

Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt 14th Lord Berners 1883- 1950.

The Berners title is an ancient one. Sir John Bouchier, the son of a French Count and daughter of an English duke, the great grandson of Edward III, took his wife's maiden name for his barony.

John Berners was a man of action, a soldier, a diplomat and Chancellor of the Exchequer under Henry VIII. The title descended through a zigzag of distant cousins and passed through women and lay dormant for 200 years before 1720.

Gerald's paternal grandmother, Lady Berners, inherited the title rather than marrying it. She had been born Emma Wilson, an only child in a family well established in Leicestershire and Norfolk. She married Sir Henry Tyrwhitt when she was 17 and he 29. The couple had 9 sons and 3 daughters and Gerald's father, Hugh, was the 3rd son.

Gerald's father went into the Royal Navy at the age of 13 and was quite successful in that career. In 1882, a 26 year old lieutenant, he married 31 year old Julia Foster, the daughter of Isabelle and William Foster, an immensely wealthy ironmaster who made his fortune with the expansion of the railways. On her wedding day Julia received £30,000(today 1.5-2million pounds). When William died in 1899 he left £2.5 million.

Gerald was born on 18th September 1883, the only child of Julia and Hugh; whose marriage was not particularly successful. Hugh continued his absence in the navy because his wife 'bored and irritated him'.

Gerald's education started with private tutors, he then went to Cheam and Eton, followed by various periods in Germany and Italy becoming fluent in those languages. He eventually entered the diplomatic service and serves on the Continent during and after the first world war.

He inherited the titles of his unmarried uncle Sir Raymond Tyrwhitt-Wilson, 13th Lord Berners, who died aged 63. Gerald was the only son of his next brother and so the natural heir and became 14th Lord Berners.

Gerald became a composer, novelist and painter and led the lifestyle of the rich of that time. He had a house in London and Italy as well as Faringdon where he associated with and entertained many famous names in the music, literary academic and art world as well as the idle rich. .

When Gerald was almost 50 he met Robert Heber-Percy(1912-1987). Gerald invited Robert to live in Faringdon House with him. Apart from a short period during the second world war Robert lived and travelled with Gerald for some 15 years.

A week before he died Gerald made a will leaving almost everything to Robert, who subsequently left the Folly tower in trust to the people, of Faringdon.

From Chris France papers