



27th Levantine Heritage Foundation Zoom lecture gathering with guest speakers Gillian Mueller & James de Wesselow - 13 June 2023, 6pm (UK time)

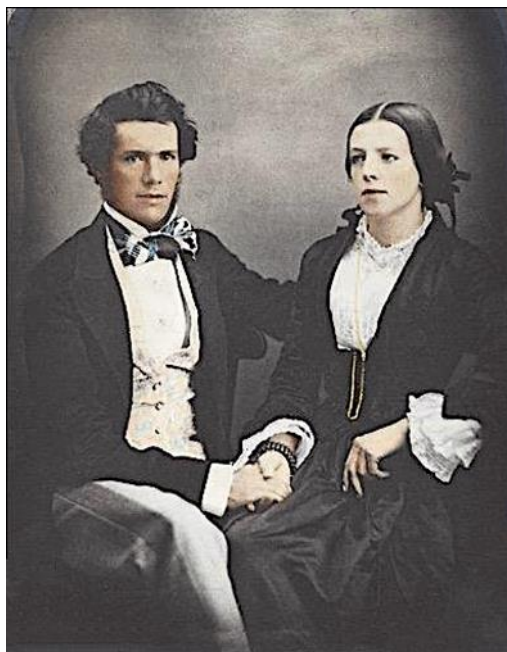
Section 1

George Baker: From London Waif to Merchant Mogul of Constantinople, 1848-1905

“The story of George Baker is one typical of that brand of enterprising Englishmen who, as worthy successors to the traditions of Elizabethan times, carried on the spirit of risk and adventure, of Pioneering and Colonizing throughout the world. It is to men such as he that England owes her greatness.” (A.C. Edwards, Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, 1949).

With this premise in mind, Gillian will examine George Baker’s trajectory from humble beginnings in England, to British Embassy gardener in Constantinople, to head of G. & A. Baker Ltd., which traded from New York to India and thrived for some 100 years. What propelled George Baker to Turkey? At a time when Queen Victoria’s Britain dominated the world stage and Sultan Abdul Mejid’s Empire was in serious decline, how did George take advantage of the political forces in play? An ordinary man seeking fortune in the Levant, he succeeded in a spectacular way. Emblematic of the age, his rags to riches story offers a unique and personal perspective on what it meant to be one of England’s pioneers.

Booking essential: <https://gillian-mueller-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk>



George and Maria Baker



Gillian is a retired diplomat and former China trade specialist. Born to Anglo-American parents at the American Embassy in Tehran, she grew up in Athens, Ankara, and Tel Aviv in the 1960s and 70s, returning to the U.S. to study philosophy at Vassar College and foreign affairs in Washington D.C. Marrying a fellow diplomat, they served in Warsaw, Vilnius, Berlin, Karachi, Kathmandu, and Accra. Thereafter, she took up editing professionally and writing for fun, publishing *You Have No Idea* in 2011.

Discovering her grandparents’ 1911 correspondence between Constantinople and Cairo, Gillian went to Istanbul in 2011 to explore the Baker’s history and book ideas. A subsequent trip to England surfaced letters, diaries, personal accounts, and photographs. The upshot is three manuscripts—George Baker’s story; that of his son Arthur, who inherited ‘The Shop’; and a third on Arthur Baker’s daughter Elsie for a woman’s perspective. They cover George Baker’s arrival in Turkey in 1848 to Arthur Baker’s return to England in 1926, and the dissolution of G. & A. Baker Ltd. in the aftermath of WWI. George Baker is Gillian’s great-great grandfather.

Section 2

George Baker's capitalisation of his eldest and youngest sons' business to form the creation of the GP & J Baker carpet and fabric business in London

How George Baker set-up his two sons, George-Percival and Jim to create their London-based company? James explores the creation of the two business divisions dealing in carpets and the design, manufacture and sales of high-end furnishing fabrics, the brothers' vital part in the creation of the Oriental Carpet Manufacturers Ltd, the purchase of the Swaislands Printworks and the creation of the Bakers design studio in London and the ongoing appeal and success of these fabric designs in the 21st Century. Who were these two men and how did they carry on their father's commercial success?



The five sons of George and Maria Baker photographed around 1900. From left to right, standing: Henry (Harry), James (Jim), seated from left: Arthur, George Percival, Frederick (Fred).



James de Wesselow's late mother Jane Baker had worked briefly for her father in the family's fabric business, GP & J Baker, before she was married and before the business was forcibly sold via administration in the early sixties. James grew up in the 1960s and 70s in Berkshire largely unaware that this sad event dominated his maternal grandparents' lives. After a spell working for Shell Agrochemicals James spent much of his business career running a family-owned horse racing publishing business on his paternal side of his family before it was successfully sold to a national newspaper group in 2000. For the last 13 years he ran the digital subscription and books divisions of the London-based Racing Post. He knew little of his late mother's family, the Bakers, until researching their fascinating history via the LHF site and other resources last year. He has documented it in his short book, *The Baker Chronicles*.