

The Hendersons of Berkley House, Berkley Frome, Somerset, England

In the churchyard of St. Mary's Church at Berkley is a Henderson Memorial

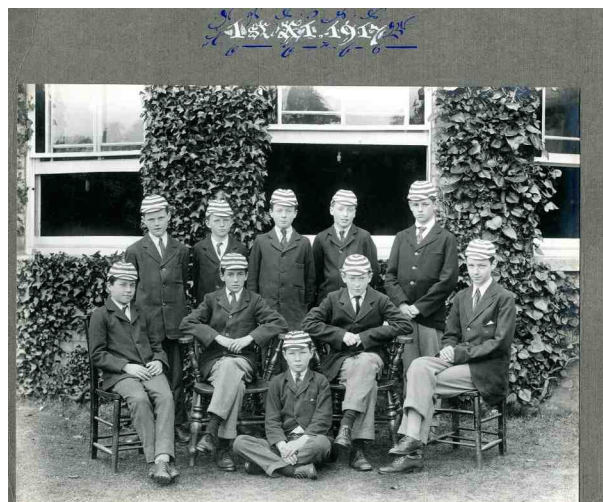


It commemorates **Mr William Henderson** who died on 1st April 1910 whilst living at Berkley House, his widow **Jessie Dennistoun** who died in 1941 and their eldest infant son, **Charles Paton Henderson**, who sadly only lived for three months and died in April 1899. Mr **Malcolm Devereux Henderson** was buried in the churchyard in 1997 but born in Cardiff, Wales 1921 and so not, as this article will show, a *Berkley House Henderson*.

William Henderson, born on 12th November 1842, had moved to Berkley House in the late 19th century from Withington Hall, a large country house outside Manchester. He had grown up there with his three brothers [Charles, Peter and John] and four sisters. Their father, **Charles Paton Henderson**, was a successful trader in what was then known as "The East Indies". When Charles Paton Henderson died in 1887 he left an estate net of death taxes [then only 6%] of £392,729 2s 6d - more than £50 million in 2020 values according to the Bank of England.

William Henderson and his younger brother, John, were appointed initially as the only two family executors despite having two elder brothers and William continued the family trading business, CP Henderson, at 87 Moseley Street, Manchester until his retirement to **Berkley House**. Of William's siblings, his sister, **Christian Alexandrina Paton [later Mrs Ross 1837 -1892]** was a celebrated sportswoman of her day [CHEADLE ARCHERS - a mystery solved - Metreman - archery, poetry and life stories](#). His eldest brother, Charles Paton, and elder brother, Peter Paton, each died in Torquay, Devon in 1889 aged 54 and 50 respectively, two years after their father.

In 1901 the Census shows the occupants at **Berkley House** to be **William Henderson** and his wife with two daughters aged 11 and 9, a Governess and seven servants. Later in 1903 there was another son born at Berkley House on the 25th September and named **William Bankier Henderson** [known as **Billy** all his life] who went on to Summerfields as his "Prep School" where he was a keen cricketer. Billy in the photograph of the Summerfields School 1917 1st XI is seated on the far right. As his father's only surviving son, **Billy** was the only male heir.



Summerfields is still a boarding school in Oxford for young boys preparing them for their next school which in Billy's case was Mr Brinton's House at Eton College. Later **Billy** would go up to Magdalen College, Oxford.

In 1908 Admiral Charles Ramsay Arbuthnot [related to the Arbuthnot baronetcy] retired to Frome and became involved with local Somerset politics before his death and burial in Frome in September 1913. His son Geoffrey also joined the Royal Navy [and would later be Admiral Sir Geoffrey Arbuthnot KCB.,DSO] and on 22 October 1913 married **Jessie Marguerite Henderson**, Billy's elder sister. Later in the 1930's, **Billy** and his friend Rom Landau were invited to cruise in the China Station on board the British warship, HMS Sussex, then under the command of Captain Geoffrey Arbuthnot being Billy's brother-in-law.

When **William Henderson** died on 1st April 1910 his estate [including **Berkley House** together with farms in the Parishes of both Berkley and Rodden] was valued for probate [net of death taxes @ 8%] at £242,838-0s- 11d. The Bank of England inflation calculator would value such a figure as almost £30 million in 2020. Apart from a generous annuity for his widow, **Jessica Dennistoun Henderson**, and bequests of £25k [about £2.5 million in 2020] to each of his two daughters, **Jessie Marguerite Henderson** and **Christian Adeline Henderson**, his Will left his only son, **Billy**, as heir to most of the rest of the estate upon reaching his majority. William Henderson's "Advowson & Right of Presentation of and to the **Rectory and Parish Church of Berkley**" [*Advowson or patronage is/was the right in English law of a patron to present to the diocesan bishop a nominee for appointment to a vacant ecclesiastical benefice or church living, a process known as presentation*] was bequeathed to his widow as long as she remained at **Berkley House**.

