

**JUBILEE MEMORIES OF ROYAL CONNECTIONS
WITH FAIRLAWNE AND SHIPBOURNE
By Sir Edward Cazalet**

In this Diamond Jubilee year of Queen Elizabeth II, our beloved Sovereign, I have been asked to write something about the Royal Family's connections with Fairlawne and Shipbourne over the years.

It was back in 1871 that my grandfather, Edward, my namesake, bought Fairlawne and its estate. He was what was known as a "merchant squire", that is to say someone who has left home to seek his fortune overseas and who, having been successful, has returned to his home country to buy a large house and estate for his retirement. In the 1870s, Edward had also bought a fine holiday villa in the South of France at Cimiez behind Nice, known as the Villa Liserb. This he did despite the fact that nearly two centuries previously his ancestors had fled from France to avoid persecution as committed Protestants.

It so happened that after William, his son, had inherited the estate and the Villa Liserb on Edward's death, Queen Victoria used to come to stay at the villa adjoining the Cazalet's villa. On these royal visits to the South of France for her summer holidays Queen Victoria loved to drive single handedly a small cart drawn by a donkey round the garden, even though driving space in the garden of the villa where she stayed was limited. The Cazalets, naturally, arranged for the Queen to be able to drive her cart in the larger garden of their villa.

As a result Queen Victoria and Mollie, William's wife, soon became good friends and, consequent on this, Queen Victoria generously consented to becoming my Uncle Victor's godmother at his christening on 27th December 1896. One of the family's treasured possessions is a photograph, taken shortly before the Queen's death, of her driving her donkey cart round the Villa Liserb garden, with the future Queen Ena of Spain, then a small girl, sitting in the cart with her.

Then, many years later, when both were at the school age of 13, my Aunt Thelma, my father's elder sister who was brought up at Fairlawne, became a firm friend of Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, our future Queen Mother. This was to be a lifelong friendship and there is a lovely picture of the two of them, taken in 1912, sitting on a balustrade at Fairlawne. On the numerous visits which Lady Elizabeth as a young girl paid to Fairlawne, she regularly attended St Giles Church. This was, of course, before the First World War. After Aunt Thelma's eldest brother, Edward, had been killed in the First World War (his small wooden cross, which was on his grave near the Somme where he was killed, can be seen to the left of the pulpit) and her second eldest brother, Victor had been killed in the Second World War, my father Peter Cazalet, the youngest of the Cazalet children, having survived the war, had already become well installed at Fairlawne.

There then came the big moment in 1949. By this time my father, assisted by his great friend Anthony Mildmay, had established, post war, an extremely successful steeplechasing stable at Fairlawne. In that very year the decision was

taken that Princess Elizabeth, as our Sovereign then was, and her mother, then Queen Elizabeth, should share the ownership of a steeplechaser. My father, Peter, then had the honour of being asked to find and train a suitable steeplechaser for this august partnership. Of course, he leapt at it, and, as a result, the King, Queen and Princess Elizabeth, as she then was, visited Fairlawne to confirm the arrangement.

Following the death of King George VI in 1952, the present Queen, at a later stage, took on ownership of the National Stud flat-race horses. The Queen Mother then took over ownership of the steeplechasers. As a result, and for more than 20 years thereafter, my father trained the Queen Mother's steeplechasers at Fairlawne and won no less than 250 races for her as an owner. In a highly competitive field this was no mean achievement and my father, who over that period was champion trainer on three occasions, had a particularly successful season in 1964/65 when the Queen Mother won more races, 27 in all, with her horses, than any other owner.

Some of the old timers who read this will surely well remember the tragic incident of the fall of Devon Loch in the 1956 Grand National. The horse slipped up on the flat just 50 yards from the winning post, a long way in front of the then second horse. No good reason was ever found to explain why this should have happened and it proved to be an historic and tragic event in racing. Dick Francis, the jockey, always put it down to the fact that never before in his life had he heard such a roar from any crowd as he and Devon Loch were given as they came up the final straight. He felt that this may have frightened the horse. As a result of this fall, sadness and much disappointment enveloped the village, through Fairlawne having so narrowly failed to provide the Queen Mother with her one overall sporting wish, namely that she should be the proud owner of the winner of the Grand National.

Through her involvement with the horses there, Fairlawne and Shipbourne meant a great deal to the Queen Mother. She got to know well all the lads who looked after the horses, in particular John Hole and Alec King who had the main responsibility for them. When she met these two as she went round her horses in the stable she would, without any prompting, ask them of particular events in their lives which she had learnt about on previous visits – I can honestly say they were absolutely devoted to her. The Head Lad for 29 years was Jim Fairgrieve, who was a delightful Scotsman. The Queen Mother earned his greatest respect both as a Scots lady with her knowledge of horses and, in particular, her keen and sincere interest in people.

