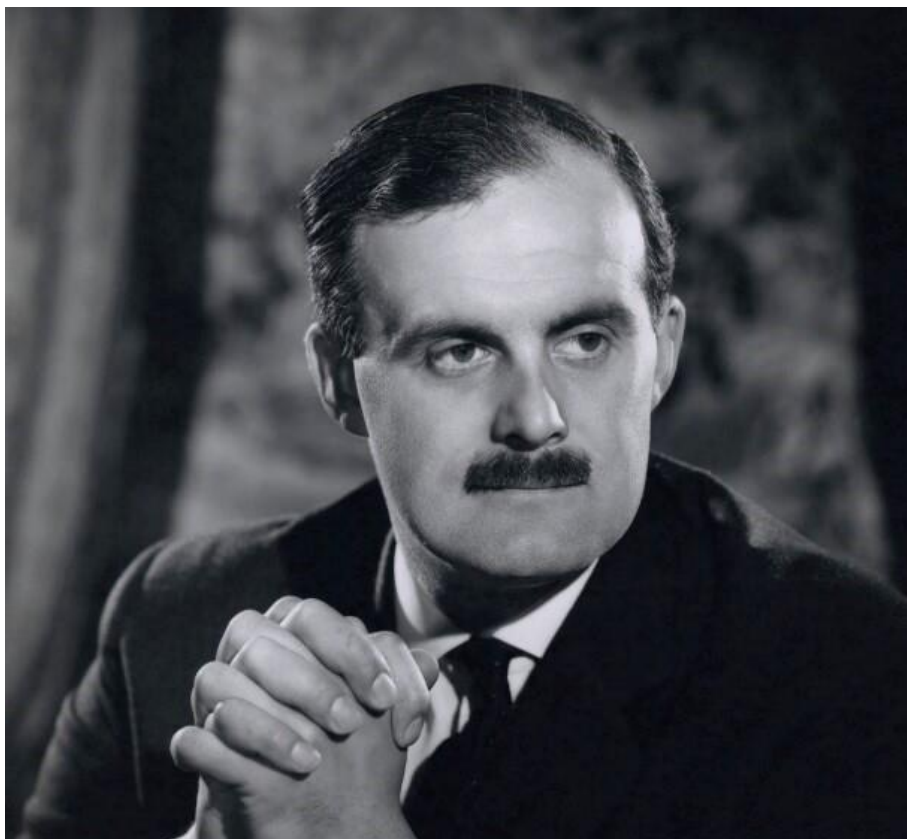


Earl Ferrers

Born 1929.

Extracts from an autobiography.

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



Earl Ferrers.

The life story which follows comprises publicly available extracts from Earl Ferrers' autobiography 'Whatever Next?' published in 2012 by Biteback Publishing. They are reproduced with acknowledgement and thanks.

Preface

I ALWAYS THOUGHT that it would be an impertinence to write a book about my life. I have made no spectacular achievements, and I have never kept a diary to help me to remember what happened and when. I have plodded through life meeting anything which 'chance' happens to throw in the way with, I hope, enthusiasm.

But then I realised what a huge privilege life is, just being alive and experiencing the world. One tends to think that one is like a piece of flotsam on the river, moving this way and that way depending on the curves of the bank, the rocks and the currents. One tends to think what has happened would have happened anyhow – but it might well not have done. Maybe one has experienced things which, at the time, may have seemed insignificant, but which, in their totality, have made up one's life – for better or for worse. Despite my inevitable grumblings and groanings, I have been indescribably lucky, and I have hugely enjoyed life and the experience of it.

For life is an experience. Why are we here? Who sent us here? Where are we going? What are we supposed to do? What happens afterwards? These are basic questions, all of a pretty fundamental and philosophical nature, which everyone asks of themselves but for which no one has the answers. We are given the seven senses of man – the abilities to see, hear, touch, taste, smell, think and reason. But there are other senses with which we are not endowed such as the ability to answer the basic questions of why are we here, who sent us here, where are we going and what happens afterwards? We have not got the senses to understand or to provide the answers to the questions, so stop worrying and stop trying to answer the unanswerable.

But few of us do. A body, a 'soul', a life is made at conception when a sperm meets an egg. I have often wondered what would have happened if one of the other of the six million or so sperms which are supposed to compete for the fertilisation process had won the race, and not the one which did, whether 'I' would still be here – with possibly a different personality, different looks, different height, different academic achievements but basically the same 'me' who thinks and talks as I do. Would one have the same soul? Or would one just be a totally different

person, as a brother is to another brother or sister? Would the 'person' I am now not be in existence? I never have existed? Nor one's soul either?

I find this pretty frightening stuff – pretty confusing stuff and pretty awesome stuff, too. If the latter premise is correct, it is pure chance – one in six million – which has enabled me to live and experience life at all and even to experience, if one believes such things as I do, another life after this one. If one of the other sperms had got there first, what would have happened? Would I never have been born, never have experienced this life and would never experience what happens afterwards? What would there be instead? Nothing? Never existed? Quite frightening, really – and unanswerable. And it is the same for everyone.

Chance? Pure chance? No design? No one in charge? That in itself is pretty unthinkable, too. When one looks at the human body with its bones and muscles and arteries and nervous system, and when one realises that, on the whole (barring a few exceptional aberrations) everyone is born with two arms and two legs and two lungs and one heart, one realises that there must be some overall 'person' in charge.

How is it that the fertilised egg knows how to multiply continuously and yet to change the form of multiplying when the heart or the lungs, for instance, have become big enough? Stop multiplying there, and direct your efforts to some other part of the anatomy! And how is it that the cells of the spinal cord know how to multiply in such a way that it contains, in each person, that myriad of nerves and blood vessels and tissues? How is it that, when a surgeon opens up anyone's body, he always – with, of course, a few exceptions – knows exactly where to find the pancreas, the Islets of Langerhans, the heart, the spleen? In everyone, all over the world. They are all the same.

If you stop thinking about the astonishing wonders of the human body, look at the horses, the cows, the dogs, the squirrels, the flies. They all have a skeletal and a nervous system too, one which is similar, but which is peculiar to each species. They also have this remarkable make-up, but they all are different.

In my later life I have found an interest and peace in ducks – ornamental ones. The different varieties of ducks have different varieties of colourings. A male meets a female – and they almost always mate with their own breed – an egg is produced from which a duckling appears. In the fullness of time the duckling produces feathers, white ones, brown ones, golden ones, black ones. They all appear in the right place, with black and white diamonds down the back, or with a golden stripe in a particular place near the wing. How does the individual cell

know whether to – or how to – produce a black feather or a white feather or a golden feather? Yet they do. Always in the right position. And when the ducks moult, automatically another feather emerges, the same colour, the right colour and in the right place. How is it all achieved? And the same goes for every other bird or fish or animal in the universe.

All these things are impossible to fathom. It forces the inevitable question. Why are we here? Is no one in charge? I take great succour from what a wonderful Roman Catholic Priest said to me, Father Valentine Elwes, who married us. Because I am an Anglican and because I was about to marry a Roman Catholic, I had to have, as the Catholics say, ‘instructions’ so that as a non-Roman Catholic one should understand a little of what makes one’s wife-to-be adhere to her religion.

He said a fundamental thing, which I have never forgotten. There is always someone greater than what you see who has created whatever it is that you see. If you admire a beautiful picture, someone has painted it. If you admire a magnificent house, someone has built it. If you admire a lovely car, someone has designed it. If you admire a beautiful garden, someone has created it. If you admire all that one sees in this world, someone must have created that too. It cannot have appeared – in all its beauty and unbelievable complexity – as a result of just a big bang.

I have always found that of huge comfort, but even the most devout Christian cannot give you the answers to many of these fundamental questions. In the Creed, we say ‘I believe.’ We do not say ‘I know.’ A dash of humility? A dash of uncertainty? – oh yes! Humility is essential. Uncertainty is inevitable.

We have been used to saying in church ‘World without end.’ There is no end. Life in this world comes to its end in death, but life in the Hereafter is without end. I can just about get my feeble mental processes around that concept even if I cannot understand it, but I have recently been totally knocked sideways by the concept that, if life has no end, then it has no beginning either. How on earth does that make sense, one’s bewildered and oh-so-limited thought processes ask? If the world is here, physically, there must have been something here beforehand in which, as it were, to plonk the world. Something, somewhere, must have a beginning even if it has no end.

But, if it does have a beginning, something must have been here before ‘it’ began. What?

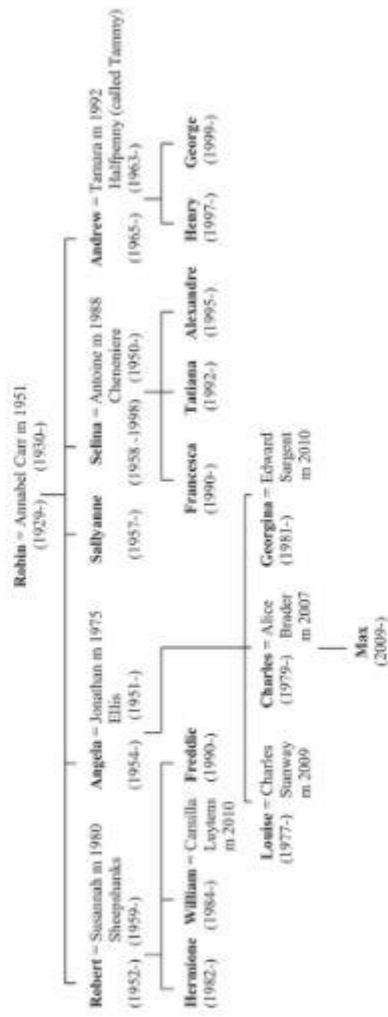
But here am I asking all the questions, which I said at the start that it is absurd to ask, because we cannot answer them and we do not have the ability even to consider how to answer them.

For all that, they are fascinating questions. For all that, it makes one realise what a privilege – yes, a privilege – it is to have been chosen to experience, or at least to have found oneself experiencing, life. The other six million participants in the sperm race never had that.

I, therefore, felt that I should jot down some of the experiences and happenings in my life, not that they will be of wild interest to many others or that they will become a bestseller – I doubt if many will ever read them – but because, simply by the nature of things, life has unfolded for me, as it does for everyone, in a unique way.

This is not an autobiography. That would be too pompous in thought. It is more in the nature of reminiscences or memories, a little piece of this and a little piece of that, as one remembers life unfolding. The dates, the figures – even the facts – may not be entirely accurate, but I have no reason to believe that they are far from the truth.

FERRERS FAMILY



Family

IT IS SOMETIMES helpful to have the names of a family, because otherwise any potential reader can become easily confused and lost, so I am enclosing a summary – I hope accurate! – of both Annabel's and my families.

Annabel's father was **Brigadier William Carr**, always called **Bill**. He was born in 1901. He inherited the estate at Ditchingham when his father died on 28 January 1925, when Bill was in his twenties. He was in the 12th Lancers during the war. He was a superlative horseman, winning all the point-to-points in his youth. He was in the British team for the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936.

Annabel's mother was **Donna Nenella Carr Salazar**. She was an Italian lady from Naples who was first married to General Sir Foster Newland, by whom she had a daughter, **Antonella**. Nenella married Bill Carr in 1927. They had one child, **Annabel**, my wife. Nenella always said that she had to spend nine months in bed waiting for Annabel whilst she was pregnant. I never knew whether that was strictly accurate – or whether it included a little Italian poetic licence.

Antonella Lothian, Annabel's half sister, was always called **Tony**. She married **Peter Kerr**, who later became the **Marquess of Lothian**. They lived at Melbourne Hall in Derbyshire, which was three miles away from my old home at Staunton Harold and where Annabel used to come and stay.

To confuse things a little, Peter Lothian's mother, **Mrs Andrew Kerr**, (not Carr) more usually known as **Marie Kerr**, was Annabel's godmother and, separately, she was also one of my mother's greatest friends. As my mother and Marie Kerr, who was then living at Melbourne Hall, were close friends, therefore their children must be friends, too. We were not. We thought **Peter** and his brother **Johnny** insufferable.



L: My grandfather, Camfer, 11th Earl Ferrers; R: My grandmother, Gaga

My father, because he was Viscount Tamworth, was always known, even by my mother, as **Tam** – short for **Tamworth**. He went to Winchester, where he contracted polio, which left him for the rest of his life with a considerable walking disability. He had a younger brother, **Andrew**, who was a scholar at Winchester. My father went to India in the 1920s to try and earn some money. He and my mother married there. They came back to England and my father went into the Stock Exchange in London with George Henderson and Co. They lived at 35 Victoria Road, which was built by my grandfather, an architect, **Walter Knight Shirley**, later **11th Earl Ferrers**.

I had two sisters, **Betty and Penelope**. Betty could never say Penelope. It became transmogrified to Nepalie, and then abbreviated to **Neppy** which was the name by which she has always thereafter been known. They both went to school at Downe House in Berkshire.

After leaving Downe House Betty went in to the WRNS, which made her feel that she was a real woman-of-the-world (I don't think really that she was!). After the war she worked as a secretary for the Georgian Group, where she was paid £5 per week, and later for the Coal Board which was less intellectually stimulating, but paid about £1 per week

more.



L: My father, 12th Earl Ferrers – 'Tam'; R: My mother, Hermione

She married **John Luttrell** in 1959. John worked in the oil business in Qatar when Qatar was just developing from being a desert.

They had one child, **Robert**, who went to Winchester College, and afterwards became a Catholic and married **Pauline Roddy**, an Australian. They both, with their children **Madeleine**, **Lucy** and **Prudence**, live in Sydney, Australia.

Neppy became engaged at the age of sixteen when she was still at school to **Maurice Robson**. Maurice was thirty-two and was in the Army as a Chaplain to the Forces. He was chaplain to the soldiers who were stationed in Staunton Harold.

Neppy and Maurice were married in the Chapel at Staunton Harold in 1944 at three days' notice because Maurice did not know when he would be allowed leave.

After the war, Maurice's first incumbency was at Bamford-in-the-Peak in Derbyshire where the stipend was £360 per year, £90 per quarter. Paid in arrears.

He then took on the living at Brailsford and Shirley in Derbyshire, of

which my father was the patron. They later retired to Southrop in Gloucestershire, when Maurice was seventy-three and Neppy only fifty-five. Neppy now lives near her daughter in Cornwall.

Neppy and Maurice had two children, **David** and **Phillida**. After having been in the Merchant Navy, David married **Josephine Manwaring-White**. They have two children, **Oliver** and **Jonathan**. They live in Surrey.

Phillida married **James Jermain**. He is mad keen on sailing and became Editor of *Yachting Monthly*. They now live in Cornwall. They have three children, **Katie**, **Abigail** and **Eleanor**.

Annabel was twenty-one when we were married in July 1951. I was twenty-two and was 'in Statu Pupillari' – an undergraduate – at Magdalene College, Cambridge, having completed the first of three years' work on a degree course in Agriculture.

Robert was born in December 1952, when I was an undergraduate. He went to a pre-prep school at Town Close in Norwich, then a prep school at Farleigh House, near Basingstoke. From there he went to Ampleforth. Robert did not like school. He wanted to farm. I was not keen on the idea (in the same way that my father was not keen on me doing it, either.)

Robert went to Kenya for his gap year which was organised by the Church Missionary Society, with whom we were put in touch by Simon Barrington-Ward, who later became the Bishop of Coventry. Robert married **Susannah Sheepshanks** on 21 June 1984. Susannah's father was **Charlie Sheepshanks**. He ran Sunningdale Preparatory School in Berkshire. His wife, **Mary**, was the sister of David Nixon who joined up in the Army with me in 1948. She writes, including poetry.

Robert and Susannah lived in the Old Vicarage at Shirley where my mother used to live, with their three children, **Hermione**, **William** and **Freddie**. Robert and Susannah and their family came to live at Ditchingham Hall in 2004 when we moved out to Park Lodge.

Robert, with **Jonathan Ruffer**, started up an Investment Management Firm, more usually thought of as Private Client Stockbrokers, in 1994, called Ruffer LLP. There were the two of them and two secretaries. Some fifteen years later, they employ 135 people and look after funds of over £10 billion. It has been the most astonishing success story, and I feel hugely proud of Robert for that which he and Jonathan have achieved.

Since Annabel and I moved to Park Lodge, Robert has been responsible for the running of all the farm and the estate at Ditchingham.

So he has come back to doing what he wanted to do in the first place, but with the added and wider success of having been in the business world and all which goes with that.

Robert and Susannah have three children. **Hermione** always wanted to be a physiotherapist. She did a three-year course at the University of London, for which the National Health Service paid. When she passed her exams, the National Health Service said that they had no vacancies for physiotherapists.

There is something bizarre about the National Health Service training people for a job and then saying that they do not require them. I suggested that Hermione tried for a placing in the private sector, but private hospitals will not take on physiotherapists unless they have had experience in the public sector. Snookered again. She has now given up thoughts of being a physiotherapist and is working as a Personal Assistant to a headmistress of a school in London.

William went to Sunningdale where Susannah's father had been headmaster, although he had died by the time that William went there. William went on to Eton where, in the middle of his time there, he became an Oppidans Scholar. We felt very proud. He went to Christ Church, Oxford, where he obtained a first-class degree in Economics and Management. He then became a banker (sensible fellow). William seems to have everything – brains, intelligence, good manners, good looks and a great sense of twinkling fun. And he now has a very attractive and lovely girl who has just become his wife – **Camilla Lutyens**, known as **Millie**.

Freddie went to Sunningdale and then to Stowe. He did well there and enjoyed it. He has a mad passion for all the things which make one squirm – like snakes, and bats, gorillas and all sorts of creepy crawlies. He worked in the same school in London as Hermione for a while and taught, amongst other things, tennis, of which he is a trained coach. He then went to Oxford Brookes.

Angela, our no. 2 and first daughter, was born in 1954. She had red hair and was sometimes, not very originally, called Carrots. Despite the passage of time she still has red hair, albeit not so vivid – but she is no longer called Carrots. She went, as later did her sisters, to the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Woldingham. I am an Anglican and thought that a Convent education might be restrictive. I could not have been more wrong. It is the fullest education of them all. They have not only academic work and physical work and discipline, but they were brought up to be lovely ladies.

The girls always used to curtsy to the nuns in those days, and to other

girls' parents too. There was a Mistress of Discipline who used to say at the beginning of the Prize Giving – and I loved this – when the girls all paraded with a hint of a self-satisfied grin on their faces, 'Glory be to God alone.' In others words, 'However, proud you may feel, get back in your box.' It was a wonderful de-bouncer and leveller. There were sufficient nuns in those days for each nun to have six specific girls for whom she would pray. The Headmistress was a wonderful lady, so gracious, courteous, understanding and holy, Mother Stanley who is now 106 years old. Almost unbelievable.

