In December of that year, the estate of John King Clark was declared to be worth just £21-6-9. This is a little under a thousand pounds in today's currency.

In 1876 Merton bought The Bath Hotel in Bournemouth. The hotel was closed in 1878 for extensive renovation and reopened in 1880 as The Royal Bath Hotel, prospering beyond all expectations. Merton became closely involved in town politics and was elected to the Bournemouth Board of Improvement in 1881. When the town was granted borough status in 1890, Merton presented the town with a mace and Annie gave the Mayoral Badge of Office.

In 1891 Merton and Annie's youngest daughter, Clara, married Joseph Drew. The couple had one daughter, Gwendoline, born in 1893. Unfortunately Clara's marriage didn't last and the couple were divorced several years later. Gwendoline married a naturalised German Jew, Ronald Stanford (born Rudolf Albert Samelson), in 1915. Clara never remarried and died in London in 1916 at the age of 54.

Merton became Mayor of Bournemouth in 1894 and soon after started making plans for East Cliff Hall. This was to be the family home and later became the Art Gallery and Museum.

Merton and Annie's son, Herbert, married Edith Quarry in 1899. The couple went on to have three children; Evelyn, born 1900, married Norman Jacks of Bournemouth, Anita, born 1906, married John Curtis Cosgrove of California, USA and Edith, born 1911, married George Parsons of Bournemouth.

East Cliff Hall was finished in 1901 and Merton presented it to Annie for her birthday. Later that year their eldest daughter, Ella, married Edward Stebbings. The couple had two children; Edward, born in 1903 who died in a tragic skiing accident in Switzerland in 1939 and Phyllis, born in 1904, who went on to marry Harry Lee-Duncan.

Merton and Annie went on to give many more generous gifts to the town, including the freehold of East Cliff Hall, Merton's collection of art and funding for three more galleries, added when the collection outgrew the house.

They celebrated their Diamond anniversary in 1920. By this time Annie's health was deteriorating and she died soon after at the age of 84. Merton survived Annie by just 8 months and was buried alongside her on February 1st, 1921 at the age of 85. This would have been their 61st wedding anniversary.