

Times past

A child's memories of Harman & Co., 177 New Bond Street, London, 1914 – 1920



1 Lambert & Co., 10–12 Coventry Street, circa 1880. The photograph is annotated with the names of those shown (left to right):
B. Blackburn Senr, J.W.H. Powell, J. Mortimer Senr, J. Rabbits, George Lambert.
The firm was absorbed by Harman & Co. Ltd in 1916.

By Lola Harman, born 1910,
daughter of Sydney B. Harman [1871–1920]

When I was allowed to come to London with Daddy, I found Harman's almost too good for description, from the painted sign with an 'old silversmith', which hung above the jingling old-fashioned glass door, through a long, narrow, emporium crammed, floor to ceiling,

either side, with behind-glass gold and silver objects to that private inner windowless room where we lunched. There was a deep glass-topped central table, a sort of glorified counter, I suppose, [though my father wouldn't have had it called that], full of sparkling jewellery.

My father's first act on arriving with me was sending dear old Woolbarb for plovers' eggs, arranged in the prettiest of small green moss nests, for my lunch. There

was a patterned carpet, reddish, on the floor there, which left ample margins of glossy green linoleum, perfect for my brother and I, as we always did, to play farms; allowed to help ourselves from the cupboards, there were all sorts of silver animals including numerous cow creamers, so we must have made a lot of extra work for the small army of polishing porters - Woolbarb, who I called Rhubarb, Streep and Joe. But nobody appeared to object, and clients merely smiled indulgently when Daddy, as he always did, proudly indicated us sitting on the floor surrounded by silver. I remember also there being a free-standing, tower-like case on cabriole legs. Ugly in itself, its glass shelves were laden with miniature silver furniture that were not toys but collector's pieces – even I mustn't touch.

Woolbarb used to do all the cooking at Harman's and we would use some of the silver plates to eat off, making meals there a double treat. But my father never did justice to the meals, always with one ear cocked for the 'ping' of the door.

All the elderly staff bustled around non-stop, though I never saw old Kilsby, in his white surplus-like gown, so much as look up, so I thought he might as well have

been stuffed and do believe he was there just for the effect, with his blowlamp and odds and ends behind a dark-green curtain, repairing things. But his inattention was more than made up for by pretty, bubbly, red-headed little Miss O'Leary. That popular song 'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling' has always made me think of her; she'd dart from behind her desk directly when she heard us come in and we were often left in her charge.

It would have been about then, too, I was taken to visit the Crichtons, probably, though I'm not sure, the then Bond Street jewellers and silversmiths. At any rate, their daughter Billie had this remarkably fine dolls' house, so huge as to make mine a shoe box, with room after room magnificently furnished, down to a real water-flushing lavatory, with a seat to lift up and down and a chain to pull which worked, and in its surrounding garden even a pigeon-cote, with fantails perched about. All in all it was such a dream that for years and years I spoke of 'Billie Crichton's dolls' house'.

In the height of the War, in January, we went on holiday to Cornwall. I remember Atrid, one of Daddy's favourite porters from 177 coming to Paddington with a telescopic silver mug which he thought would prove



2 Harman & Lambert, 177 New Bond Street, circa 1930.

useful. I always wondered why, for it hardly seemed necessary to me when we had a huge heavy leather picnic case that I always admired. I think that it had been some nobleman's bad debt, for Daddy quite often accepted goods in lieu of debt, (that was how he got his best claret) and all its silver fittings were crested. At any rate, I always thought it magnificent for it all weighed a ton.

After the War, Daddy bought up Lamberts, which had been his father's whole life, and where Daddy and Evans were apprenticed. This was one of his proudest achievements and 177 became not merely Harman & Co., but Harman and Lambert. And he brought home all manner of memorabilia, including poor battered old Moggie, the battle-scarred black tom, and several iron-bound safes, which had once held plate, but were from then on used to store pig and chicken food. There were also a Regulator long-case clock and a long refectory table, where the Lambert's staff had sat to eat their meals, which we used at home for our lessons.

For all that my father was – though he'd not appreciate me for saying it – only a glorified species of tradesman, he and his firm enjoyed an unusually warm association with Buckingham Palace. So it wasn't unusual

for him, and after my father's death the manager Evans, to be summoned there, and on arrival actually admitted to the royal bathroom when King George was in his tub. My father and Queen Mary undoubtedly established quite a rapport over the years and she, when at Harman's, would retire with him to the sanctum and discuss, over a cigarette, whatever transaction involved. In those strictly formal days, when royalty visited all staff not actually concerned were expected to stand outside premises on the pavement, whatever the weather, the entire time royal patrons were within; which is how Mummy recognised the Queen's presence, when she and I reached 177, shortly after Daddy died. Mummy being Mummy, scarcely less imperious than her Majesty, sent word in to inform her we were outside – whereupon we were admitted to the presence of a Gracious Consort, and a nervous, blushing Princess Mary, and spoken to with great kindness.

Extracted from family papers by Peter Cameron, the author's son.



3 Sydney Bellamy Harman, circa 1898, at the time he set up his own company.

Sydney Bellamy Harman, 1871–1920

Son of Walter John Harman. Educ. City of London School. In January 1886 apprenticed to George Lambert of 10, 11, 12 Coventry Street, London [for Lambert's see Culme vol II, pp281–82]. Allegedly thrown out of his father's house for saying 'damn' and at the same time left Lambert's without completing his apprenticeship. By 1891 he was working for Charles Johnston Hill [Catchpole & Williams] of 510 Oxford Street as a 'jeweller's assistant'; subsequently he spent some time working at Arthur & Co. of 36 New Bond Street, before setting up on his own account. In May 1898 formed a partnership with Charles Weld-Blundell of Ince-Blundell Hall, Lancs, as 'Harman & Co Ltd' and took over the shop at 177 New Bond Street from the Crown Perfumery Co. In October 1899 entered a mark with the London Assay Office [Culme 12952]. Charles Weld-Blundell, who had only debenture shares in the business, proved a difficult partner and eventually withdrew from the company. In 1915 acquired the freehold of the building in New Bond Street. In 1916 acquired the stock, name, fixtures and fittings of Lambert's. After his death in 1920, his widow Jean Shannon Harman, entered her own marks at the London Assay Office [November 1922, October 1926, and February 1935]. The firm was managed after S.B. Harman's death by William Evans, who had been employed at Lambert's in Coventry Street.

Peter Cameron