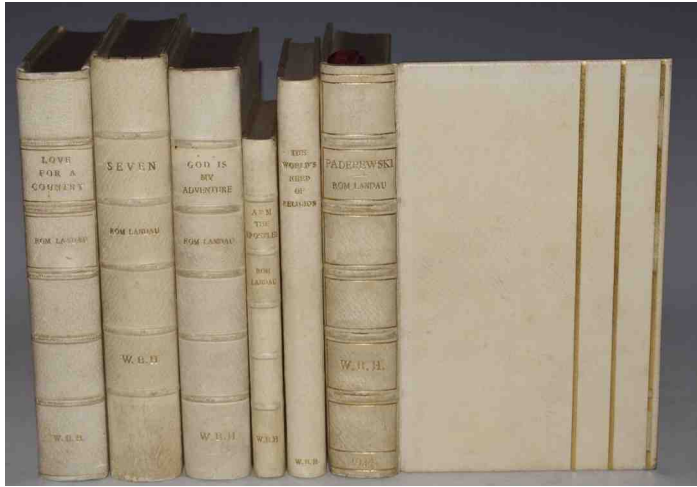
Billy Henderson came into his inheritance aged 21 in 1924 and abandoned his Oxford University studies for the art world in Paris and was in later years a much respected artist himself. The size of the estate he inherited from his father was probably much reduced by the First World War [and later by the 1930's Great Depression] but would still have been many millions of pounds by 2020 values. Billy was generous from the word go and a patron of the arts. In Paris he met **Rom Landau** [four years older than Billy] then a sculptor manqué, penniless journalist and art critic [later a successful author] whose origin was Polish but who was living mainly in Berlin and Paris. His published work on modern mainland European art in 1925, "*Minos der Unbestechliche*" [*Minos the Incorruptible*] was acclaimed by many including Thomas Mann who described it as "one of the best books on art ever written". Little wonder that when, in 1927, **Billy** and **Rom Landau** met in the Paris art world they had much in common and became good [indeed lifelong] friends. Rom Landau's writing was not yet commercially successful and **Billy** seems to have become **Rom Landau's Patron** and for the next few years. <http://www.romlandau.org/>

On 2nd June 1927, **Christian Adeline Henderson** [Billy's eldest sister] is married to Robert Cathcart Bruce of that family's peerage. She dies in 1990 leaving two children, Fairlie and Mariaane.

In 1929 with both sisters now married, Billy invited Rom Landau to stay at **Berkley House** from where Rom Landau published his first book in English in the Autumn of 1929. It was a "romantic" biography of *General Pilsudski* who had brought independence to Poland after WWI. The book was dedicated to "**Mrs J.D. Henderson and Billy**" and the preface in those days included the author's address which was printed as **Berkley House**, Frome, Somerset. Significantly, the dedication also included the words "offered in gratitude". That may have been an acknowledgement of their hospitality and/or of Billy's patronage. Rom Landau often presented one or more of his sculptures to hosts in thanks for their hospitality at various houses in England. If anyone knows of such a sculpture still remaining in the Berkeley area it would be of great interest [info@romlandau.org]



In September 1929 **Billy** and Rom Landau are registered as "[jointly](#)" paying the "[Council Rates](#)" [now Council Tax] on 33 Halsey Street in Chelsea, London and continued to do so until 1933. From then on until the Second World War, **Billy** received a signed first [and specially white leather-bound] edition of each of Rom Landau's publications on birthdays and at Christmas. They were not always thoroughly read ! - the 1934 "Best Seller" [*God is My Adventure*] still has uncut pages and *Minos* was passed on to Dr Glen Davidson in September 1963 who was another of Rom Landau's close friends then in the United States of America. Rom Landau's 1934 biography of *Paderewski* - the internationally renowned Polish pianist - also carried a printed dedication to "**WBH**".



Following Rom Landau's international success with *God is My Adventure*, he and **Billy** went their own ways and in 1939 Rom Landau volunteers for wartime service with the RAF. On 7th January 1941, aged 37, **Billy** was commissioned as a [temporary Captain in the Royal Marines](#) and served out the remainder of World War II in India as an ADC to two successive Viceroy's of India, the 2nd Marquess of Linlithgow KG and then Field Marshall Lord Wavell GCB. This photograph of **Billy** in India was taken by Sir Cecil Beaton [later a friend and neighbour in Tisbury, Wiltshire] during his photographic tour on behalf of the British Wartime Ministry of Information.



In 1948 **Billy** is remembered in Rom Landau's last published novel [*Odysseus*] which was also Rom Landau's penultimate non-Moroccan publication where the printed dedication is;

"To William Bankier Henderson after the first 21 years of a very precious friendship 1927 - 1948"

Billy was also photographer for Rom Landau's autobiographical books "*Seven*"[1936] and "*Personalia*"[1949]

William Henderson's widow, **Jessie Dennistoun Henderson**, later moved to Claverton Lodge, Bathwick Hill, Bath where she died on 2nd November 1941 leaving an estate for probate of £5,457 [about £280,000 in 2020 values].

Upon returning from India with his Indian batman Ghulam, as valet, **Billy** moved to a fine coastal house in North Devon much of whose land and woods he later donated to The National Trust. There he continued to host Rom Landau on the latter's UK visits from the USA where he was a university lecturer in the 1950's/1960's.

This is a painting by **Billy** of the Viceroy's House, New Delhi, India 1945



and of his Indian attendant, Ghulam.



In 1973 **Billy** made his last visit to Morocco to be with **Rom Landau** who had retired there before dying in 1974. Billy remained a bachelor up to his death in 1993 and the "*Berkley House Henderson*" male line so ended.

There was a fine obituary in *The Independent* on 8th October 1993 [Obituary: William Henderson | The Independent](#) | [The Independent](#) Billy had been an admired artist, generous benefactor and talented photographer. It may be possible to add Billy's name to a restored family Memorial in St. Mary's Churchyard, Berkley with the inscription "*William Bankier Henderson 1903 - 1993*".

David Denison, January 2022

Volunteer Research Director

The Rom Landau Project

Comments and Recollections most welcome to

info@romlandau.org

www.romlandau.org

photographs of Berkley House in the early 1900's.

Especially welcome would be any