Lord Oaksey was one of the most distinguished participants in steeplechasing over the decades of the post-war racing years. In his history of steeplechasing, he wrote that the Queen Mother was one of the three top people who, in those post-war years, had played a major part in lifting the sport of National Hunt racing to its high level of popularity and genuine sportsmanship. Her happy presence on a racecourse always gave great pleasure – as the word sped round the course “The Queen Mum's here today”. Dick Francis said that whenever he rode a winner for her he found it hard to believe that such an incredible roar could come from the

crowd. It was John Oaksey who wrote that if she eventually did own a horse that won the Grand National anybody within half a mile of the race course would be well advised to put in earplugs! Perhaps that says more than anything else that I can say.

All with long memories at Shipbourne will remember that she stayed many weekends at Fairlawne and there must be so many who have lived in Shipbourne, not only those old stables lads, but others as well, who will recall her lovely welcoming smile, her sense of fun and the invariable interest which she took in all those she met. She was a particular admirer of our Rector, the late Archdeacon Edward Maples Earl. He was a great speaker but, when she came, his oratory from the pulpit would soar to dizzy heights and she always looked forward to her regular visits to Sunday matins. Quite a number of her weekends at Fairlawne involved her horses running at the nearby course at Lingfield and it was these weekends which the Archdeacon used to call "The Feast of St Lingfield".

On any weekend visit she made she would be on the gallops early on a Saturday morning. The horses would be out at 7.00am, sometimes during a bitterly cold dawn. She would be well wrapped and wearing her thick boots. As Jim Fairgrieve, the old Scotsman, used to say, "Her Majesty is trained for all this through her Scots blood". On one famous occasion my father had organised a jumping session on the schooling ground in the park. There were a number of "names" staying in the house on that occasion which included Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Elizabeth Taylor, a highly accomplished rider (remember that film National Velvet), was riding my brilliant pony of 14 ½ hands, and she was going to jump the pony over the hurdles. Just as she was about to start there was a thundering voice that came from two or three hundred yards away on the higher ground towards the main house. The voice was calling urgently. Just before Elizabeth was due to go over the jumps, a figure suddenly drew closer, leaving the gate from the Fairlawne garden and advancing towards us across the park. When about 100 yards away this figure was suddenly heard to start shouting again. There was a lull for us all to hear what was being shouted and then, declaimed at full volume, there came from this approaching individual, who turned out to be Richard Burton, the immortal Shakespearean words, "A horse! a horse! my Kingdom for a horse!". The Queen Mother was delighted and highly amused by this highly improbable and dramatic piece of theatre on the Fairlawne schooling ground!

It was a family joke that my father, who always had an early morning start before a long day's racing, was the only person who was allowed to fall asleep in her car when driving home with the Queen Mother after a day on the racecourse.

My brother Anthony, an expert on vintage cars, once had such a car at Fairlawne when the Queen Mother was staying. Egged on by the Queen Mother, he took her along some of the Fairlawne drives in this aged vehicle. This caused my father a great deal of anxiety. However the Queen Mother enjoyed it to the full and Anthony was always well in control.

During Fairlawne weekends there was always a regular game of croquet in which she was partnered by my father, who was an absolutely top-class player. They were a very hard pair to beat. It was the greatest fun playing in any foursome with her.

In 1968 there was a big family occasion when my sister Sheran was married to Simon Hornby at Shipbourne Church. Most of the village kindly turned out to see them driving away and the Queen Mother was, of course, the central figure in this. Also present were Noel Coward and, once again, Elizabeth Taylor and her husband, Richard Burton. These three, who had deliberately left London by car together in good time, had arrived much too early and so took the opportunity, well before the service started, to drop into The Chaser for a sharpner or two. In fact they were the first to enter the pub that morning, and old Reg Bearsby, then in control of the taps, nearly died of shock when he first saw this wholly unexpected trio entering his public bar.

After my father's sad death in 1973, with the stables still in cracking form, the Queen Mother in her well-established sweet and understanding way, came down to Fairlawne for a final visit. She individually saw each member of the staff in a private room, giving them all a personal gift ranging from cigarette boxes to travelling clocks to cufflinks, all engraved with her crest and initials. This was a typically generous gesture on her behalf and one which I know brought tears to the eyes of all those concerned.

As the era of the Fairlawne racing stables concluded, the royal connection with Shipbourne and Fairlawne also came to an end. Its memories have, I think, been treasured by so many with whom the Queen Mother made contact. She brought her happy, welcoming, and delightful presence both to all those who worked in the house and the stables, and to the church and the world of Shipbourne and Fairlawne. So may I conclude by saying that it has indeed been a privilege for me to be able to paint some of the diverse scenes which have flowed for so many of us from this glorious royal connection.