We were so impressed with what Woldingham 'did' for their pupils that Annabel and I always said that, in later life (and that means after they had left school), you could always tell a Convent Girl. They had a serenity about them.

Angela went to learn typing and then went to work in the Conservative Research Department, a place which turned out to have a great camaraderie about it, and the girls love going back for reunions and, as Angela says, 'seeing my mates again'.

Like Annabel, at the age of twenty-one, Angela was married – to **Jonathan Ellis**. He had to go to the Channel Islands to be crammed for his accountancy exams, and then became a senior partner of Larking Gowan in Norwich. They live near Holt in Norfolk. Jonathan is a real countryman and loves and knows all about wildlife and shooting. Now, at the age of sixty, he has retired – still a mere baby!

Angela and Jonathan have three children. **Louise**, who works in Robert's firm of Ruffer Investment Management, which is now called Ruffer LLP, of which she is now a director. She had a 'boy friend' at Durham University, **Chaz Stanway**. He went into the Royal Navy as a submariner. That was not the best of occupations in which to get married, with six months spent underneath the sea and the other six months in Glasgow. So they remained great friends. When Chaz had ended his career in the Navy, some fifteen years later – by which time he had risen to the dizzy height of Lieutenant Commander – they got married!

Charlie is Angela and Jonathan's second child. Like his father, he has become an accountant. At the age of twenty-eight in 2008, he married **Alice** who is Austrian. She is a pretty and lovely girl and, on top of that, speaks seven languages – English perfectly. They now live in Hong Kong where he practises accountancy and they have a son – our first great grandson – **Max**.

Georgina, who is always known as Beanie, is tall, striking, beautiful and with a glorious and gentle character. Anyone who marries her will be

lucky! As it happens, she has now married **Edward Sargent**. Like her sister Louise, Beanie went to St Mary's Convent, Ascot, which helped to bring them up beautifully. She has always been mad on travelling in Africa. She now works with a travel agent firm, Cazenove Loyd, specialising in, guess where? ... Africa. She likes to go on safari looking at animals and even gorillas. Not my scene.

Sallyanne is our third child. She has always had trouble with reasoning. She has the kindest and most helpful nature. She is exceedingly strong and will do anything – provided that she feels in the mood. If she is not, then, like litmus paper, it turns from pink to blue and Sallyanne will pursue her own course determinedly. She has become very set in her ways – but aren't we all? – and, when this happens, she can be quite difficult to dislodge. She now lives in a house of her own in Holt, and carers come in to help look after her. Angela has been wonderful and has taken over the responsibility of looking after Sallyanne.

Selina is our fourth child, bright, pretty, sparkling eyes, hugely attractive both in personality and looks. She was fifteen months younger than Sallyanne and always felt smothered by her, especially at school when Sallyanne was finding it difficult to keep up to the mark and was usually late for everything. Selina tended to take the rap. When Selina left Woldingham she took off for America and went to Washington. She loved art and worked in Sotheby's and Christie's and made wonderful friends. An American friend of ours, fulminating over Selina, said, 'She is the best Ambassador for your country that you have. She has made lots of friends, good friends, nice friends, the right kind of friends, and she has not hitched up with the wrong ones. And she has chosen them all on her own.'

After two years Selina came back to England, a lovely, confident, beautiful girl whom everyone just loved. She married **Antoine Cheneviere** in 1988, when she was thirty. He was in the Art World, with his own firm, Cheneviere Fine Arts, and he specialises in Russian furniture. So they shared a common interest. Antoine is half Swiss and half Bulgarian and he is a person of whom I am very fond and whom I greatly admire.

Not long after Antoine and Selina were married, they were staying with us at Ditchingham Hall and Selina was pregnant. She said to me in a way which indicated quite a knowledge of life, 'You know, Daddy, it is very easy to become pregnant.' I said, 'What are you telling me that for? I should know. We had four children in six years. Yes, it is very easy.'

Selina and Antoine had three children. **Francesca**, known as Cheski. She was born in 1990. Quiet, deep thinker, beautiful and spookily like Selina, not just in looks but in mannerisms too.

Tatiana was their second child, born some eighteen months apart. Tati is much taller than Cheski, blonde like her mother, full of fun. Does all the wrong things, like smoking. Is always late and has an air of vagueness to life through which she paddles at her own unpredictable but charming pace, but she is a really lovely girl. Both Cheski and Tati were educated, like Louise and Georgina, at the Convent at Ascot.

Alexandre is the youngest of their three children. His name was always spelt in the Swiss way of *Alexandre*, not the British way of *Alexander*. In order to emphasise the correct spelling, I always called him 'Rrrrrr', which became truncated to Rooer. He is now, very Englishly, called Alex. The school and his friends find it easier. He went to the Westminster Cathedral School in London and he is now at Sevenoaks boarding school, which he likes very much and where he seems to be doing quite well.

This lovely happy family, where Love went round and round and outwards too, fell onto the rocks when, in 1998, Selina got cancer and died. They thought that she had an ulcer and then, on further investigation, they found the cancer underneath. It was in the duodenum. The oncologist told Selina that it was a very rare place to have it. He had only seen it in the duodenum three times in his medical career, and two of these were in old ladies of eighty. Yet, here was Selina aged thirty-nine, preparing for her fortieth birthday party. My doctor, Dr Bushnell, who is in the same partnership with Selina's doctor, Dr Wheeler, said that Selina would either die before her fortieth birthday, or the excitement of the anticipation and the preparation of it would keep her going, and she would die immediately afterwards. She did not make her fortieth birthday.

When I asked Dr Bushnell, when they had first discovered the disease, what the prognosis was he said with hideous clarity, 'Months rather than weeks. And months rather than years.' He was right. It was about nine months.

Andrew is the last of our five children – an 'afterthought' as people tend to say. I am bound to say that, when Annabel disclosed to me that she was pregnant again some seven years after I thought that the shutters had come down, I was appalled – nappies, screaming children, prams, whatever next? I thought that that had all been relegated to the history books. But no, that was right back in the frame.

The curious part about all this – and this is in no way unique – although one was apprehensive, almost dreaded the appearance of Number 5, when he came, I found that I had an extraordinary capacity to love that child in a way which I had not experienced with the others. It did not mean that I loved him more than the others. Some said, ‘Well, you have more time now,’ or ‘You have got the experience which you did not have before.’ I do not know what it was. I only know that I was deeply grateful to be able to discover a love that I did not know that I had. What was it? The love *for* Andrew himself, or the love of one’s own offspring which one has had in later life? I think that it is probably the latter, but if Andrew had been an odious child – and, mercifully, he was the reverse of that – I doubt if this burgeoning of now fresh love would have been quite so forthcoming. Whatever it was, it was quite an experience.

There is always a hazard with having an afterthought. People say that you always spoil the youngest child. I am not sure whether that is entirely true. I was the youngest of three, and I did not think that I was at all spoilt! Others may have a different view. But there is no doubt that, on the whole, the youngest one does tend to get spoilt. ‘That’s not fair. I was not allowed to do that,’ say the older ones. One can hear it all.

Having a second son, whilst bringing so many advantages, brings its own peculiar problems too, especially what one can conveniently call ‘Second Son-itis’. Particularly is that so when funny things like titles and land are concerned where, if the larger part is to be retained of which the owner is merely a tenant for his life, it tends to be passed down to one person.

Once you start dividing it up, why restrict the division to sons? Why not daughters too? Once you start on that course, in two generations there is nothing left. Over these responsibilities, where it is often thought of as *my* land or *Charles’* land, or whatever, it is actually the preservation and the continuation of the *land* which is important and not the interests of the temporary *owners*. It is all very complicated stuff, loaded with trip wires and elephant traps and unexpected dramas of which ‘it is not fair’ summarises most of them. But life is not fair, and the sooner that we all realise that the better.

Andrew’s prep school was, like Robert’s, Farleigh House, near Basingstoke. At one point the Headmaster was in a state of distress as the cook had left and he had no cook for all these boys. Andrew said, ‘Shall I ask **Marguerite** (Mary Robinson’s daughter)?’ The answer was yes and Marguerite went to become the cook at Farleigh House. The Headmaster

was so pleased that he asked Andrew in and said, 'I would like to give you a present for this. What would you like?' That was a pretty wide canvas. Andrew did not know what to say – a car or a biro? He got a biro.

Andrew followed Farleigh House with Ampleforth which, unlike Robert, he enjoyed. Andrew always wanted to farm but, as with Robert and my father beforehand with me, I tried to dissuade him. Andrew has many qualities, of which a mildly stubborn streak is one, and he was not dissuaded. So it was arranged for him to go to the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester.

In the summer holidays between Ampleforth and Cirencester, Andrew went to get some farming experience at Sandringham. He suddenly announced to Julian Loyd, who was the agent at Sandringham, that he wanted to leave because he wanted to go to Ampleforth and become a monk. Julian could not believe his ears. He let him go before the end of his allotted course even though it was inconvenient as harvest was approaching and Julian was particularly relying on Andrew to help. Julian said, 'You will never make a monk. You like the gin and tonics and other worldly things too much. You will be out in six months.' So he was. Thereafter, Julian has always referred to him as 'The Drunk Monk'.

Andrew did not like Pardon and Penance, where you got on your knees in front of the Abbot and apologised for being late. The obstinate streak coming out again. I thought that it was very good for him.

The prospect of Andrew becoming a monk put the cat really amongst the pigeons. Annabel, despite her deeply held loyalty and convictions to the Catholic Church, was mortified. There was her little one going into a Monastery. 'Happy Birthday, Darling Mummy. This is the last present which I will be giving you.' The tears cascaded down. On it went.

Andrew went into the monastery, but was out again about six weeks later.

After Andrew had left the monastery, Cirencester was back on the rails. Later, he joined the Country Landowners' Association as a member of the staff. He has been there for nearly twenty years and has found it interesting. He is now considering standing for Parliament, but there are so many people doing that, that he probably will not get in – eighty applications for one Constituency, 150 for another. He did not make it.

In 1992, Andrew married **Tamara Halfpenny**, who is usually called **Tammy**. It is quite confusing when Robert is called Tamworth. My father was called Tam, and now the daughter-in-law is called Tammy. Andy and Tammy were married at Staunton Harold, my old home. I felt

so proud. I love that place, and it took one back years. It then belonged to the Ryder Cheshire Foundation. They had gone to so much trouble to make the gardens look beautiful but, on the day, it just poured and poured with rain. Such a pity. I said to Andy, 'If you see your old Dad crying, don't think that it is because you are getting married. It will be because he loves Staunton and cannot bear the fact that it is no longer part of our lives.'

They have two boys, **Henry and George**, charming children but like most young children – they are now eleven and fourteen – they fight like cats. They always have – not nasty fighting, but it usually ends with one hitting the other – then away we go. The screams start. It is so exhausting. I am amazed how the parents cope, but all parents say that of their own children.

Mary Robinson was not a member of the family, as such, but she came to us as a helper with a six-week-old daughter and she stayed with us for thirty-eight years until she died. Although she could cook nothing when she arrived, not even a boiled egg, she became a superb cook and total family confidante. She cooked, cleaned, looked after the children. When they grew up, the children used to tell Mary everything, months before we ever got a look in.

Mary came with a daughter, **Marguerite**, aged six weeks. 'There you are,' I said to Annabel. 'If she comes with a child and she is no use, you are lumbered. You will never be able to get rid of her.' Mary could do nothing. We were lumbered, but what a lumbering. She turned out to be a huge success. Father Edward Cruzet, the Parish Priest at Bungay, said that Mary was the nearest thing to a saint which you are likely to see in this life. We were very privileged.

Mary had nothing. The only thing which she had in this life was Marguerite. Yet she had the capacity to love all of our children without favour and without jealousy – even though they had more than her daughter did. It was truly a remarkable experience.

Marguerite loved playing with our children and spent most of the time with them. It was quite a delicate balancing act. She had to be with her mother because she was her mother's daughter, but not to play with other children in the house would have been intolerable. Marguerite trod the delicate path quite beautifully, giving happiness to everyone on the way – again, no offending. No jealousy. It was wonderful. And so it goes on.

Marguerite married **Peter Akister**, who was in the Parachute Regiment. He then left and went into business. They have two sons, **Edward** and **George**. They are now about nineteen and seventeen. They

are quite charming and have the most beautiful manners.

Chapter 1

Childhood

I WAS BORN in 1929. My earliest recollections are of when we lived in London at 35 Victoria Road in Kensington and I was aged about five. My two sisters, Betty and Neppy, were older than me. Betty was six years older. Neppy was four years older. So, whenever I ventured to give an opinion, usually on nothing more profound than whether the jelly tasted nice, I was met with the rejoinder 'You are the youngest. Your opinion does not count. So shut up...' So generous.

Betty once went off to have her bath early, leaving her blancmange on the table. Fearful that the always avaricious Neppy would consume it whilst she was away, Betty left a note saying, 'I have licked this.' That, she thought, would be enough to see off any potential predators. It did not. It was eaten. Brothers and sisters, especially when young, are so charming to each other. We all fortunately got on very well together and family love was a great bedrock.

In those days – the mid 1930s – we had a cook, Edith Ruffhead, who was paid the princely salary of £25 per year and a wonderful cook she was. She always used to go regularly on Sundays to St Martin-in-the-Fields. It was the church of her choice and she loved it.

We had various nannies of whom the last, Winne Bug, I remembered best. She came to us when Neppy was four. I must have been nought. She was with us for my formative years as a child. She was a lovely, kind, understanding person. Neppy still sees her. She is well. In 2010 she was ninety-five.

Winnie was fourteen when she came to us. She was paid five shillings per week. After six weeks she went home for the weekend. In the train she was looking at this glorious £1-10-0 which she had earned. She felt so proud of it, and then ... the pound note flew out of the window. Can you imagine it? It must have been devastating for the poor girl. But she survived!

My father had had polio when he was a boy at Winchester – a particularly horrible disease in those days – and he was left with a permanent and substantial lameness. He always walked with a stick. I never knew what my father did for a living – how could I at that age?

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Whenever I asked him what he was going to do today, he used to say 'I am going off to work the Bread and Butter machine.' My father had a unique ability to talk in a language all of his own, which was not always readily understood by others and especially not by a little four-year-old son.

I imagined that he literally went off and turned the handle of a machine, rather like a mangel-cutter which one might see on a farm, and then out came bread and butter. What my father actually meant was that he went to work as a stockbroker in the City in order to earn a living so that we could all have something to eat – including bread and butter. How could one have known that?

Sunday was, quite rightly, a special day and we would all go to church at St Mary Abbots in Kensington. My father always wore a tail coat and top hat, and grey spats on his shoes. You never see spats anywhere nowadays. He was always very smart, with a stick in one hand, and the other hand placed in the small of his back, for balance, I suppose.

Daddy used to put our weekly pocket money on the hall table on Saturdays – sixpence for my sisters. Then it went up to a shilling for them and sixpence for me.

Another example of my father's looseness of expression came in 1945 when it became clear that the War would soon be over. There would be great jubilation everywhere. Villages all over the country were preparing for VE Day (standing for Victory in Europe, the war in Japan was not yet over).

At Staunton a committee was set up of which my father was the chairman – even in those days you always had to have committees – and, as food was rationed, everyone round the table had been saying, 'I can give some sugar,' or 'I can give some tea,' or something else. My father noticed that one of his tenant farmers, Horace Dunncliffe, had kept his mouth shut and had offered nothing. So my father said, 'Horace, you can beg, borrow or steal something can't you?' The farmer was so shocked and insulted that he walked out and resigned from the committee.

My mother kept a wonderful, happy home. She was one of those people who emanated love from every pore to everyone who came within her range, but that did not stop her from having very high standards and from being hugely critical of anyone who fell below them.

My sisters both went to Kensington High School, the 'Ken High', which they quite liked. I went to Wagners, a pre-prep school at 48, Princes Gate. It was Mr Wagner's son who many years later, as Sir Anthony Wagner, became Garter King of Arms. Jeremy Morse, who was

a brilliantly clever person, and who became Sir Jeremy Morse, was a great friend in later life. He was also at Wagners. So also was John Sainsbury who became Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover. I do not remember him there and it only transpired that we had been schoolmates when we were both near eighty! My time at Wagners does not form a great part of my memory other than the fact that there were two masters, Mr Fry and Mr Le Froy, which at the age of six I found totally confusing, and also that there was a mistress – one who seemed elderly to me at that age, but who I suppose was only fifty – who said to me, when I was being slow in tying up my football boots, ‘Come on fatty.’

I was profoundly wounded by that remark, even though there may have been some truth in it. It is odd how, in life, it is often the small things, in themselves of no consequence, which nevertheless imprint themselves into your memory, as if they had been branded there to the total exclusion of everything else. The poor mistress, whose name I have forgotten and who must long since be dead, would have been horrified to think that such a passing remark was to remain in the mind of the poor hapless recipient for the rest of his life, and that any other contribution which she may have made to the school and to his upbringing went down the sluice of life.

It all goes to show that you never know the effect which you have on others. We each, though, have a tremendous effect on other people the whole time – by what we say, by what we do, and by how we behave. You are what you are because it is natural to you. You behave in the way in which you do because it is natural to you. If you smile, that affects others. If you are sad, that affects others. If you sing in a beautiful choir, that affects others. If you sing in the street in the middle of the night, that affects others. If you drive at 90 mph, that affects others. If you drive at 30 mph in the middle of the road, that affects others.

In all of life, what you do affects others, but, of course, so often you are blissfully unaware of that, because it is natural to you. If a person were to bring a skunk into the room, everyone would know it was there because of the appalling smell. The poor skunk would not be aware of the effect which it was having on other people because the appalling smell is natural to it.

Which all goes to show that, whoever and wherever one is in life, one should never underestimate the effect one has on other people – good or bad.

Summer holidays were spent at Littlehampton on the Sussex coast where my parents used to rent a house. We loved our holidays there, playing, walking down the streets to the beach, calling in at the shops to buy kites and toys with the cousins, going riding, eating juicy pears, doing all the things which children do and, of course, the excitement of going for speedboat rides in the sea – at 6 pence a time in old money.

Betty hated wasps. Therefore they always chased her. They would. We would all sit down for a picnic on the beach and a wasp would appear. Betty was terrified of them and ran around us all like a crazy windmill. She usually got stung. Nobody else did!

