

Lord Berners Abroad.

For about 300 years, upper class young men would undertake a Grand Tour of Europe in the company of a chaperone. When Gerald Tyrwhitt, later to become the 14th Baron Berners, left school, the era of the Grand Tour was over, as rail and steamships made the Continent of Europe an easily accessible holiday destination.

Here was a young man who had to have a career and for whom the diplomatic service was considered a good option. Foreign languages were a requisite, so Gerald was sent abroad. First to France, to Normandy, in 1900. His family knew of the widowed daughter of an impoverished aristocrat who took in paying guests to her château at Résenlieu, near Gacé (not very far from Faringdon's present-day twin town, Le Mêle sur Sarthe).

Gerald loved everything there, the food, the pace of life, the countryside : *“An extraordinary feeling of well-being came upon me, such as I did not remember experiencing since the early days of my childhood.....The air I breathed seemed full of liberty and lightness”*.

His book, **“The Château de Résenlieu”** is delightful, written in a very easy, readable style, unlike that which he adopted later in his novels. It is full of the contentment he felt and the pleasures experienced, both in Normandy, and, for a short time, in Paris.

Having mastered French, Gerald's next linguistic challenge was German, so he was promptly despatched to a crammer in Dresden in early 1901. This was a very different experience – life, people, music (mainly Wagner), everything was strange to him, and was made difficult by his having no prior knowledge of the language.

In Dresden, Gerald was to stay at Frau Eberhardt's pension *“a rather shabby looking stucco house”* in the company of other young Englishmen, also there to learn German. His first impressions of the city were depressing, *“There was not a single building that gave me any pleasure to look at, and the inhabitants were on a par with the architecture”*. His spirits were lifted later on, when he was able to leave Dresden and visit, first the Harz mountains, then the beautiful town of Weimar. Here then, is a second book, simply called **“Dresden”**, with descriptions full of detail and humour, that appeals to a reader looking for a light-hearted account of a young man's travels, and wishing to know about life in Germany before WW1.

These two books are published by Turtle Point Press and Helen Marx Books.