My mother's sister and her husband, Christine and Eric Hussey (known as Auntie Chrissie and Uncle Eric), lived in Littlehampton with their two children, Helen and Dukie.

Helen and Dukie became very close to us all – especially Dukie. We were young. It was the summer holidays at Littlehampton. Beaches. Swimming. Ice creams. Tea parties in the garden. Hide and seek. Dumb Crambo. It was all good, youthful and happy. We were cousins and we were all very fond of each other.

We had some other cousins who used to come and stay at Littlehampton, the Troutbecks. He became Sir John Troutbeck and was later Ambassador in Prague. They had two daughters, Mary and Clare. Clare's birthday was a week after mine, mine being on 8 June, Clare's on 19 June. So, whenever my sisters wished to crush me into oblivion with the remark, 'You are the youngest, so you don't count,' I could always come up with the remark, 'No, I am not. Clare is younger.' It was not a very stout defence, but it was the best that I could do.

One summer before the war, when I suppose that Mary and Clare were about eight and ten, they had a French au pair (although they were not given such names in those days) to help them to try and learn French. Her name was Blanche. Mary and Clare also tried to teach her tennis. It was an uphill struggle. They could not get poor Blanche to understand the basic principle that, between serves, the server and his or her partner changed sides on the court. The constant cry of 'L'autre côté, Blanche. L'autre côté' still rings in my head. Blanche must be ninety now.

more than a milk cheese. But these were the real works – good, thick, yellow cream. I have never tasted cream cheese better. She used to send them to customers all over the country in very smart waxed cartons emblazoned in green with a coronet and the words ‘Earl Ferrers’ Dairy’ printed on them.

The milk was put into a ‘separator’. The handle was turned and cream came out of one spout and skimmed milk, which was subsequently fed to the pigs, came out of the other. It was slightly more complicated than that because the separator consisted of about twelve cones which fitted one above the other and the mechanism was highly geared so that the cones, over which the milk dropped, spun round at a great speed throwing the lighter skimmed milk out to the edge and through a spout, whilst the heavier cream went out through a separate spout.

If I was lucky – and privileged – I used to try and help my grandmother separate the milk. It was not an easy task because the gearing was so great that turning the handle became a very heavy business especially for the arm muscles of a six-year-old boy.

Gaga was remarkable as I think that she must have been the only Countess to have had a Hawker’s Licence which enabled her to go from house to house selling things.

Staunton Harold was a lovely, handsome, magnificent Georgian house with a church alongside it and a lake in front of it. For some curious reason, the Church was always called ‘the Chapel’. In fact, it was a full-blown, free-standing, beautiful Church which is historically both important and unique.

The estate and house at Staunton Harold was originally owned by a wealthy gentleman called Harold Staunton. One of his descendants, Margaret Staunton, married Ralph Shirley in 1423. Her brother died as a boy and therefore she became the heiress of Staunton Harold. That is how the house and the land subsequently merged into the Shirley family.

The Shirley family originates from a little village in Derbyshire, near Ashbourne, called Shirley. They held land there at the time of the Magna Carta. Of that land only some 250 acres of it still remain in the Shirley family. But remain it does.

When William the Conqueror came to England in 1066, he brought with him from France one Henry de Ferrers, to whom he gave land at Chartley in Staffordshire and who subsequently became Baron Ferrers of Chartley.

Some people used to say to my grandfather, with a certain amount of pride and amazement, ‘Of course, your family came over with William

Chapter 2

Staunton Harold

BACK WHEN WE were children, parts of our holidays from London were spent with my grandparents at Staunton Harold in Leicestershire. They were memorable – if somewhat imposing – occasions.

My grandfather was the 11th Earl Ferrers. He was an upright person, both in physique and attitude and carried a fabulous but well-trimmed beard, a proper beard, not one of these miserable, whiskery things all daintily created, which one sees nowadays. We used to call him Camfer which, I suppose, was grandchild-speak for grandfather. I remember kissing him on one occasion and exclaiming 'ouch' as the bristles of his beard gently imprinted themselves on to my then tender face. He frequently wore a stiff winged-collar.

My grandmother was always known as Gaga. We thought that to be a perfectly normal name but, of course, you could not really get much more insulting if you tried. But that was her choice. She liked it that way. We liked it that way, too.

She was a lively and very competent person who ran a very well ordered house with a butler, cook and many domestic servants. Her happy peal of laughter used to ring around the house.

She was always a great do-er. She used to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and go down to the dairy, which was an out-house from the huge house, just opposite the kitchen door. The cowman would bring the milk down from the cowshed on a trolley which he pulled down a hill for about 800 yards, and which, presumably, he had to pull 800 yards back up the hill again afterwards.

The trolley used to have a large wooden cross attached to the floor. As a young boy, I always thought that this was some sort of religious emblem. It was nothing of the sort. It was merely a basic mechanical device, which fitted into the bottom of the milk churn – which in those days was a conical object with a round base – to prevent the churn from tipping off the trolley on its way down the bumpy road from the cowshed to the dairy. Very sensible.

In the dairy, my grandmother used to make cream cheeses – and very good they were, too. Nowadays, what is called a cream cheese is little

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the Conqueror, didn't they?' This used to infuriate my grandfather, who replied 'Certainly not. We were here to greet him.'

The Shirley family used to be a very wealthy family owning, at one period, land in seven counties. They have produced over the years some remarkable people – remarkable in both ways. One was killed at Shrewsbury because he was dressed up as the King in order to deceive the enemy. He did this very well – resulting in the King remaining alive and Sir Hugh Shirley being killed. The Shirley coat of arms is still emblazoned in the Battlefield Church at Shrewsbury.

One was Grand Falconer to Henry IV and is mentioned in Shakespeare. Three brothers, Sir Anthony, Sir Robert and Sir Thomas Shirley were traders and adventurers. One taught the Persians how to use gunpowder. Another spent so much time in Persia that he married a Persian lady and ended up by coming back to England as the Persian Ambassador to the Court of St James.

It is slightly doubtful how he came to be Persian Ambassador. There is one source which said that the then Persian Ambassador had a party in London at which some of the guests did too well and that, when they were nicely 'in their cups', Sir Anthony had a fight with his host and won. After this he became Ambassador. In other words a 'putsh'. Other sources say that the route was more conventional.

The most revered member of the Shirley family was Sir Robert Shirley. He built the Church at Staunton Harold in 1653 and was prevailed upon by Cromwell to build some ships. 'If you can build a church, you can build some ships,' said Cromwell. Sir Robert, being a staunch Royalist, refused to do so and he was put into the Tower of London where he died at the age of thirty-two suspected of having been poisoned.

Charles II, who was then not yet Charles II because he was in exile in Belgium at the time, wrote to Lady Shirley a moving letter, which is still in our possession, on hearing of the death of Sir Robert. On commiserating with her over the loss of her husband, Charles concluded 'If ever it should be in my power to remember the loyalty of your husband you will see that I bear a great part with you in your affliction by the care which I shall have of you and all your family.'

When Charles returned to England and became King Charles II, he gave Sir Robert's son a peerage, a Barony, and he decided to resurrect the name of Ferrers in the title. Earlier, a separate barony, the Barony of Ferrers of Chartley, had become extinct but a daughter of the line of Baron Ferrers of Chartley had married a Shirley. Thus it was that, now,

the two families – the Shirleys who were in England and the Ferrers who had come over with William the Conqueror – became united and the title of Ferrers was resurrected. This title was then uplifted to an earldom in 1712 by Queen Anne for whom Lord Ferrers had been Chancellor.

The first Earl Ferrers was quite a fellow. Not only was he Queen Anne's Chancellor, but he founded a Regiment, the King's Liverpool Regiment. It had as its special Regimental tune 'The Ferrers Gallop'. It was this Regiment which, by chance, came to be billeted at Staunton Harold during the War. It is curious how the unexpected often seems to happen.

The first Earl was a vigorous procreator too. He had twenty-seven children – legitimate ones. And fifty-one illegitimate children. He is even entered into the *Guinness Book of Records* as having the most illegitimate children of anyone. I suppose that that is an achievement of some sort. But I often wonder how the *Guinness Book of Records* knows that to be true.

He was married twice. The first Countess was married at sixteen and died at thirty-six whilst in the process of giving birth to her seventeenth child – and there were no twins. That was pretty staunch work. She had seventeen children in twenty years. It was from this marriage that Camfer and all of us descended. Staunton Harold and the estate went to this part of the family.

The first Earl then married again, and had a number more children. Ettington, the Shirley's House in Warwickshire, went to this part of the family which was until recently owned by John Shirley and is now owned by his son Philip.

Another Earl, the 4th Earl, probably the most notorious member of the family, shot his steward. The Earl had fallen out with his wife and had made a financial settlement for her. He made his steward one of the Trustees. The Earl thought that the steward was looking more favourably on his Countess's interests than he was on his master's.

So, one Sunday summer afternoon, he sent all the servants out from Staunton Harold. He drank some port, found a revolver and sent for his steward, Mr Johnson. The Earl raged at Mr Johnson's disloyalty, and told him to get on his knees. This Mr Johnson did. The Earl said 'I am going to shoot you.' He picked up a revolver and shot him in the stomach. The poor man collapsed.

He then had to find some help. Word had got round that Johnson had been shot and one lady ran all the way to Lount, a village about two miles away, to summon help. A band of about six men appeared carrying

staves because they were told that his Lordship was in his cups and had drunk a bottle of port, by which time he had. All the staff were, not surprisingly, scared stiff of going anywhere near the Earl.

They waited until the Earl was asleep, and Johnson was later taken to what is now 'Maggie's Cottage' and was laid down by the window. It did not seem to be a very bad wound but the bullet was lodged in his stomach and it proved fatal. Dr Timothy Kirkland came from Ashby to minister to him.

Maggie, the most recent inhabitant of the cottage when we were at Staunton and after whom the cottage was named, used to wash and starch my shirts. She was a typical old village lady, charming and superb at her work. I sometimes remind my accountant of what happened in a previous generation to one who did not look after the Earl's money properly with the rejoinder 'Be careful because these things can run in the family'. It has an electrifying effect!

The 4th Earl was tried by his fellow peers and was told to say that it was a mistake and that he did not mean to shoot him. He said that he would say no such thing. It was not a mistake. He had intended to shoot the steward.

Then he was told that he must plead insanity. Understandably, he was reluctant to do this too. But eventually he decided to do so, and he did. He pleaded his case so well that his fellow peers concluded that he could not possibly be insane. So he was sentenced to death, and hanged, legend has it, by a silken rope. He wanted to be hanged – if he had to be – at the Tower of London and not at Tyburn, which is now Marble Arch, because Tyburn was the place to which 'common fellows' go. But the Powers that Be said 'No.'

As was the form in those days, on his journey from Tower Hill to Tyburn, the coach in which Lord Ferrers rode was followed by another coach containing the coffin into which the poor fellow was going to be put. It must have been a very macabre sight, and it must have created a most uneasy feeling. The Earl, though, must have had a sense of humour, because he wore a very smart white suit which he had worn for his wedding. He did not wear it for any romantic reason but simply because, as he put it, 'the day of my wedding and the day of my death were the two unhappiest days of my life.'

When they arrived at the scaffold and Lord Ferrers had mounted it ready for this terrible death, he remained strict to protocol and he went to tip the hangman. Unfortunately, though, he gave the 'pour-boire' to the wrong man. He gave it to the hangman's mate. They both, the hangman

and his mate, had their heads hooded, like some modern day terrorists and, thereafter, there ensued an undignified harangue, the hangman claiming that the money was his, whilst the mate said that the money was given to him.

The trial of Lord Ferrers is by way of being a classic as it is one of those trials which, I am told, legal students used to have to learn. Whether they do so now or not I do not know.

It is memorable because the hanging of Lord Ferrers was the first time that the dropping floor was used. Previously, the wretched individual had to stand on the back of a cart with his head in the noose, and the cart was driven forward so that he was left dangling, and the hangman would pull on his legs to expedite the severance of the neck and put the man out of his misery. With Lord Ferrers' hanging, there was no cart, just the floor suddenly dropped eighteen inches. The rest of the procedure was not, I think, dissimilar, taking about four minutes before death took over.

The other notable fact about the trial is that a Peer of the United Kingdom could be hanged for a criminal act in the same way as would be an ordinary commoner. That was not so in other countries. That is considered by some as one of the reasons by which England was spared the indignation and upheaval which France experienced with the Revolution and it is, some people surmise, one of the reasons why the English aristocracy survived whilst those of other countries did not.

Another notable figure was 5th Earl Ferrers, Admiral Washington. He was Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports and, as my father used to put it, 'got Versailles-itis'. As a result, in 1760 he enlarged the relatively small and manageable Hall at Staunton Harold into a colossal, majestic and formidable building, very much the same as it is seen today, copying what had happened after Versailles and other buildings in that period of European history. It was this huge enlargement of the Hall which, some 200 years later, was responsible for the sale of Staunton Harold. It was just too big to use and to fund.

The 10th Earl was, in my father's day, called 'Two Back' for the very simple reason that my father was the 12th Earl – and the 10th Earl was two back. He had no children. He lived like a Lord. He went shooting. He had his own pack of hounds and his own golf course. In the old days, the now famous Quorn Hunt used to be the Ferrers Hunt. If there was any money, he spent it. And, if there was not any, he spent that, too. The 10th Earl married Ina White, the rich Irish heiress and daughter of the Countess of Bantry in Bantry Bay. Regrettably, it was not a happy marriage. He loved her but, unfortunately, she did not love him. She

missed Ireland. They had no children and much of her life was spent in a wheelchair.

Some generations earlier there had been some family feud between two parts of the family which had, as things have a wont to do, the destructive capacity of continuing for decades and even for centuries long after the cause of the original frisson had been forgotten.

As the years went by, Two Back thought that he had better meet the middle-aged man from this disagreeable line of the family who was to become his heir and who would inherit the title, Staunton Harold and everything else.

He accordingly invited my grandfather, Camfer, down to stay at Staunton. Two Back was pleasantly surprised to find that my grandfather was not a disagreeable, pugnacious or odious character, but that he was a cultivated man, who had been educated at Winchester, was a man of modest means, and was an architect by profession. He was Mr Walter Knight Shirley. He lived at 35 Victoria Road in Kensington.

Two Back, meanwhile, having had no direct heir and having had no particular love of that part of the family which was going to carry the baton after his death, had lived the life of Reilly. He kept a superbly elegant household with an indoor staff of eighty – and the debts mounted up. There was a description of life at Staunton Harold in those days in a book called *Bricks and Flowers*, written by Katherine Everett in 1951. I find it amazing that, even in those days, there should still be alive one who remembered Staunton in its high days.

In her book she described teatime:

At that moment a procession arrived, consisting of the butler and three powdered footmen, one of whom put out a tea-table, while another laid a fine lace cloth on it, and a third put a silver tray with teapot and kettle on it. The ritual was perfect, one man replacing another automatically, while canary-coloured china appeared and a quantity of varied foods – rich cakes and plain cakes, scones and biscuits, thin bread and butter, white and brown – and when all was completed the butler announced: 'Tea is served, my lady' – a fact we could scarcely have failed to know. This statement was the only active assistance he had given to the performance, and then the procession withdrew.

When Two Back died in 1911, my grandfather became, as it were, the Lord of Staunton Harold and all which therein lay. This was a role to which Camfer was not accustomed nor was it one to which he had aspired or to which he had been brought up. Nor did he anticipate debt

after debt after debt which was built in to this magnificent estate. It certainly took the gilt off it and left everyone – my grandfather and, particularly, my father – wracked with worry during their years of tenure. Debts, mortgages, Death Duties and Income Tax at 50 per cent during the war. How could anyone cope?

It was to this lovely house and this lovely estate that we used to come during the holidays. It was a change from our home at 35 Victoria Road. In those days, if you wanted an ice cream, you placed a large card, almost the size of a small window pane, with a W printed in bold black, in the window. The Wall's ice cream bicycle man would stop and ask your requirements. An ice cream was 6d or 3d, but a triangle-shaped water ice, like a Toblerone, was 1d.

We used to watch the muffin man walk down the street carrying a tray of muffins on his head and ringing a hand bell. The knife-grinder would call with his portable grindstone on a tricycle. He would then ask if there were any knives to sharpen, and he would sharpen on the pavement all the shapes and sizes of knives which he had been given from the kitchen, and sparks would fly all over the place as he peddled the grinder. I wondered why nothing caught fire. Each night the lamplighter used to walk down the road, with his long pole, ready to go up to a lamp, stretch his pole up to the glass and switch on each gas street lamp one by one.

On special occasions, and for a real treat, we would have an early tea in the nursery, and I would go with Winnie, my wonderful nanny, to King's Cross to watch the Silver Jubilee train leave for Edinburgh. It was a magnificent train and it was a real treat just to go and see it. It was built in honour of King George V's silver jubilee. The train was futuristic in design with beautiful sweeping lines in the front of the engine, not dissimilar to the Eurostar shape of today, and the train and the engine were all painted silver.

How I enjoyed it, going all the way up the platform, imbibing every bit of the beauty of the train, to stand at the end of the platform and watch this superb machine leave the station. There were, I think, six different engines each with exotic names like Silver Link, Silver King, Silver Mink and Silver Fox. No wonder one of my childhood passions was to become an engine driver. There was pride in those days.

It was from all of this that we escaped to go and stay with my grandparents at Staunton Harold. We always travelled by train. We went by taxi to St Pancras, the luggage with those huge, frantically heavy leather trunks, went by lorry.

At Leicester we changed on to a small local train. The small train

betide anyone who turned the wick up too high, especially if they then left the room because not only was there a major fire hazard (which fortunately never turned into reality) but you sooted up the glass of the lamp. This resulted in the lamp not giving out any light, but worse, it covered the room and the tables and the cloths with black soot too. No brownie points there.

Each morning the lamps throughout the house were collected and taken to the Lamp Room, which was near the Dining Room. There the wicks were trimmed, the glasses cleaned and the lamps re-filled with oil. In the evening, all the lamps were taken back around the house again to their respective positions and each one was lit. Looking back on it, it was an astonishing and time-consuming ritual. But that was life in those days.

We children had to make do, mostly, with candles. They, of course, flickered and made it all very ghost-like and we were perpetually, and inevitably, dropping candle-wax all over the place. Daddy used to say that the advent of electricity had reduced the amount of ghosts no end. The shadows and spooky feelings had gone, as had the inability to see that it was your dressing gown cord which was bumping down the steps behind you and not something supernatural.

One Christmas before the war, in Camfer's time, we were all staying at Staunton and Mummy dressed up on Christmas Eve as Father Christmas and walked down the Spring Passage. This was a long, narrow, dark passage. A young girl, who had just started work as a housemaid, saw this apparition coming down the passage. And screamed. And fled. Mummy was so upset that she had so frightened the young housemaid that she ran after her to try and console her. Even more screamings and even more fleeings.

The housemaid left her employment. She did not come back any more. That was hardly the easiest thing for a person to explain to her mother-in-law on Christmas Eve.

Despite the size of the house, there were, I think, only three downstairs lavatories, three on the main landing where the bedrooms were and two on the top landing where the servants' quarters were. Likewise there were three bathrooms on the bedroom floor and one on the servants' floor. The central heating was virtually non-existent. Despite this, there were two huge boilers below ground which had to be stoked every day. They had avaricious appetites.

There were 'bunkers' on each landing up to which coal had to be brought and where it was stored. As children, we never had a fire in our bedroom unless we were ill – and then it was quite a perk. It was

particularly romantic to wake up in the middle of the night and to see the flames dancing around the walls. We enjoyed that. It had the added advantage of enabling one to see, with any luck, whether the fire would still be going in the morning and so could be continued.

The house used to use about 400 tons of coal a year. That didn't matter too much, as it was built on top of a coal mine, and coal was quite cheap – £1 per ton or so. But the coal had to be carried everywhere – up to the bunkers on the landings and in to the rooms.

There was, of course, no running water in the bedrooms. A maid would bring up a 'ewer', a brass watering-can-like object containing hot water, which would be put in the circular basin in the washstand in the corner of the bedroom and covered with a towel in order to keep it warm.

The estate had its own water supply, which sounds very exotic but it was not really, because it frequently broke down. It was powered by two Rams. Despite the efforts of all my school masters to inculcate some form of learning and understanding into my head at a later date, I never understood how Rams worked. They can best be described as a self-perpetuating pumping system which required no engine or fuel, but which succeeded in pumping the water around the estate – by water.

All the laundry of the house was done in the laundry cottage. This was found at the far end of the Park. Mrs Charles lived there and, with help, she did the laundry. Her son, Stanley, who married Mary, went to live in the Melbourne Lodge at the top of the Melbourne Drive and, subsequently, they went with my mother to look after her house and garden at Shirley.

One used to see each Tuesday a horse and cart slowly walking across the park with hampers of dirty clothes and sheets. They were boiled in a copper and ironed with a flat iron of which there were four. Three rested on a special rack against the fire to get hot whilst the fourth was used to iron.

I remember old Mrs Charles giving me, when I first went to school, a lavender bag with a message in which she said that she hoped that I would have 'right happy school days'.

Everyone changed for dinner. Of course, at that age, I never went to dinner, but I remember my mother saying that she was a little apprehensive of staying with her parents-in-law and remembered how at lunchtime, Gaga would say 'Tonight ladies, we will wear our lace.'

There was an outside bell on the roof of the house. It was called a Toxin. To this day I do not know why. I thought that a toxin was a disagreeable thing which you had in your stomach if you were unlucky.

The Tocsin would be rung at 7.30 p.m. to alert the members of the household to go and change and it would be rung again, at five minutes to eight, to alert them to the fact that there were only five minutes left before they had to be on parade in the Drawing Room.

When dinner was ready, the gong would be sounded by Stone the butler, not with a great big bang, but with a crescendo of little hits, which made a beautiful resonant noise. Camfer would lead the way into the Dining Room with a lady on his arm, and all the other ladies would go in on the arm of a gentleman. Very elegant it must have been. How much we have lost.

Sundays were always special days. The Church stood proudly about 200 yards from the front door. It was built by Sir Robert Shirley and has over its West Door the epitaph:

*In the yeare 1653
When all things Sacred were throughout ye nation
Either demollisht or profaned
Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet,
Founded this church;
Whose singular praise it is
To haue done the best things in ye worst times
And
Hoped them in the most calamitous;
The righteous shall be held in everlasting remembrance.*

'Do the best things in the worst times and hope them in the most calamitous.' I have always thought that that was not a bad motto for the whole of life. Do the best which you can and, when events gang up against you to such an extent that life seems intolerable, then hope for the best. And don't despair.

It had always been the custom, which my grandfather inherited, that Lord Ferrers had his own private Chaplain on the estate, who lived in the Parsonage, a house into which, during the war, my parents and all our family moved. Lord Ferrers had to pay the Chaplain – in those days £50 per year – and he was allowed to live in the Parsonage. Lord Ferrers had to pay for the upkeep both spiritual and material of the Church, bricks and mortar, the lot. In Two Back's day, the Chaplain spent his Sunday locked in the Church and his meals were brought over from the Hall for him to consume in the vestry. I do not think that the modern cleric would think too much of that.

There were usually three services on a Sunday held at Staunton, but

not necessarily all on the same day: Holy Communion at 8 a.m., Matins at 11 a.m. and Evensong at 3 p.m. The main service was Matins at 11 a.m., and this was the one which, as a young boy, I was obliged to attend.

There was quite a ritual attached to it. The Chapel had a quaint custom, which had existed since Jacobean times, of the men sitting on the right hand side of the Nave and the ladies on the left. Families were therefore separated – but everyone took that as par for the course. Lord Ferrers and the male members of his family, and any male guests who were staying in the Hall, sat in the front pew on the right-hand side and spilled over, if necessary, into the second pew. Lady Ferrers and the female members of her family and any female guests who were staying in the Hall did likewise and sat in the front pew on the left-hand side, spilling over, if necessary, to the second pew.

Each senior employee of the estate and Hall would have his own particular pew – the agent, the head gardener, the Chaplain's wife, the housekeeper, the cook, the butler, they all had their special pews, with their wives on the other side of the aisle. Other employees or tenants or visitors would fit in as and where they could although, as in good Church of England practice, they tended to gravitate towards a pew in which they normally found themselves, thereby claiming some form of squatter's rights over it.

The party from the House itself would gather in the Hall and, at two minutes to 11 o'clock, they would set off to the Church with my grandfather in front. Once inside, my grandfather and grandmother would go to their pews, with the others filtering into their pews. The door was then locked and the key was carried up on a velvet cushion to my grandfather.

That custom still existed until we left Staunton in 1954. The door was always locked although the key was not brought up on a velvet cushion. I used to carry it in my hand.

The Church is beautiful in its architecture. It has a lovely and serene atmosphere. The ceiling is a complex painting of the beginning of Creation. There is a beautiful Father Schmidt organ, over which the cognoscenti drool. It stands in the choir loft. In our day, the air for the organ was produced by some poor character, sometimes me, pumping a lever behind the organ and watching a little lead weight go up and down. One could not afford to relax because, if the organist were to pull out an extra stop or, in modern day parlance, to switch up the volume, the lead weight would leap up to the top, and there would be a hideous noise like bagpipes deflating.

Each pew had a door attached to it, and in front of Lord Ferrers' pew was the place from which the Chaplain took the service. It was the Jacobean Triple-Decker pulpit – unusual for these days but not, I suppose, for those days. As its name implies, there were three tiers to this structure. The lower one, on ground level, was the Clerk's Reading Desk, where the Clerk sat. He gave the responses as people were not very educated in those days and he may have been the only literate member of the congregation. Others might join in from memory. In the absence of the Priest the Clerk would take the service. In the olden days services were often from there. As this faced north and was immediately in front of Lord Ferrers' pew, few could see what was happening. So the service was usually conducted by the Priest, in the analogy of the Car Park, from level 2. The top pulpit – level 3 – was from where the sermon was given. In our days, most of the service was taken from level 2. On only very rare and special occasions was the top pulpit used. But it was lovely when it was.

I always found this impressive. Usually, before the sermon, the Bidding Prayer was used. This was a particularly personal Bidding Prayer, which included a reference to all the members of the family. This filled one with a certain amount of embarrassment and some quite undesirable, undeserved and misplaced pride. Having prayed for the King and Queen and other members of the Royal Family, it went on to invoke the prayers of those in the congregation 'for the Nobility and Commonality of this land, and especially for the Rt. Hon. The Earl Ferrers, The Countess Ferrers, The Viscount Tamworth and all the members of their family'. The wording of the prayer was quite beautiful. It made one's spine stand upright, but I think that the Bidding Prayer is not used too much nowadays. It ran as follows:

Let us pray for Christ's Holy Catholic Church. Especially for that pure and Apostolic branch of it established in these Kingdoms, and herein for our most excellent Sovereign Lady, Elizabeth, by the grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and of her Realms and Territories, Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, over all persons and in all causes, ecclesiastical and civil, within these dominions, supreme; for our gracious Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Charles, Prince of Wales, and all the Royal Family; for the Lords and others of Her Majesty's most honourable Privy Council; for the nobility, and especially for the right honourable the Earl Ferrers, the Countess Ferrers, the Viscount Tamworth and the family; for the gentry and the Commonality of this land; for the magistrates and others

who are in authority, that all in their respective stations may labour to advance the glory of God and the present and future welfare of mankind, remembering that solemn account which they must one day give before the tribunal of God.

But for the sake of all, let us pray for the clergy, whether Bishops, Priests or Deacons, that they may shine like lights in the world and acclaim the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Finally, let us bless God for all His servants departed this life in His faith and fear, more especially for Robert Shirley, baronet, founder of this church, beseeching God to give us grace so to follow their good examples that, this life ended, we may dwell with them in life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose most perfect form of prayer we conclude our address to the Throne of grace saying:

Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, The power and the glory, for ever and ever Amen.

Chapter 3

Life at Staunton Harold

CAMFER DIED IN 1937. Apparently – although I cannot remember this myself – aged seven, I bought five cigarettes out of my own pocket money to give to my father to help him over his grief. My father liked it.

We all moved from London to take up residence in this huge building of seventy-two rooms. A year or so before we went, my father had not been well and the doctor had said to my mother, ‘Get him out away from London to get some fresh sea air.’ So, they went down to Brighton for the day.

It was November. It was a miserable, cold, rainy day and there was hardly anyone about. My parents went on to the pier and saw the booth of a Fortune Teller. My father was a reluctant participant in this kind of futuristic prediction and, in a somewhat ungallant manner like a shy young boy shoving his sister forward, he told my mother to go and have a shot and see what the Fortune Teller would tell her.

The Fortune Teller told her two things of note. My mother had lost a silver teaspoon to which she was greatly attached. 35 Victoria Road had been searched up and down, but no, it could not be found. The Fortune Teller said ‘Don’t worry. The teaspoon will appear and probably when you will least expect it to do so.’ My mother forgot all about that until, some time later, my sisters, Betty and Neppy, were playing around in the nursery and bumped into a piece of furniture. Out fell the silver teaspoon.

The other memorable thing which the Fortune Teller said was ‘I see a large house with a lake in front of it. You will move there after the second full moon of next year. But just check that the property is properly insured because you will be burgled within a year’.

My grandfather died in February of the following year, 1937 – after the second full moon. When we moved to the ‘large house with a lake in front of it’ – Staunton Harold – my father studied the insurance policies with infinite care. He found that the House was insured for everything except ... burglary. He had it insured. The House was burgled in November.

I never understand how these things work or what credence, or authority or respect, should be accorded to fortune tellers, clairvoyants

and the like. One tends to dismiss them all as irrelevant rubbish and all part of a con trick. But is that so? Or is it because one does not like to get too close to them for fear of what they might say? I think that there is something in some of them somewhere but, on the whole, I prefer to stand at a distance – in happy ignorance of how they perform and of what they might divulge.

My father went down to Brighton some time later and went on to the pier to thank the Fortune Teller. But she had gone.

Life at Staunton before the war, certainly to us as children, was idyllic. A huge house – far too huge, but that was the way that the dice had fallen – an inside staff of some thirteen including Stone the Butler, and Mrs Stone the Cook, and an outside staff of about the same. As children, we knew nothing of the apprehensions which my father had of being left with an estate of 1,500 acres in pretty poor nick, a colossal house and a private church to run and to keep up, as well as a large mortgage on it all and huge debts bequeathed by Two Back. My father always said that the estate should have been sold when Two Back died. My grandfather thought the same, but he did not like to do so as soon as he had inherited it. Anyhow, he had two able sons, both of whom had been to Winchester, and maybe one or both of them might be able to make some money and find a way through.

Similarly, Daddy always said that he should have sold Staunton when he inherited it in 1937, but he did not like to do that just as soon as his father had died. That would have seemed peremptory and unseemly. But, of course, within two years the Second World War had started, and that put the lid on that idea – at least for the time being.

Neppy paid a short visit to hospital in 1938. This meant that she could not go back to school for a few terms. My parents, therefore, thought that they must get a governess to help both Neppy, whilst she could not return to school, and me before going off to prep school.

So into our lives walked Miss Mason – Margaret Mason, commonly known in later life by her friends as Margot. To us, though, and to all the staff at Staunton Harold, she was Miss Mason. She was twenty-one and had red hair. I was eight and shy. I was introduced to her by my mother. I was horrified. Red hair! When Mummy came to say good-night to me in my bed, I said to her, almost by way of admonition for having brought her into our life, 'But you know, Mummy, that I cannot stand red hair.'

Miss Mason was a lady, though, of exceptional talents. She taught us. She played the piano beautifully. She played tennis for Leicestershire. She was bright and able and ran everywhere. I have never seen – or heard

– anyone run down a flight of stairs at the speed with which Miss Mason did. It sounded like a pack of dominoes collapsing.

She drove the car beautifully and loved doing so, to such an extent that, if anyone else were to drive whilst she was in the car she emanated an atmosphere of black fury – jealousy I suppose – but it was like having a joss stick in one's car, puffing out horrible vapours.

She came, though, to be an integral part of our family, staying with us for some twenty years. She became a hugely trusted, loyal friend and a real confidante. She became my father's secretary when Neppy and I went to school, and she helped to organise the estate – and everything and everyone else who came within her sights.

One day before the war, my mother and I were gardening, doing some weeding in one of the borders. Miss Mason was with us. A few weeks earlier we had been to see the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. That evening, the Toxin rang at 7.30 to warn us of dinner at 8 p.m. So we gathered up our belongings and went off home in a line, with our hoes and rakes over our shoulders, just like the Seven Dwarfs, singing 'Heigh ho! Heigh ho! It's home from work we go.' My mother was in the front. I was in the middle and Miss Mason was at the rear. We gave ourselves the names of some of the dwarfs and, Miss Mason, inevitably being at the back, was called Dopey. Dopey she was from that day forward to the end of her life.

When the war came in 1939, the first thing which happened was that thousands of children were evacuated from Coventry which was likely to be, and which turned out to be, a prime target for German bombers. Some of the British children were sent abroad to places like Canada where they did not see their parents for years. Others were disseminated into the country.

My mother did the round of the houses on the estate and the nearby village of Lount to find out how many evacuees could be taken in by each house. Some said that they could take one, some two, some three. Those who said that they could all came to the Village Hall, which was known as the Recreation Room, in order to meet their new lodgers-to-be when they arrived. Several bus loads of them came, and my mother, rather like Lady Bountiful, sat at a desk distributing these poor bewildered children and their mothers to their new families.

When this was completed, rather like the five barley loaves and two

small fishes, there were some fifteen evacuees left over. 'We will have them at Staunton,' said my mother, and off they went to this huge house, the like of which these children from Coventry had never seen before. They were terrified. They were put into bedrooms in the attics. The rooms there used to be the servants' quarters, and there were many rooms next door to each other along a long passage. There were two rooms on the ground floor near the back door into which my mother had put some chairs and tables, so that it would be nice and welcoming for them.

My mother went down to see them that night to make sure that they were all happy and content. She had come from dinner in her evening dress. People always changed for dinner in those days even at the beginning of the war. But there was no one in the two downstairs rooms. 'Oh well. They must have gone to bed.' So my mother went up to the attics. She went into the first room. No one there. The beds were empty. She went into the second room. No one there either. The beds were empty. And so it went on until she came to the end of the passage, and there they were. All fifteen children and mothers. They had got themselves into two rooms. A little mother with a white face said, 'Do come in.' They were scared stiff!

Not surprising when you come to think of it. They had come from Coventry. Their particular part of that town was like a village. Everyone knew everyone. They met their friends in the streets, in the shops, in the cinema and in the pub. No one travelled. It was quite a social life in its own way.

Now, what on earth had they come to? They had travelled from Coventry to the middle of the country. A terrifyingly huge house. No water. No electricity. No heaters. Only lamps and candles. 'Is there a pub?' 'Oh yes, down the drive – about a mile. Across the field on the left, but look out for the cows because they may chase you.'

They were terrified – and miserable. In those days, the men went out to work and earned the money. The wives stayed at home and cooked and looked after the house and children. When the husbands of these evacuees came to Staunton at the weekends to meet up with their families, the wives and children were thrilled.

'How are you getting on alone in Coventry?'

'Fine. Fine.'

'Who is looking after you?'

'A nice kind lady drops in and helps.'

'Oh she does, does she?'

You can see all the anxieties, tensions and miseries. The wives soon

found themselves some transport and went home with their children to see what on earth was going on and to try and bring a bit of order and discipline back into the marital homes again. None stayed long at Staunton.

I hope that they enjoyed their introduction into country life, even though it may have taken some time to adjust. It was all totally new to them. They did not know what happened in the country. They did not know what baths were for. Some of their parents used them for storing coal. I remember one young boy, of eight years of age I suppose, Donald Bamber, being amazed to see a cow being milked and seeing the cowman squirt the milk out of the cow's teat into his face. He always thought that milk came out of bottles.

After a while the military came and requisitioned Staunton Harold. Two officers came to see my father in his Den at Staunton. 'How can I help you?' Daddy said. 'We want your house.' 'When?' 'Next week.' So it was.

I am not sure, and never have been, as to what is the difference between being requisitioned and being commandeered. I think that the language of commandeering is 'We are having this,' whereas the language of requisitioning is 'I hope that you do not mind if we have this.' The net effect seemed to be the same. The military takes over your property. And they took over Staunton Harold.

We stayed on at Staunton in a part of the house for a year or so before moving out and going to live in the Parsonage. The Parsonage was a horrible little house really. There were no two windows in it which were the same and they mostly faced north. The only room to face south was the larder. But we kept three big rooms at Staunton – the Hall, the Dining Room, and Daddy's study – for generally keeping things or for any parties.

When the military took over Staunton, life became very different. There were guards and road blocks everywhere, the drives were lined with half-moon corrugated huts containing ammunition. On Sunday, the chapel was full because there was a Church Parade to which all those who could not find a better excuse were obliged to attend. I remember thinking how smart it was to see some four soldiers collect the offerings on a plate and march up with them to the altar, halt, give them to the priest and about-turn. It was very disciplined and very effective. In some funny way it gave one a feeling of confidence – in them, in the military, and the way in which things were done. But that is one of the advantages of discipline, which is nowadays so frequently despised and ridiculed

and, too often, rejected.

On some Sundays my father used to take the salute standing on the steps outside the front door as the soldiers all smart marched past after church. I sometimes used to stand by him. I felt very smart, but I think that others must have thought that I was horribly precocious.

The soldiers at Staunton were a good group of people, who were kind and understanding to us. I think that some of the officers could not believe their luck in finding a red-haired, twenty-year-old Dopey on the scene – beautiful, fresh, vibrant, confident and young – and I think that Dopey could not believe her luck in finding an endless array of young officers taking an interest in her. Boy! What has happened? She was like the cat who has been given a bowl of cream. I did not understand about that kind of thing then, but I do now! It was, though, all very proper and above board – at least I think that it was.

Oddly enough, the Other Ranks looked after their part of the house beautifully, but the Officers left theirs in a shocking state. My mother had left one or two nice things for them, like curtains and a carpet and the odd chair, in order to make the Officers' Mess look and feel more homely. They were ruined.

After the English soldiers, Italian prisoners of war and Germans came to Staunton. Although one hates to say it, they were far better custodians of the house than were our own English soldiers. They, particularly the Germans, looked after the house immaculately, and many of the Italians made lovely pieces of metal work, like cigarette cases and lighters which they engraved. They were beautiful works of art and they reflected the great skill of their makers. We loved these hand-made pieces, and I used to ask them whether they would make some for me, which they did.

The Italians used to walk home in the evening after a day's work on the farm. It was lovely to hear them, with their magnificent Italian voices, singing arias and operettas as they went down the Ashby drive, and to hear the music filter across the countryside.

One day, Dopey went down to Staunton and was horrified by what she saw. She went back to the Parsonage, where we were then living, and said to my father that he really ought to come down to the Hall.

He did. There were stacks of young girls with plunging necklines and skin-tight short skirts all over the place. It was crawling with them. They had come from heaven-knows-where by bicycle. My father sent for the Commanding Officer and gave him a monumental dressing down. He then went back home and rang up Northern Command and told them what was happening and said that it had to stop. When he rang off, he sat

back in his chair and wept, 'Look what they have done to my lovely home. They have turned it into an unlicensed brothel.'

Staunton was built on an E-shape but without the middle bit, so the windows of one part of the house faced the windows of the other part, albeit at a considerable distance.

At the beginning of the war, when the military had only taken part of the House, we still lived in the other. One evening, part of the domestic staff, who were mostly girls of eighteen-to-twenty and who were living in one part of the 'E', were getting undressed. The rooms were lit by candle-light and the curtains were not closed.

The soldiers on the other side of the 'E' could not believe their eyes – a free strip-tease show! Before anyone knew where they were, the windows on the soldiers' side had soldiers practically dropping out of them, like the participants of a Punch and Judy Show.

The girls quite liked the attention they were receiving, and they improved their efforts. Neppy, though, sneaked on them and rushed along to my mother and said, 'You had better come and see what is going on down here.' My mother stomped down the passage and told the girls, 'Put the candles out immediately and draw the curtains.' They did. That was the end of that bit of fun.

During all the time when we were at Staunton, my mother took a great interest in everything locally. She was a Justice of the Peace. She was on the governing body of Ashby Grammar School. She was a member of the Women's Institute. She was a member of the Mother's Union of which she subsequently became the Presiding Member, and she ran the local Sunday School in the Church at Staunton every Sunday.

Each child would have a book into which you stuck the appropriate coloured stamp to show that you had attended Sunday School that week. A prize was given if, at the end of the year, you had a full book with no cards missing. It was rather like collecting cigarette cards.

I remember the school mistress's boy, Michel Rathbone – a clever but precocious child of about ten – telephoning on Sunday afternoon and asking whether, as he was ill and therefore unable to come to Sunday School, he would nevertheless be able to have the stamp for that week. My reply, at the mature age of fifteen, was 'You don't come to Sunday School to get a stamp. You come to learn about religion.' I do not think that he liked that.

My mother always ran a Nativity Play every Christmas Eve in the Church. She used to write it and 'direct' it and help, together with others, in the making of the costumes. The cast was all the Sunday School children from the estate and the nearby villages, aged from six to about sixteen.

There were always amusing anecdotes some of which one can never get out of one's mind. One young girl, Joyce Cave, playing Herod found it difficult to say 'Go and search diligently for the young child.' She used to say 'Go and search deliciously for the young child.' Even to this day I cannot hear that piece read without being taken back instantly, and with amusement, to that young girl's difficulty with Herod. She must be eighty, now.

Another was one Herbert Hurst. My mother said that he was too young to take part in the Nativity Play. He was about four. She told Neppy, who was then aged about fifteen, to teach him a carol. Neppy remembered Herbert Hurst sitting in one of the box pews of the Chapel swinging his legs. He could not say, 'In the bleak mid winter.' He could only say, 'In the blinking winter.' That became an expression in our family. If something was going to happen in the winter, Daddy always said that it would happen 'in the blinking winter'.

Again, it is surprising the effect which these episodes have on one's life – forever. It was only the other day that I had a letter from a man who lives in Suffolk, not far from where we now live, to say how he was brought up at Staunton and how well he remembered my mother and the Nativity plays in which he used to take part at Christmas. It made a huge impression on him.

When my mother died Neppy had several letters from people who had been children at Staunton in the early part of the war. They wrote and said what a tremendous amount Mummy had done for them in teaching them about religion in the Sunday school classes and the Nativity plays. They, in their turn, had become pillars of their church and so had their children.

One young child had walked all the way up the lanes from Heath End to the Recreation Room, a matter of some two miles and back again, just to go to Sunday school. That was quite an effort. Would people do that nowadays? My mother would have been thrilled to know what effects her efforts had had. It is another example of how you never know the effects which you have on other people.

My father was, by nature, very low church. My mother was, by nature, high church. My father could not stand incense, Hunting Pink, candles

and even vestments. He liked the simple stuff of church life. Not so my mother, who enjoyed injecting a bit of spice and pageantry into the life of the Church at Staunton Harold. It was, of course, entirely the choice of my parents what, if anything, was put on in the Chapel. It was, after all, not a parish church. It was a private chapel, run by and financed by my father. Others came to it, as it were, by invitation.

My father always held reservations about a midnight service on Christmas Eve, preceded by a Nativity Play. He always felt that a midnight service, which was not in those days a very common occurrence, had too much of a flavour of popery about it, particularly when the parson wore, at Mummy's suggestion, some modest white vestments. And anyhow, Daddy did not like the idea of the children running around the Chapel and, in particular, around the chancel, turning it into a stage and making the whole place resemble a theatre. He did not find that in any way to be a soothing preparation for a Christmas service.

I always thought that that was a bit of an extreme position, although everyone is entitled to their own views. But Daddy came to the Nativity Play and to the Midnight Service. He tolerated them and, in the end, he liked them. He always, though, admired my mother for what she did, how she had galvanised people together to make a Nativity Play and how she had inculcated into these children, and indeed into their parents, who came to watch and thereafter to participate in the Midnight service, something much more than just the ability to act in a play.

In the early days of our time at Staunton, before the outbreak of war, my father had the advantage of a chauffeur, Lovatt. Cars, in these days, had no heating. No one had yet thought of – or if they had, they had not yet succeeded in devising – a system of heating a car with the excess heat from the engine. So whenever my mother went out in the car in winter she had a rug with a metal ring attached to it, which she would snap around her waist, and hot water bottles were produced to keep her and the passengers in the back warm.

Antifreeze had not been thought of by then. At night-time in the winter, a small oil lamp with a wick in it used to be placed on top of the engine and underneath the bonnet of the car, so that it would keep the water in the engine from freezing. Otherwise, you had to drain the water from the engine or risk having a cracked cylinder block. Woe betide anyone who drove the car out in the morning having forgotten to remove the lamp!

One employee at Staunton was found to have been pilfering and he was told to find another job. His future employer asked my father for a

reference. Daddy said, 'Although the Doctor has said that he must not lift heavy things, he is pretty good at lifting light ones.'

The kitchen garden of some four and half acres was turned into a commercial nursery garden for the duration of the war. It was called Staunton Harold Nurseries, and many of the flowers and vegetables which were grown were sold on Fridays and Saturdays at a special stall which we had at Derby market. Derby Market was a pretty rough place, but Dopey, who by this time had joined the Women's Land Army and dressed up in the uniform of brown corduroy jodhpurs, beige shirt and green sweater, used to go there and do the selling. She also made sure that we had the best-looking stall on the market.

Nothing is ever easy in the growing and disposing of grown goods. Arum lilies were fine, beautiful, robust flowers, perfect for Easter. In time for the Easter market, they were very valuable at 5/- per bloom (a lot of money in those days). The week after Easter they were virtually valueless.

In 1942, my sister Neppy shocked the family, her friends, her school, the World, and anyone else who was in a shockable frame of mind, by announcing (very discreetly) that, at the age of sixteen, she wanted to get married. The man of her dreams was Maurice Robson. He was in the Army – an army chaplain – who had been at Staunton and who had seen, admired, got to know and love Neppy. He was thirty-two, twice Neppy's age. That did not half capsize the tranquillity of our happy family life. My father said that Maurice 'has pinched my best bud'. My mother said that, like Lot's wife, she had been struck dumb for three days and could not speak.

But, like most things in life, the initial shock was overcome and they got married and 'lived happily ever after'. They were married in 1944 in the Chapel at Staunton Harold, when Neppy was eighteen. Very few people came to the wedding because it had to be held at short notice when Maurice had a few days army leave. And, because Staunton was not a parish church which was licensed for the taking of weddings, a special licence had to be requested from, and was provided by, the Archbishop of Canterbury – in three days.

Maurice prepared me for my confirmation in 1942, when I was thirteen and, in the company of two other young boys, I was duly confirmed by the Bishop of Derby in Staunton Chapel on St George's Day, Saturday 23 April 1942.

The evening after the confirmation, and the day before I was going to receive Holy Communion for the first time which Maurice was going to

take in the Chapel, we were having a family supper at home, and I repeated a stupid story which I remember one of my masters, Mr Ledgard, at West Downs telling me. It was about a man who got on a barrel at Hyde Park Corner. He was haranguing the multitudes and telling them to repent. In support of his case, he quoted Our Lord who had said 'In a little while you will see me, and in a little while you will see me not.' At which moment the top of the barrel gave way and, to the horror of the spectators, the speaker disappeared inside the barrel. A little voice from within it said 'Ha, Ha. But I can see through the Bunghole.'

All my family were kind enough to laugh at this with considerable gusto. What none of us realised was that the next Sunday – the next day – was the Third Sunday after Easter and this story in all its glory formed the entire gospel. It kept on repeating 'In a little time you will see me, and in a little time you will see me not.' In church, anything seems ten times funnier than it does outside, and this was no exception. Here was I, at my first sombre Holy Communion service, yet all doubled up with laughter – trying hopelessly to keep a straight face. But it was not possible. Nor could anyone else. The poor unfortunate Maurice had to read through the Gospel, with its constant repetition of the essence of the story, with a composed face. He managed to do so – but only just – which promptly made it far more funny for the rest of us. The Third Sunday after Easter has become known in our family, rather irreverently, as 'Bunghole Sunday'.

At the end of the war, Daddy said that Staunton would have to be sold. Everything had been sacrificed on the altar of Staunton. It cost a fortune to run and that left nothing for anything, or anyone, else. He added to me, very poignantly, 'I do not want you to have the worry that I have had!' Daddy wrote to me in August 1954, two months both before the sale and before he died. 'I do very sincerely feel if I had not taken this decision, you would have been forced to do so under far less favourable conditions.'

This threat had been hanging around the place for years. I loved Staunton. Mummy loved Staunton. We all loved Staunton. But then Daddy died late the night before the auction.

'Do you want to put the sale off?' I was asked by the auctioneer and the solicitors. Of course I did, but how could we overturn my father's conviction of the last seven years within twenty-four hours of his dying? It would look as if there had been a terrible family row and, anyhow, there would still be Death Duties to pay.

So the sale went ahead. I sat behind the Auctioneer on the stage at the

Auction Rooms in Derby and I saw the lovely Staunton Harold Hall sold for £10,000 – to demolition contractors.

Some four months later, Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, VC, agreed to buy the house from the demolition contractors for £16,000. Fifty per cent increase in four months – highway robbery. Cheshire had no money. People gave him bits of money, shillings, pennies, £5, £10. But he was miles off the new asking price. Then, when he was right up against the buffers and had to pay the balance within a couple of days, someone advanced him an interest-free loan of £10,000. He got on to a train and rushed up to the solicitors.

So Staunton Harold now belonged to the Cheshire Foundation Homes for the Sick. People came from everywhere – miners, folk from Derby, from Leicester, from the National Coal Board – to give their time and effort in order to make Staunton once again a home, albeit this time a home for people who had been afflicted in life.

For some twenty years Staunton Harold gave astonishing happiness to those who lived there, remaining a gem in the countryside. It was then sold to John Blunt, the son of our old butcher. He and his wife Jacqueline have brilliantly and sensitively turned it back into the lovely family home that it always was, and have always been astonishingly kind to the previous owners.

Meanwhile, before the sale of Staunton in 1954, Daddy said that we – or Mummy and he because I was married by then – were going to live at Shirley. ‘Our family has been at Staunton for only 500 years. But we have been at Shirley for 1,000 years.’

Chapter 4

West Downs

AT THE AGE of eight, in January of 1938, I was sent to my preparatory school at West Downs in Winchester. My father had been there when it was run by Lionel Helbert. He loved it and he admired Helbert greatly, as I think most people did. It was now run by Kenneth Tindall – who was also known as K.T. His wife, Theodora, was a sweet person but regrettably short and dumpy. I say ‘regrettably’ because her initials were TMT and she gained the unfortunate, and not very respectful, nickname of Tumpy.

I loathed West Downs – especially the first few days. So much so that I asked the Headmaster for some writing paper and an envelope. I wanted to tell my parents how miserable I was. He offered me a postcard, but I declined that by saying that the postman could read it all. So I was given an envelope and some paper.

I begged my mother to come and collect me on the first train on Monday – and such was my trust in her that I ‘knew’ that she would. As a postscript, I added that I would return to my parents the tip of two shillings which I had been given. My mother told me, later, that my postscript had completely unbuttoned her and made her burst into tears. I still have that letter. The Headmaster fortunately warned my mother in advance that a pretty miserable letter was on its way. He advised her not to take too much notice as I would soon settle down.

Little boys can be pretty odious and most new boys come at the beginning of the school year in September. There were only two of us who came in January 1938. One was Giles Allan – although, of course, I didn’t know then that he was Giles. One did not know that kind of thing then. He was just Allan. The other was me, who was then Tamworth. We were the most junior. Allan and Tamworth were always at the bottom of every school list. Our peculiar isolation, as we were the only two new boys of the term, imposed upon us an instant friendship. When anything went wrong there was always a chorus of ‘Oh, Allan and Tamworth’.

I had not met Allan since West Downs days when he was a squitty little boy and I wondered what had become of him. I met him in 2002 or thereabouts at an Old West Downs reunion dinner. Here was this huge,

Continued on next page

jolly, larger-than-life character, perpetually laughing. I asked him what he had done in life. 'I was the Regimental Lieutenant Colonel of the Irish Guards!' – alias Colonel Giles Allan, OBE. Help! Help!

West Downs was a school deeply conscious about health. Twice a day – once in bed in the morning and once standing together after prayers in the evening – the two sisters used to take everyone's temperatures with a thermometer which, together with about thirty others, was kept in a jar of methylated spirits. You were woken by a jab of glass being put into your mouth, which sometimes, because of your half dozy state, you would break and get glass and mercury into your mouth. You were left totally convinced that if you did not die from the one you would die from the other. If the glass did not break, which was of course the usual occurrence, you would be obliged to suck in methylated spirits. Charming.

Onions used to hang on the walls in the dormitories near the windows in bundles of about ten. The theory was that onions helped to avoid colds. I never thought that the theory proved very successful.

Then there was that remarkable institution of Sanitary Prep – from 8.40 a.m. to 9.10 a.m. – when you went after breakfast to your classroom to do some prep. It was also the opportunity for each boy to open his bowels. This was overseen by a sister who was on parade with a stick to ascertain the results. If there was no success, then the boy would be made to have another shot at 11 a.m. If that was not successful, then you were for the High Jump – syrup of figs at night.

Allan and I always used to take as long as possible over breakfast so as not to get to the classroom before our mistress, Miss Hills – or Miss Quilly, as she used to be known – arrived. There was good reason for this. One little boy with red hair, Bucknall Minor I think he was, who had been in the school for all of one, or possibly even two, terms demanded somewhat aggressively 'Have you had a new boy's squishing yet?' You didn't have to have a lot going on in the Intelligence Department to gather what this was likely to be like and to realise that it was probably pretty disagreeable. It consisted of getting the poor newcomer on to the floor and the rest of the form all sitting on top of him. All pretty harmless in itself, but daunting to a frightened, lonely, isolated eight-year-old.

Table manners were drilled into one, as there was a master at each table to ensure proper behaviour. Anyone who fell foul of the standard was made to stand up, and therefore not eat, for ten minutes, or even for the rest of the meal. Everyone would then turn round and look at the hapless boy who was standing like a lighthouse in a calm sea and say,

'There is Smith standing up. I wonder what he has done.' Like the stocks, Public Humiliation has its own salutary effect.

A really bad misdemeanour had the boy standing on his chair at his table so that the whole school could see and take note. In modern political parlance this would be called naming and shaming. A boy who had really gone beyond the pale with bad manners was made to go and sit at the Pig's Table – eat on his own at a table in the corner of the room facing the wall. No one liked that, and no one respected anyone who was sent there.

I always regarded Mr Ledgard as an old and rather frightening master – and he was both – but he was a stickler for rectitude. He had white hair – and that made him even more frightening. He had a gammy leg and I thought that he was eighty, but he was probably only sixty-seven. 'You must eat your pudding with a spoon and a fork.' If a boy ate his pudding with a spoon only, Mr Ledgard used to say, 'Only savages eat with a spoon only.' I have never forgotten that. If I am – or anyone else is – tempted to do without a fork for the pudding, even if it is rice pudding, his words immediately come to mind, and I remind my children of them. It is funny how things that people do or say when you are young stay with you for the rest of your life – but that is what bringing up children is all about.

I was quite keen on gardening when I was about ten. I read a book all about allotments. It referred to digging the allotment, not just one spit deep, but two. This was called 'Bastard Trenching'. I mentioned it to my mother who said, 'Never use that word bastard. If you do so at school, they will sack you.' Help. What is this terrible word? Typical of a boy who likes playing with fire, I asked one of the masters, David Howell Griffiths, in the most grown-up unfussed way about 'Bastard Trenching'. There – I had said the word. For the next three weeks I was then terrified that I would be sacked.

When you were about to leave West Downs, you were given what in typically schoolboy language was called a 'Leaver's Jaw'. It was a one-to-one, with the Headmaster telling you all about the Facts of Life. It was a good practice but, despite everyone wanting to know what the Leaver's Jaw was about, it never got out. I always found that remarkable. You were told not to talk about it, and you did not. Nobody did. Trust can be forthcoming even at an early age.

We were looked after, and were taught well, at West Downs but, as a boy, I thought that life there was austere. I never really liked it at the time, unlike Winchester, later, which I loved from the word go – and not

one of his slippers and administering justice through your pyjamas. This was always done in one of the tiled bathrooms in the evening and the noise rang around the walls and down the passage with an eerie openness. We all knew that someone was being dealt with.

Really bad behaviour, though, resulted in action being taken and the boy dealt with by the Headmaster during the day. He had a cane in his study, which he kept above the bookcase. It had a brown knob on the end. Caning was done with your trousers on, and it hurt. Being slipped was looked on with a certain amount of bravado. Caning was regarded as awesome and somewhat shaming. Everyone was nervous when the Headmaster appeared at Prayers in the morning wearing his Old Wykehamist tie. For some reason, the origins of which were never clear, his Old Wykehamist tie was known as his Whacking Tie, and his wearing of it was a portent that some poor blighter was going to be in for it before the day was over.

Nowadays, I suppose, this would be called 'abuse'. I have never been able to understand that. Apart from anything else, I always thought that that word meant something different. For all that, and for all the rubbish which is talked about corporal punishment, nowadays, it never did me any harm, and I never objected to it being administered. Nor do I think did it do many other people harm. Nor do I think that many people objected to it. Nor do I think that those who did administer it were sadists, as is so often made out. They were just administering justice for the betterment of the boy, the school and eventually society, in the context and within the parameters of the society of the day. But things change. So do practices. So do perceptions. And, I suppose, so must we. But I do not like doing so.

Two occasions stand out in my memory of West Downs. They are both trivial, but it is always the trivial which stand out.

On one occasion there was an appalling flu epidemic and many of the Masters had succumbed. K.T. therefore arranged for my mathematics class to be taught by one of the cleverest boys in the school. So it was that I got taught by Jeremy Morse, aged twelve, a fact about which I have never ceased to remind him. He later became Sir Jeremy Morse. We were the same age, although our academic propensities were light years apart – and here was he teaching me.

Jeremy and I had been at Wagner's together. We were at West Downs together. We were at Winchester together. And, later, we were to be Fellows of Winchester together, of which he was then Warden. Jeremy claims that, at each of those incarnations, I masqueraded under a

Winchester, Dr Ralph Townsend, wrote a charismatic piece about why Winchester College is a special place. He concluded with these words, referring to what a boy would remember:

He will know that our aim was not merely to get him a good passport to a good university, but to inspire in him a deep and lifelong love of learning and beauty; that while he lived among some of the most beautiful buildings of any school in the world, what really mattered was the quality of Winchester's teaching and the friendships that flow from it; that what William of Wykeham's motto means when it says *manners makyth man*, is the cultivation of an unselfconscious and natural courtesy, respect and modesty in all he does, so that while he will be deeply grateful to what his parents did for him in sending him here, he will not be arrogant or boastful, and he will respond to the opportunities life affords him with confidence, imagination and sensitivity. If everything works as it should, he will be a force for good in the world!

What remarkable words. But Dr Townsend is a remarkable man. Erudite, scholarly, a deep thinker, with the ability to communicate his thoughts. What a rarity. What a gift. Winchester is indeed truly fortunate in having a person of that calibre to be Headmaster.

Chapter 6

Dukie

MY COUSIN DUKIE, with whom I passed those childhood summers at Littlehampton, turned into a fine person. He became Managing Director of *The Times* and then Chairman of the BBC, which exalted position he held for ten years. On his retirement he became a Peer, as Lord Hussey of North Bradley. The BBC was like a can of worms. Dukie told me that he did not trust anyone in the BBC whom he had not appointed himself.

Before that he went to Rugby where he excelled in athletics. Then he went into the Grenadier Guards. At one point during his training Dukie was sent off to a very tough outward-bound training camp. As soon as they got off the train the Sergeant said, 'The camp is up there. Run.' And they ran everywhere for the whole of the next week. It was exhausting. The only time when you could rest was in your bed at night.

One of the operations included being loaded up with kit on your back, and having a rifle with you and doing a long cross-country run with an assault course at the end and being told to go harder and harder all the time. There was a sewage pond at the bottom of a dip through which you had to go before swimming across a river as a nice finale. You lay down on your back on the slope with your feet forwards and your rifle tucked in alongside you with the butt nearest to your feet, and then slid down into the sewage pond.

Dukie arrived at the top of this slope, exhausted. He rested whilst the previous fellow went down the slope. Dukie said that the only thing which kept him going was watching this wretched man go down before him. His rifle butt hit a stone and twizzled him around so that he went in all the sewage head first. The language was such that would make even a Sergeant's Mess quiver. Dukie just roared with laughter.

With his training over, Dukie was sent to Anzio in Italy where there was severe fighting with the Germans. Within three days, he was badly wounded. Dukie always felt that all that training, which he had undergone, had been wasted for him to be wounded before he had time to do anything, and that it was slightly unfair that his contribution to the war effort lasted for only three days.

The day before he went to Anzio, he said to a friend, who was later killed, 'I don't really mind if I am killed, apart from its effect on my family and everything. What I do not want is to be badly maimed.' Poor Dukie. The dreaded scenario came to pass, and he was to be badly maimed.

Dukie was taken, with his platoon, up to a hill at Anzio under mortar fire. They were lucky. They had no casualties. Large numbers of Germans came to within 200 yards of their position. There was a lot of firing. Dukie and two others jumped into a six-foot deep ditch which was thick with brambles. It was dark. A German came up to the side of the ditch and said, 'We know that some of you are down there. Unless you come out and surrender, we will throw grenades into the ditch and fire a machine gun down it.' Dukie was beginning to think of calling it a day. But Norman Johnson, one of the others who was with him, said, 'Oh no no. We will stick this one out.' Dukie winced. The German counted to three and Dukie, Norman and the two guardsmen buried themselves as deep as they could into the bottom of the ditch.

The Germans dropped in the grenade and the machine gun opened up. Terrifying. But, because of the brambles, quite extraordinarily, none of them was touched.

They eventually had to get out of this hellhole and back to the battalion. They worked their way through the German line, when it was still dark. When challenged at one place, Dukie replied: 'Officier. Gute Nacht.' He said that he could have put his hand on the head of the Spandau guns as he walked through them.

It was becoming light and they decided to run for it and vault a machine gun. Dukie, having been a substantial hurdler at school, got over the machine gun successfully but, because he was tired, he slipped. He was then in the disagreeable position of being two yards away from a trenchful of Germans. Dukie thought that there was nothing to do other than to run for it. Then he received a burst of gunfire – one bullet through his hand, several in his leg and one in his spine. No more running. Dukie always said that he was very lucky, as the machine gunner must have been the worst shot in the German army. He should have killed him stone dead. That brought Dukie's fighting war to an end.

He was taken to a barn by the Germans where he met up with Norman Johnson who had also been hit by a burst of machine gun fire in the thigh, but not too seriously. They spent two nights and two days there. Because they were being shelled and mortared by the Allies the whole time, the Germans could remove neither them nor even their own

of each bed as he passed by. This seemed to me to be a completely crazy thing to do and I was glad when he had completed the ceremony at the end of my bed and had passed on to the next one. Having hyped us all up to wonder what on earth was going to happen next, David said 'What are we going to do with the smoke bomb now? We cannot keep it. Let's throw it in to the next door Nissen Hut and smoke them all out of it! That will be good fun,' and roared with laughter. He reacted neither to persuasion nor to reason. Common sense did not even enter the frame.

The next thing that we knew was that the inside of the next door Nissen Hut was thick – thick – with smoke. It seemed like an impenetrable fog. Grey, huddled figures were seen rushing around like shadows trying to escape. We all thought that this was excruciatingly funny, until it transpired that the particular Nissen Hut into which the bomb had been thrown did not contain our friends, but it housed the Headquarter Company – all the old soldiers who were supposed to be teaching us and looking after us. They found nothing whatsoever funny about this. They all rushed into our hut to see us all, like little angels, polishing our boots. They were furious. After combing the barrack room and questioning everyone, David Tate was duly found to be the perpetrator and was put under Close Arrest.

When he came up in front of the Company Commander for punishment the next day, I was one of the two 'Escorts to the Prisoner'. Michael Thornton was the other. David had to be hatless between Michael and me and we were marched in and out of the Guard Room and company office at a rate of knots – as if we were in the Rifle Brigade. We two escorts felt slightly smug, because we had enjoyed all the fun, yet there we were being totally responsible, 'guarding the prisoner', and watching poor David get what was coming to him. I cannot remember what the sentence was, but it was nothing too alarming.

When we left Eaton Hall, as young subalterns, Michael Thornton and I were due, with some others, to go to Malaya on, I think, 18 December. It was in a troopship called the *Dunera*, and it took four weeks to get to Singapore. Nowadays, it takes thirteen hours by aeroplane to go to Singapore and everyone says what a long journey it is.

But, before we went, a very important thing happened.

At home, we had got up a party to go to the Meynell Hunt Ball. It was always a very grand occasion with all the girls dressed up to the nines and all the older ladies looking very elegant. It was held that year at Kedelston Hall, the home of Lord Scarsdale.

My father and I went over to have lunch with Tony and Peter Lothian

at Melbourne Hall, some three miles away from Staunton Harold. After lunch Tony said to me, 'Robin, will you be terribly kind? We have got up a party to go to the Meynell Hunt Ball too, and my sister, Annabel, is coming to stay for it. But everyone else is much older and I am frightened that Annabel will be bored stiff. Would you be terribly kind and dance with Annabel? ...' *Be kind and dance with Annabel?* To be asked to dance with her – this glorious girl aged eighteen. In my books, it was like being asked to dance with the Archangel Gabriel.

On our return home, my father said how delightful and charming Tony and Peter were. 'If there were only more people in the world like those two, what a lovely world it would be.' What a glorious thing to have said about one.

There, at the Hunt Ball, was this unbelievably beautiful girl, with a lovely, gentle, smiling face and a staggering figure, dressed in a bright red off-the-shoulder, flowing dress. And it was my 'duty' to dance with her. I just simply could not believe my luck! I made the best of every bit of it until Johnny Kerr, Peter's brother, came and broke it up by saying that Tony had got an attack of asthma so they were all going home. I minded that greatly. I did not realise, until years later, that Annabel minded that greatly too. And neither of us realised, or could have thought, or could have ever expected, that, within three years, we would be married.

When Annabel used to come to stay with Tony and Peter at Melbourne and I was at Staunton, we used to meet, either prearranged or by lunching. There were no mobile telephones or texting. They wouldn't have been any good because I don't understand them anyhow. Annabel used to say that she was 'going out for a walk'. I used to take a gun and say that I was going to try and find a rabbit. This thrilled my father no end as he was always conscious that I tended to hang around in the afternoons and do nothing. What are you going to do? Cut some trees down? Have a bonfire? Go for a walk? Do some gardening? *Anything*. And here was I going out to shoot a rabbit without being pressurised from anyone. Whatever next?

Little did he – or anyone else – realise that I was going to walk quite a distance – I hated walking – to Spring Wood, and meet Annabel who had walked over from Melbourne.

We sat on logs and wandered through the woods and talked and had a lovely time. We really loved it. It was dead romantic. No one seemed particularly surprised when I returned without any rabbits.

Chapter 8

Malaya

I WOULD NOT have missed my spell in Malaya for anything, although I did not enjoy it much at the time. I was not much good at it. I was always getting lost with my platoon in the jungle. I hated those long marches, with one's feet preferably in a stream to keep cool, and I was always terrified of meeting a bandit which, after all, was the main purpose of being there. I was always rather frightened, too, by one's brother officers in the Mess. They all seemed so confident and so knowledgeable and so efficient, and to this long, lanky, inexperienced young subaltern it all seemed a bit daunting. But the year there did me a power of good, as it did most other young national servicemen.

You were made to grow up, and one of the huge advantages of those National Service days compared to the 'gap' year which children nowadays have between leaving school and going to university, is that you had a job to do. You were paid for it. You were responsible *for* others and you were responsible *to* others, and others were responsible both *for* you and *to* you. Too often nowadays the attitude is, 'there is a lump sum of money, go off and enjoy yourself wherever you may wish to go, and come back in nine months' time.' I think that that is bad, on principle. It is rather like saying, 'you have had a tough time at school and now you deserve a rest. Go and have a holiday – and get lost for a while.'

Whilst the reasons for all this are very understandable and well-meaning, there is an aura of selfishness about it – *my* holiday, *my* break, *my* gap year, what shall *I* do? With National Service, you weren't given too many choices. You were told what to do and where to go and, to get on with it. Your conduct and performance were watched and scrutinised. The services also had that perfunctory ability of making people do what they did not want to do.

I always thought that one of the best examples of that was in a war film about the Welsh guards called *They died with their boots clean*. All the soldiers were piling on to the beach at Dunkirk hoping to be rescued by that remarkable flotilla of boats from England when some German fighter aircraft appeared and strafed the beaches randomly, killing the

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Chapter 12

The Chartley Cattle

IT IS ODD how funny things happen to you when you least expect it, but which then have a lasting effect upon your life.

I never forgot that stuffed Chartley Bull which used to be in the Hall at Staunton. He was a formidable beast and there were two comfortable armchairs, curiously placed on either side of him and each underneath a horn. In order to protect the 'sitter' from any cerebral damage, a cork was placed on the end of each horn. It looked most odd. This was in 1935 or thereabouts.

We were always told about the Chartley cattle as children. They were animals which roamed the forests at the time of William the Conqueror. One of the descendents of Baron Ferrers, who had come across with the Conqueror, was Baron Ferrers of Chartley Bouchier and Louvaine, and he was given permission, in 1248, to fence in part of the Needwood Forest in Staffordshire. The enclosure became known as Chartley Park and the wild cattle within it became known as the Chartley Cattle. The descendants of these cattle remained in Chartley Park until 1905, when they were sold by 'Two Back'.

They were very distinct cattle, white with black noses, black ears, black fetlocks and a black mascara-like line over the eyes, and they boasted those large horns. They were wild and, in those days, aggressive.

They were sold to the Duke of Bedford for 1,000 guineas in 1905 and were put on to railway wagons. Then followed a traumatic event which nearly extinguished the Chartley Cattle for ever. The straw on the railway wagons, in which the seven cattle were put to take them down to the Duke's home at Woburn, caught fire. Most of the animals were burned and some died. There was one bull left, but so terrifying was the fire that the bull panicked in the melee and knocked his horns off. The stubs became diseased and the bull died.

The Duke of Bedford decided to cross the remaining Chartley Cattle with his Longhorns in order both to infuse new blood into the herd and to keep the herd going, but the characteristics of the Chartley breed are so strong that the Chartleys of today are almost indistinguishable from the Chartleys of earlier times.

In 1968 there was a violent outbreak of foot and mouth disease throughout the country and the Chartleys were sent down to a separate part of the farm to keep them away from the special deer which they have at Woburn. If the Chartleys got Foot and Mouth, then the special deer would be slaughtered – and that would be disastrous.

So the Duke of Bedford decided to sell the Chartleys. I was told of his intention to do this and, on the basis of ‘it would be fun, wouldn’t it, to have just one or two animals for old times’ sake’, we went to Woburn, but we came back having bought the whole herd of twenty-four of them – delivered. ‘Delivered’ was important. They had huge horns and I thought that they would only get one on each lorry.

These things always happen at particularly inconvenient times. We had recently sold our dairy herd and we had turned the whole farm down into an arable farm. I explained that we could not take them immediately, February, as we would have to sow grass for them, but that we could have them in July. That was fine. It was one of the best deals that I had ever done. When I bought them in February there were twenty-four of them. When they were delivered in July, there were thirty-three of them!

One of the Dukes of Bedford had been President of Whipsnade Zoo, and he had put some of the Chartley Cattle there. Some two years after buying the cattle from Woburn, Whipsnade Zoo contacted me to say that they wanted to get rid of their Chartley herd and, if they could not sell them, they would ‘shoot them and feed them to the lions’.

The thought of that was just too terrible. So I bought them as well. It was not that I was intent on empire building, but I took the view that, if opportunity knocks, you ought to open the door.

So it was that the Chartley herd was reunited with the Ferrers family in whose possession, bar those seventy years, it had been for 700 years.

There was an old superstition which said that if a black calf was born in the Chartley herd it meant that Lord Ferrers would die. One day I went up to the farm and saw a tiny black calf in the yard. I said to my farm manager, ‘Help. What are we going to do?’

‘I shouldn’t worry’, he said.

‘But you know what the superstition says.’

‘Yes, but we have had two black calves already. I did not tell you about them but sent them straight down to the knackers, and you are still here.’ I thought that that was very kind.

Since then we have had lots – far too many – black calves and, mercifully, I am still here.

My father-in-law did not like the Chartleys. If he was out shooting and

he dropped a bird into a field where the Chartleys were, Bill would send his Labrador after the bird. The Chartleys hate the dogs and the dogs were scared stiff of the Chartleys. The Chartleys would chase the dogs all over the place. The dog did not like that. Nor did Bill. He said that it was like starting up a zoo and that it would cost fortunes. 'No more than the cost of keeping your hunting horses,' I rather impertinently said.

I took one of the young bulls to a sale and sold it for a thousand guineas – a lot of money in those days. Bill found out from my farm manager for how much the bull had been sold. The next time that he saw me he said, 'I hear you have sold your bull well. Blast you!' It was a delightful way of saying 'Well done.'

These animals give us all great pleasure, especially in the spring when they have lost their winter coats and they look sleek and beautiful with their tiny calves with them, all white with little black noses and bright eyes, and skipping around in the lush green pasture.

Their wild manner of living over all the centuries has built into them a strong maternal instinct. The mothers look after their calves with so much care. They lick them and love them, and protect them, and the little calves copy their mothers.

I often think that we could benefit in taking time off from this absolutely hectic life just to watch these wild animals of nature. We would learn a lot about motherhood. Now they are in the perfect place – in the park overlooking the lake at Ditchingham Hall.

I, in turn, screamed, pulled the herring out of my drawer and threw it at Bertie. He screamed, the secretary screamed, everyone screamed. The secretary disappeared into her room and slammed the door. After a bit of, as you might say, 'tennis' with the fish, I eventually put it into Bertie's open brief case amongst his papers. That was just too much. It triggered an almighty bellow, such as a lion might emit and the game came to an end.

It was all good clean – if childish – stuff. I liked to think that that kind of thing stopped us from getting too pompous.

I remember telling one young Minister who was objecting to being kept up there late into the night saying, 'I want to get out of this bloody place and go home.' 'Never say that,' I said. 'This is the most wonderful place and is the most lovely building. Some people would give their right arm to come here just to see it, whereas it is your place of work. Don't complain.' That shut him up.

In about 1975 I became involved with the Norwich Union Insurance Company.

Desmond Longe was President of the Norwich Union Insurance Group. In this case, the President was the equivalent of the Chairman. In America, President was an honorific title for an older person who had been put out to grass, rather like 'Emeritus'. That was definitely not so with the Norwich Union. The title was changed later because people in other countries did not realise that the President of the Norwich Union was, as it were, boss-guy – very much in charge.

Desmond was quite keen that I should join the Board of Norwich Union but he thought that I was not sufficiently widely known, so he asked me to propose the adoption of the year's accounts at the next Annual General Meeting. He had asked me once, if not twice, before and I had been unable to come. This was a pity, not only because it looked rude but also because I might be prematurely extinguishing any flames of opportunity which might have been there. But, on this occasion I could come. So I accepted. The AGM was a very civilised affair with it all running on very well-oiled wheels.

I was sent the accounts of both the Life Society and the Fire Society. I did not understand a word, and so I had a telephone call with Basil Robarts, the very efficient, slightly dry, but charming Chief General Manager. I reported the conversation in my speech to the AGM, which

went something like this:

‘Chief General Manager. I have looked through all the figures in the two books but I cannot see anywhere where they refer to the Life Insurance Society or the Fire Insurance Society.’

‘Oh’, said the Chief General Manager. ‘The figures under the heading of Long Term Assets refer to the Life Society. Those under Short Term Assets refer to the Fire Society.’

I thought ‘Well, why couldn’t they say so?’

I went on: ‘In all the figures, I cannot see where the profit appears.’

‘Ah, well, we don’t make profits.’

‘You don’t make a profit? An insurance company does not make a profit?’

‘No, well you see it is called ‘an increase in assets’ – and you will find that at the bottom of page 19.’

And so it went on.

It was all deeply confusing to the amateur, but I repeated my memory of the conversation in my speech to the Annual General Meeting. Fortunately, the audience loved it. They roared with laughter. So, mercifully, did the Chief General Manager and the Board. They all laughed and, although I say it with some modesty, people remember it to this day.

As luck would have it, I became a member of the Board a few months later. It was a very happy organisation of which to be a member. When Desmond Longe asked me to come on the Board, he said, ‘I don’t want you to go in and out at each change of government, and I would like you to give me an undertaking that you will not do so.’ I said that I thought that that was very unlikely as my political days were virtually over.

‘But I cannot give a promise. Suppose some bomb was dropped on Westminster and killed all the members of the government and that somebody said to me, “You must come and be Prime Minister.” I could not very well say, “I cannot. I said that I would not leave the Norwich Union.” Unlikely, I know, but I could not give a guarantee. Desmond understood that. What happened, though? I went in and out, just like the weatherman on a Swiss clock. Unintentionally, but that is the way that the cookie crumbled.

About that time I became more involved with the Trustee Savings Bank. Originally it was the East Anglian Trustee Savings Bank. Then we joined up with some others and it became known as the Trustee Savings Bank of Eastern England.

In those days, it was the poor man’s bank. It had backing from the

Treasury and the deposits were 'copper-bottomed'. Therefore, the bank could do practically nothing – certainly not without the approval of the Treasury. There was the Ordinary Account into which people put their money. The interest was peanuts, but if you had more than a certain amount, £2,000 I think, you could put some money into the Special Investment Department, where you received a higher return – 2 ½ per cent. Think of that – 2 ½ per cent! The TSB did not have cheque books. That was much too like a High Street Bank. Instead, the TSB had Passbooks. You went to the local branch and drew out some money and the transaction was noted in a pass book. It was a government backed bank which could not go bust and, therefore, it protected the interests of the working man.

The trustees were all unpaid local worthies, the good and the respectable. We met periodically for non-arduous meetings which were preceded by a good lunch. Our manager was a delightful and very efficient man, John Evans. He was tall, imposing and courteous.

The TSBs, and their boards, tended to be very insular. They looked after their own affairs and did not bother too much about what the other Trustee Savings Banks did. I was lucky enough to become chairman of the TSB of Eastern England. Gradually, the banks did more. They were allowed to issue cheque books – a huge milestone. In the fashion of the day some Trustee Savings Banks amalgamated with each other – from fifty-two to sixteen – to make fewer and larger banks. This was always a bumpy transition. There was too much 'parish pump' consideration.

The Central Board of the TSB was formed. It consisted of a Chairman and the Chairmen of the sixteen Savings Banks and other representatives. I was on the Central Board, and I enjoyed it, even if it was ponderous.

A new part of the bank was set up called Trustcard, which dealt with card transactions in a similar way to Barclaycard. I was lucky enough to be on the Board of this brand new company from the day when it first started. It was fascinating to be part of an organisation which was set up from scratch to deal with credit cards. We chose Visa. Subsequently we had Mastercard as well.

The Central Board was not all that happy a place. Andrew Rintoul was the Chairman – a nice enough man but perhaps deficient in dynamism. Tommy Bryans was the General Manager, Irish, full of fun and jokes and laughter. Competent too. But the Board members were all pretty insular, not wanting to join up, to co-operate or to move into the new exciting era of the mid and late 1900s. 'I'm alright, Jack,' was the general, although unmentioned, attitude. That did not do too much good – either for them

how his bats were. He told me how he had bought a Victorian stuffed owl from an antique shop in Brighton. He had paid £100 for it. He had put it in his house, but it had made no difference. The bats were still there!

On a visit to Indonesia, I went to Jakarta, and I was taken to see the Botanical Gardens at Jogjakarta, a few miles away from the Capital. We arrived in a long and impressive cavalcade of cars with me, as the Minister, in the front car with a United Kingdom flag on the bonnet. The driver was dressed in a beautiful white suit. I noticed that there were some trees ahead with what looked like large dead leaves or black handkerchiefs hanging from the branches. Much to my surprise, the dignity of the whole procession was eroded when the driver sat on the horn and continued to blow it intermittently for a long time. I thought 'What a funny thing to do on a pompous occasion like this.'

All of a sudden, all the black handkerchiefs fell off the branches and flew all over the place – huge, great big black 'birds'. These, I was told by my ministerial hosts, were Flying Foxes. Huge great big bats with a wingspan of 6ft. 'They are dreadful. They are the scourge of the place. They eat everything. We want to get rid of them.' They could not believe their ears when I told them that we, in the UK, were preserving them. They thought we were mad. So did I!

Every day, when we returned in our motorcade to the hotel, I used to get out of the car and went to the front to thank the Police outriders. I stood to attention, thanked them and bowed. They liked that. They had an extraordinary way of driving their motorcycles. They would blow their whistles and indicate that people should get out of the way by taking one of their hands off the handle bars and waving their hand as if they were swatting a fly. On some occasions, they would take both their hands off the handle bars and make these glorious gesticulations with both hands, the motorbike continuing at 40 m.p.h. It was the kind of thing that, as a boy of fourteen, one would do on a push bike. But not on a motorbike. It was very impressive, but I think that Health and Safety would have had a fit.

U-Than, the Burmese Minister of Agriculture, was a very nice man, and I got on well with him. When he came to London, I gave a dinner party for him at Lancaster House. They were mostly friends of mine from different walks of life, who I thought would provide interest and variety

– instead of boring old politics and business. The one thing which he wanted to do was to visit Sandhurst again, where he was during the war and where he asked for *four* blankets! The poor chap was so cold after Burma.

I passed Bryan Hayes in the Ministry one afternoon. He was the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture. He was a very charming person and very efficient. 'Where are you going?' I asked. 'I am going to No.10 to brief the Prime Minister on Muldoon's visit.' Muldoon was the Prime Minister of New Zealand, and was at that time supremely fussed about the UK joining the EEC, with the consequent loss of Commonwealth preference on agricultural imports to the UK, and the effect that would have on New Zealand lamb and butter.

I saw Bryan Hayes later that day. 'How did you get on?' I asked. 'I am exhausted. I have never had such a time. I was grilled solid for two hours and, at the end of it, the Prime Minister asked if I would like a cup of tea. I didn't want a cup of tea at all. All I wanted was a large whisky and soda.'

I had to take the Bees Bill through the House of Lords. It dealt amongst other things with a nasty disease affecting bees called Varroa. During the Committee Stage an amendment was put down by, of all people, the Conservative Peer Lord Hives, making a suggestion which was unacceptable to the government. He divided the House. The government lost. The next day Peter Walker said to me, 'Robin. The *only* Bill which the Ministry of Agriculture has this year is the Bees Bill. The *only* time that the government has lost a division in this parliament was yesterday. It was in the House of Lords. *You* were in charge of it, and the government were defeated by an amendment to the *Bees* Bill – put down by Lord *Hives*. Really.' He laughed.

Lord Hives was a charming, but stodgy-looking, middle-aged gentleman whom I thought had probably not done anything very remarkable in the whole of his life, but his forebear was Rolls of Rolls-Royce. I think that probably the entrepreneurial genes of Rolls had slipped through the net on the way down to Lord Hives.

Chapter 14

Out of Government

I LEFT THE government in 1983 as we were going to take on the task of moving to Ditchingham. I thought that would be the end of my time in government. Michael Falcon was kind enough to ask me back on to the Board of the Norwich Union, a wonderful and happy company.

I was asked to be Chairman of the British Agricultural Export Council (BAEC). I always thought that British agriculture ought to look outside its own territory instead of being inward-looking – and I was glad to do it, but it turned out to be a hornet's nest.

I had to sack the Chief Executive, John Thorneloe, and he did not like that. I did not like it either. I am useless at that kind of thing. BAEC had been Thorneloe's baby. It did not employ many people – about ten – but it had many companies subscribing to it, and hence providing its revenue. John Thorneloe knew everyone. Some people did not like the fact that, as Chairman, I was being paid £7,000 per annum – a novel idea. The Chairman used to be paid nothing. When the Members heard about this and that we were going to reorganise it all, they set up a splinter group called 'The BAEC Concerned Members Group'. I did not like that a bit. Eventually, John Thorneloe left, and Peter Sillars took over. He was a stalwart, and a charming person, previously the President of the National Institute of Agricultural Engineers. I had met him in Ministry of Agriculture days. I liked him. He was sound, good and had a charming and understanding character. He was always laughing and made any problem seem manageable. We became great friends.

We were always struggling to find enough money to keep BAEC going, especially as agriculture was beginning to feel the cold draught of recession, and companies hunted around to find costs which they could cut. Sometimes companies amalgamated, so two subscriptions became only one subscription. That might have helped them, but it did not help us. It was a difficult and, frankly, not very enjoyable time. Two real stalwarts were Francis Pemberton of Bidwells in Cambridge, and John Mitchell of ICI. They made life possible and worthwhile. They were total supporters, and they realised that change was needed. They were full of encouragement and could see beyond the end of their noses, which is

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officer walk all the length of the room before she spoke to him. When the officer reached her she told him that she expected her people to be looked after by the Germans with courtesy and respect. That was a brave act of dignity and defiance to an invading power. She was a powerful, formidable lady.

The problem of homosexuality used to appear, in various guises, about once every three days in the Home Office. Everyone tried to be prim and proper and not in any way outraged by the problems, whatever they happened to feel. The most extraordinary vocabulary was used, which one was more used to hearing in the Sergeant's Mess, but in the Home Office those words were used as if they were common parlance. They were always discussed in a genteel manner like having tea with granny with a couple of cakes and sandwiches.

One day, I had a submission all about homosexuality. Needless to say, I cannot now remember what the submission was about, but I took pretty good care to consider my thoughts and to put them down for the Home Secretary – and others – to see.

Martin Narey, my wonderful Private Secretary, said to me, 'Lord Ferrers. Please don't send that.' I said, 'Why not? These are my views and it is important that people should know the views of Ministers.'

'Yes,' he said. 'But please don't send it. It won't do you any good.' I did not send it. He was right. I was wrong. And I have always been very grateful to him for warning me off.

The important point to me has everlastingly been that it showed the right relationship between Minister and Private Secretary. The one can guide the other away from falling into an elephant trap of gargantuan proportions.

I once succeeded in changing the Law of the Country single-handed. And by mistake. That is not a bad achievement, especially as it was not intended – and, even more so, because nobody could put it back.

Douglas Hurd was the Home Secretary and he introduced the Licensing Bill which was to allow pubs to be open at all times, but that this relaxation in the licensing hours was not to apply to Sundays. It was just too controversial and, if we were to start trying to have a free-for-all

on Sundays, we would get no Bill at all.

The Bill was to start in the House of Lords and, as it was a Home Office Bill, I was in charge of it.

I made it perfectly clear that the Bill deliberately did not refer to Sundays. All went well until somebody put down an amendment saying that pubs should be allowed to be open all day Sunday. I did my stuff and said, 'No. No. We cannot accept this amendment because we have always said that the Bill is not to refer to Sunday.' A lot of Peers stood up and supported the amendment. None supported the government view.

So, the amendment was put to the vote. The Lord Chairman of Committees said, 'Those that are in favour say Content.' There was a great roar of Content. 'To the contrary Not Content.' The Whip and I were the only two to say Not Content. I sat back and waited for the Division, knowing that everyone would come in, and the Conservative backbenchers would back the government in the division lobby.

Because there were so many people saying Content and only two saying Not Content, the Lord Chairman decided to put the question again. 'I think that the Contents have it.' No objection. 'The Contents have it.' I had switched off and had been waiting for the Division. I should have said Not Content again, but I did not. I suddenly sat up and realised what had happened. The Holy of Holies had been violated and the amendment had been accepted. Pubs were now going to be able to open on Sundays.

I attended Douglas Hurd's morning meeting the next day in the guise of a worm. I profusely apologised for this terrible disaster. He roared with laughter and took it all quite happily.

They then had to decide what to do when the Bill went to the House of Commons. The government could put an amendment down reversing the Lord's decision. The trouble with that was that it was such a popular amendment that the government did not believe that the members of the House of Commons would want to reverse it. And that would look worse – the government putting an amendment down and then being defeated by its own side. So they decided to let it go and to let the Lords' amendment remain in the Bill. It was then that Douglas Hogg said in the House of Commons, somewhat indelicately, of the Lords' Amendment, 'There was either a conspiracy or a cock-up. We are content to believe that it was a cock-up.'

The fact was, though, that I had changed the law of the land single-handed and by mistake. And no one could put it back.

Murano, and we were taken there by a most luxurious launch to see the glass which they make. Quite fabulous.

We had been there before when Angela was seventeen – about seventeen years earlier. On our first visit, we had seen some lovely champagne glasses in red and emblazoned with gold. ‘How much are they?’ ‘A million lire’ – or whatever the price then was. Anyhow, they were wildly expensive and we did not buy them. We constantly regretted not having bought them. On our second visit seventeen years later, we went to the same place. Had they still got those glasses? Do they still do them? We went through one room. No. Then another room. No. And then – ‘Yes, there they are.’ What was the price? Now two million lire or whatever it was.

What was the point of six glasses? Smash one and the set is useless. So we bought twelve. They were very expensive – hideously expensive. The point is that I cannot remember what we paid for them. All I know is that they have given us huge pleasure ever since.

There is a moral there somewhere.

F.
4 April 1996

Another of my pet hobby horses was – and still is – the length of government papers, submissions, reports and general government, and other, documents.

There is a theory that everything must be written down in glorious detail and then everyone knows where they are. But this is a fallacy. The point of writing something down is in order that people should read it. If it is long or boring – or *unattractive* – to read, the writer falls at the first fence. The reader does not want to read it, and the points which the writer is trying to make get vaporised.

Now, all businesses and commerce are falling into the same trap. They are writing endless documents, Reports and Annual Reports, all produced on very expensive paper with coloured photographs. I suppose that they are all trying to make their document more attractive than the others so that, when the reader is inundated with all the others, he will read the one which at least appears to be attractive to read. That is fine. But there is too much of it.

Even after I have been out of government for thirteen years, so all the Reports, Annual Reports and the rest come flooding onto my desk. Despite the glory of the publication, I am afraid that the majority go straight into the waste-paper basket.

When I was in government I used to avow to the fact that, when I left government, I would set up a business to make documents, letters and papers easy to read. Needless to say, I did not do so – and, as a result, I then lost out on what might have been a lucrative retirement career.

The first overriding principle is that, if you write something down, you want it to be read. The following points seem to me to be desirable if you want this principle to work:

- The type must be sufficiently large for ease of reading. I was once sent a lobbying document the print of which was so small that one could hardly read it. They asked for comments on the paper. I told them that the print should be larger, as it was virtually unreadable. I never heard from them again.
- There must be plenty of paragraphs. No paragraph, unless for exceptional reasons, should be more than seven–nine lines in

length. With too long paragraphs, it is like looking through wire-netting. You do not know where you are.

- Spaces between paragraphs should be larger than spaces between lines.
- Unfashionable I know now, but new paragraphs should be indented in order to break up the mass of verbiage.
- Documents should be short, sharp and to the point. Not a compendium of essays.
- Rubbish words so loved by civil servants, but which actually mean nothing, should be avoided like the plague, such as:

Joined-up Government
Seamless Government
Cohesive
Co-ordinated
Meaningful
Underpinning
Overarching

The list goes on.

I readily acknowledge that it is easy to write this, but that it is far more difficult to comply with it. You may wonder why this dictat has not been followed in this book. The answer is that printing books is a 'science' all of its own and does not always take kindly to good suggestions. Not everything, though, is books. There are letters, documents, memos, reports, and all sorts of instructions, each inviting the reader to read. The more inviting they are to read the more people will be likely to read them. Most could be improved by these suggestions. If people only, though, tried to keep along these simple lines, I think that the practice of reading and absorbing what the writer is trying to get across would be much easier and much more fun. I wrote my thoughts to John Gummer as follows, and the circulation list was fairly formidable.

Secretary of State
DEPARTMENTAL PUBLICATION

I get worried about the number of publications which the Department issues – and their length. I think that every effort should be made to cut down on both.

Ministers are often asked to 'approve' documents for consultation or

cross-breed. The trouble was that the White Headed Duck was the National Emblem of Andalucía.

At some international ministerial meeting, a well-meaning junior United Kingdom Minister said that we would control the Ruddy Duck. But how do you stop a duck from flying? Or from copulating? The hapless Minister had unwittingly opened up a can of worms and had dropped his successors in the cart.

Even the RSPB – the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds – came to ask what we were going to do. Why didn't we shoot them? they asked. I said, 'Why don't you shoot them?' Oh they could not do that because they are supposed to protect birds, not shoot them. Otherwise they would be called RSPSB – the Royal Society for the Protection of *Some* Birds.

Why did the government not pay people to shoot the birds? – so much per dead bird. You could not use a shotgun, as you would kill everything. So it would have to be a rifle. I pointed out that many people felt quite proud when they had shot a flying duck with a shotgun containing many pellets. People must be mad if they thought that you would kill a flying duck with a rifle.

Even so, the impact that you would make on the population of the Ruddy Duck would be minimal, the numbers would be back to normal next year, and the money spent would have been wasted.

Endless discussions took place, and the name of the duck gave cause for ribald comment and laughter. So much so that, at one meeting, John Gummer said: 'I will not have any more of this jocular reference to the Ruddy Duck. It is a waste of time and nobody is taking it seriously. You will have to find another name for it.'

The far-seeing and witty Mr Plowman entitled his next submission '*** Duck'. It was hilarious.

Clause 16 (a) states that the Bill does not affect the descent of any peerage or title of honour. Of course it does – it goes to someone to whom it was not supposed to go.

I have read Clause 16 (b) six times and I cannot understand it. It says that the fact that a person's gender has become the acquired gender does not affect the devolution of any property unless an intention that it should do so is expressed in a will. In years gone by, quite a lot of these properties were expressed in wills by grandfathers and great-grandfathers who did not have the curiosities that exist nowadays.

If it is intended that the land owned by an earl should pass on to the next earl, and if Earl Dodger becomes a woman and vacates the earldom, does he have to pass his land on to Viscount Chump, who presumably becomes the earl? Of course, he cannot become the earl, because the earl is still alive. It does not seem very fair, and it happens to nobody else in the country. I hate to put it like this, but the Government are discriminating against hereditary Peers. They have always hated hereditary Peers but I think hereditary Peers are jolly good folk. It is a pity to see the Government discriminate in this way by suddenly saying that the Bill is wonderful, but the change must not appear to be part of the peerage.

The noble Lord, Lord Filkin, made an interesting remark in a letter to my noble friend Baroness Buscombe: 'The hereditary principle is hence untouched. However, this does mean that a person recognised in law as a woman may inherit a "male title". Clearly, a person in this position may wish to seek a change to the form of address.'

He said that the whole purpose of the Bill is to allow a woman to inherit a male title. Yet, earlier on, it said that there would be no change. In his letter, the noble Lord goes on to say that: 'Subsequent to these discussions,' that he had with the Garter Principal King of Arms, 'it is clear that a person in this position would be free to petition Her Majesty for a change in the form of address. Therefore, rather than making the detailed provision in the Bill to deal with every possibility, we believe that this issue should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and that this discretion should rest with Her Majesty.'

Do the Government mean to say that they have introduced a Bill that is so complicated, and has made such a mess of everything, including the peerage, that the only way out is to get Her Majesty to resolve it? I find that quite extraordinary.

I shall remind your Lordships of what the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester said in Committee. He asked what happens if a female priest changes sex and becomes a man and said: 'It is an infringement of her rights that *Crockford's*' – or, as the right reverend Prelate also mentioned, *Who's Who*, *Debrett's* or *Dod's* – 'continued to contain details of the early stages of her ministry.'

If one removes the first part of a person's career from a professional

minority who have to be looked after and nurtured.

I replied: 'My Lords, the whole of this Report stage has been worthwhile just to hear the noble Lord say that.'

Quentin Letts wrote the following piece about the Gender Recognition Bill in the *Daily Mail*:

Tory Peer Earl Ferrers is worried about proposed new sex change laws. What will they mean for the hereditary peerage? Toothbrush-moustachioed Robin Ferrers made a hilarious speech in the Lords on Tuesday when he wondered what would happen if the nobleman became a transsexual.

The Government, perhaps understandably, said it didn't really know. Civil servants are now working on an answer. Pip, Pip.

Lord Elton is a man of many parts. One of his talents is that he can draw cartoons. The other is that he can write limericks or rhymes as sport of what is happening. They can be very amusing.

I was going to have a 75th birthday party, so Rodney Elton produced the following letters purporting to come from a government office with horrible powers of control. He is a very talented man.

**The Office for the Supervision of Individual and
Departmental Entertainment
(Offside)**

99b Whitehall, London SW1PE 1T

Minute internal Date 1/4/04

From Director of Official Merriment (DOOM)

To General Liaison Officer, Official Merrymaking (GLOOM)

Subject Earl Ferrers

Ferrers is having too much fun;
It's time that he was stopped.
So, kindly see that this is done
-or else I'll have you dropped.
We know he plans to hold a binge,
A party quite unmatched.
Work out how his plans infringe
Our rules, and get it scratched. Three-quarters of a hundred years
He's managed to enjoy.
Don't let him mark it with his peers,

Go Placidly Amid the Noise and Haste

Go Placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.

* * *

When I was in King Edward VII's hospital, having had a hip operation, Lord Elton (alias Rodney Elton who is married to the stunning Richenda) wrote a poem about my absence from the House of Lords. He is a dab-hand at poetry and writes beautifully. He wrote this:

*'We want Lord Ferrers back', they said
In chamber, bar and Colmondeley room.
'Lord Ferrers' back is in his bed;
It's broke', they answered, full of gloom.
'We want Lord Ferrers back', they cried
On terrace, stair, in left and hall;*

entertaining – especially if there is a bit of distress about. This was his letter:

Dear Robin

Hippity, hoppity, hippity
Lightly poor Robin did trippity
Trippit so lightly he slippity
Slippit and brokeit – his hippity

Hoppity, hippity, hoppity
The poor fellow surely did coppity;
All his activities droppity
Now must in hospital stoppity

Hippity, hoppity, hippity
A turn up but not serendipity
His plaster and crutches exhibity
Poorfellow, poorfellow, is suchpity.

Hoppity, hippity, hoppity
Send him a bottle of poppity
Into his tumbler then sloppity
And drink to his walking, not hoppity!

Yours ever
Rodney

I always thought that the following was a preface to *Stemmata Shirlieana*, a book which has depicted our family history. It might well have been and it certainly applies, but I cannot find it there. I do not know, therefore, where it was that I saw the quotation nor can I remember the exact words but, in taking pride in one's own family which most people tend to do, some more modestly than others, it is no bad thing to remember:

Rejoice in the past and all which your forebears have done. But, remember, the achievements are theirs. They are not yours. Use them as a standard for your own conduct.

When I was fifteen or so, if my father thought that we ought to go to bed, he would come into the room and say 'Shadrach'. This was an abbreviation of the biblical three, called Shadrach, Meshack and

Abednego. This in turn was translated to Shadrach, Meshack and To-bed-we-go. This in turn got translated to Shadrach, Meshack and Off-we-pop, i.e. Time to go to bed. My father had a number of succinct phrases which I remember well and which said a great deal. Some of that which follows are his. Others are others':

- Water your friendships for they grow like flowers and they die like flowers.
- On a less than perfect holiday – A change, even for the worse, is nevertheless a change.
- Bank your praises. (When everyone is cursing you, it is nice to remember that someone once praised you).
- You will be blessed in this life for the things which have cost you nothing. You will be cursed for the things to which you have given your all.
- Annabel and I used to dance to a jolly little number with a perky, bright theme, called 'Enjoy yourself. It is later than you think'. It is so true. I have used that as a motto all my life.
- One of my maxims has always been, 'If you have something in which to rejoice, wallow in it.'
- The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.
- Rudyard Kipling's *If*. ('If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you.' All of it.)
- My grandfather, as a justification for a long lie-in in bed used to say, 'I sleep slowly'. I use that expression frequently.
- Some people say, 'Good Health is the most important thing after life'. I do not agree. You can have good health but deep unhappiness at home. The result, misery. You can have bad health, but a hugely happy home. The result, happiness. If you are happy, you have the greatest gift which God can offer.
- A simple guide towards success in the Domestic Budget:
Income £1, Expenditure 95p, Result – Happiness
Income £1, Expenditure £1.05, Result – Misery

My advice to a couple getting married.
Do three things:

1. Make a Will.
2. Share a double bed – not for any sexy reason, although that might be a perfectly good reason for it – so that, at the end of the day you can touch

Thank you for your cheery letter, a copy of which I enclose, telling me how many free minutes I have received on the Vodafone Stop the Clock. I am, indeed, grateful to you for letting me know that I have received some free minutes.

It is clear from the manner of your address that you must think that I am an American or some such with a Christian name of Earl, and that you feel it is appropriate to start and end your letter by using my Christian name.

I am not, in fact, an American and Earl is not my Christian name. It happens to be an English title – very unfashionable, I know, but it is just one of those irritating facts of life.

Of course, at Vodafone you must do so much of your work by telephone that you probably have lost the art of writing letters, which is the sorry fate of many children. Letters do not naturally start with 'hello' and end with 'That's it, Earl'. They are usually signed by the person responsible for writing them and have the address of the sender attached. Neither of these appeared on your letter.

If I might respectfully so suggest it, it might be a help if letters were to be properly written – if only to encourage others to do the same.

Please do not trouble to send me 'another update' in a few months. They do not seem to be of any particular benefit.

Mr The Earl Ferrers
Park Lodge
Hedenham
Norfolk
NR35 2LE
21 Sep 2007

Our Reference Number is C2727100

Good morning Mr The Earl Ferrers,
Thank you for contacting us. I'll be glad to assist you.

Mr Ferrers, I understand that in the letter which we have sent to you your name was not addressed in an appropriate manner. I'd like to offer you an apology for any frustration that this issue may have caused you. I would like to assure you that this matter will be thoroughly investigated.

Rest assured that this letter is recorded on your account as a permanent record of the information I have provided you with. If there is anything else I can help you with, please feel free to contact me.

Best wishes,
Dolly Mehra
Vodafone Customer Services.

purposes. Unfortunately, there was an error. I pointed it out to them.

26 August 2009

Dear Sir,

Thank you for being kind enough to send me a Delane pen. I was delighted to receive it.

There is, however, one problem which I thought I should draw to your attention. As the purpose of the pen is to remind recipients of the name of the firm which gave them the pen it is clearly important that the wording on the pen should be correct.

In my case, I am referred to as 'The Right Honourable the Ear'. This is quite obviously a computer shortcoming but it might have been helpful if the accuracy of the wording had been checked before the sample was sent. It should have been 'The Right Honourable the Earl Ferrers'. But I dare say that that would have been too much for the computer to stomach!

I am enclosing the sample for you to see. This is meant to be helpful and not to be overtly critical. I am very grateful to you for sending me the original but do not trouble in sending me a replacement.

There was no reply. Double bad marks.

On a ministerial visit to Burma, when I was in the Ministry of Agriculture, we used to go out each day in a cavalcade of cars and with three policemen in front on motorbikes. They shoved people off to the left with their left hand and off to the right with their right hand, but the *pièce de resistance* was when they removed both hands from their motorbikes and dispersed people by waving both their hands at them. The motorcycles never wobbled. It was rather like the sight of an eleven-year-old riding his bicycle with no hands.

On a visit to Saudi Arabia, I was taken out to the desert where they irrigated crops with water drawn from huge underground reservoirs from a great depth. In order to explain the depth of the reservoir, my host picked up a stone and dropped it down the pipe. I put my head over the pipe. Waited for a long time, and there was an almighty bang as the noise ricocheted all the way up the pipe.

I got hold of the official from the Ministry of Agriculture, Brian Camp, who was with me. He was a very nice, slightly dour person, but with a great sense of humour. I said, 'Look at this. It shows just how far

Tam and I set off around Kuala Lumpur. Tam kept stopping the car and taking photographs. That is the Sultan of Brunei's house with three huge domes painted with gold leaf. Click Click went the camera. And then we passed some Tamils who, in those days were the scruffiest members of society – and their houses really were scruffy. Click Click went the camera. You could see what Tam was up to. Back in his constituency in West Lothian, he would be able to say, 'This is how the Sultan of Brunei lives. And this is how the workers live.'

We got back to the airport late. Everyone else was there. The High Commissioner was waiting for us. It was getting dark and the airport had no night-flying arrangements, but it was being kept open for us – and we were late. Tam and I thanked the High Commissioner and apologised to him for being late.

We then went into the aeroplane. Silence. Deathly silence. We found a pair of seats. Silence. The aircraft took off and then there was unleashed a barrage of criticism from all the others (ten altogether, five Conservative and five Labour). Dan Jones was a Labour MP, a lovely Welshman, an ex-miner who was always very clearly spoken, and said 'Tam, Tam. It is a bloody disgrace. Do you realise that you were late? And you kept the High Commissioner waiting? And the airport had to be kept open especially to let us leave?' On and on it went. We sank into our chairs – at least I did. Tam was fairly robust at these kind of things. 'Throughout this trip', Tam said, 'we have only been shown the things which people wanted us to see, and not things as they really are.'

At that, Dan snapped and, in a state of rage, said to Tam, one of his own side, 'Well, good God, man. If I was having guests in to my house, I would want to show them into the Drawing Room and not the bloody tool-shed.' It was too much. I just burst out laughing, and the atmosphere gradually got back to normal.

Dan was a lovely man. I did not see him much afterwards but, whenever we did meet, he always gave me a fulsome welcome, 'Well, good God, man. You do look well.' That vignette of Dan Jones and Tam Dalyell will remain with me for the rest of my life.

On a later visit to Singapore, I was a Minister, and I was shown around a new yoghurt factory. Singapore did not have any cows, so they imported milk and then made it into yoghurt. I found that I had to creep underneath all the very smart stainless steel pipes, as they were about the same height from the floor as were my shoulders. I could not understand why the pipes were all installed so low, until I was told that it was installed by the Japanese, and that the pipes were the right size for the

White, whose Agency we used, saying, 'If you want to take Lady Ferrers out of hospital on Tuesday, I can supply you with a carer but, if you can wait until Wednesday, I can supply you with the person whom I think will be really right for you.' Thank Heavens we waited until Wednesday.

Jennie Bleier came to be with us when Annabel left hospital and she has, except for holidays, been with us ever since – at the time of writing over six years. Her home is in New Zealand, but she loves England and has been here on and off for ages. She was a Matron in a hospital in New Zealand. She is very competent – medically. But she is kind, loving, understanding and deeply caring and she will do anything. She is full of fun and has a huge sense of humour. There is always laughter in the house when Jennie is about and we just believe that we have been so unbelievably lucky to have had her – *and* to continue to have her.

I have always had my anxieties about continuing to go to London and whether one should not stay at home the whole time to help Annabel. 'For better for worse, in sickness and in health,' haunts me. But so many people, including Annabel in her enormous generosity, have said, 'You must keep going to London, seeing people, doing things, otherwise you will sit here and fret and do nothing.' Even the doctor said the same, rather poignantly, when he said, 'In my experience, husbands and wives looking after each other is not usually successful and it does not lead to marital harmony.'

So, having my wonderful, generous, understanding Annabel, I continue to go to London. There is no normal pattern, but coming home is not a case, regrettably, of sitting down and reading a book in the garden. I cannot think why it isn't, but it just isn't. But then I doubt if it is, really, for anyone.

After six years, our garden really has become mature and it gives us great pleasure. Cliff Hart looks after it. He came to us forty-five years ago. His real love is machinery. He can mend, make, create, repair, devise anything, and he looked after all the machinery on the farm for years. But he can turn his mind to anything. He is kind, deeply responsible, courteous. How lucky we are. But I bet, when he originally came to work for us, he never thought that his life would end up this way!

His wife, Rosemary said, 'Cliffy is wonderful with the vegetable garden, but don't let him anywhere near flowers. He does not know anything about flowers!' I often think of that remark, when I look at the garden resplendent with colour.

One of our hobbies in our dotage has been ducks. When we came to

London, Devon, Belgium and even America – just for a lunch. It was very touching. The weather was unbelievably perfect. The sides of the marquee came down so that you could see the flowers, the house, the lake. There was a hugely happy atmosphere.

I worried in case this was a crazy extravagant personal indulgence, celebrating one of my own personal attainments for which, of course, I was in no way responsible. I concluded No. I was very lucky to have attained eighty. Life is wonderful. There are so many things for which to be grateful and friendship is one of the greatest. Most people have fearful dramas in their lives, about which most of us know little, and that to go out, have a wonderful lunch in the most perfect of settings, surrounded by one's friends, is a day of great happiness in which they, not just I, could indulge. If you can make other people's lives lighter and happier, just for a bit, what a huge pleasure that is and what great fun it is. I do not think that that is being selfish. There are so many miseries, disasters, sorrows in life that, if one has anything to be grateful for, then wallow in it.

Richenda Elton wrote a touching paragraph in her thank-you letter. She said, 'My grandmother, when asked about the After-life, used to say that she thought Heaven would be a place where she would see all her favourite friends, untouched by time, dressed in their best and surrounded by flowers. If she was right (and that distinguished congregation of clergy would certainly have a view) yesterday's celebration was such a glimpse of Paradise.'

It was lovely – just lovely. Some people have a majestic touch with words.

My father always used to say, 'Water your friendships, because they grow like flowers and they die like flowers.' It is not a question, necessarily, of doing a lot. It is merely a question of keeping in touch – periodically. Christmas Cards are a wonderful way of doing that.

We have always been bad at having people in and having people to stay. We should have done more of it. It was not that we did not like it, but there always seemed so much to do and, very stupidly, we found it difficult to fit in unless, as it were, it was 'predestined' for you like a shoot or a wedding. Once you go to a person's house, once you have enjoyed a meal there and, better still, once you have spent a night there, you are much closer to that person.

Ben Blower once said to me 'Remember, life is for enjoying too.' I liked the word 'too'. If you say that life is for enjoying, you are virtually promoting the lifestyle of a playboy, but if you work all the time that

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