

Endpapers: Lowther coat of arms



CONTENTS

Preface	v
Memories of the Yellow Earl	vii
Introduction	xiii
PART I	
THE VICTORIAN	3
PART II	
THE EDWARDIAN	116
PART III	
THE GEORGIAN	166
Epilogue	227
Family Tree	232
Appendixes	235-255
Footnotes	254
Acknowledgements	259
Index	261-268

CHAPTER 22

Hugh was over sixty by the time the war ended. Grace was sixty-two. Neither had spared themselves in the war effort. Hugh had headed the Sportsmen of Britain in raising funds to buy ambulances and as a full Colonel in the army had travelled back and forward to France in the interests of the Blue Cross, as well as undertaking all manner of other duties. His efforts on behalf of the National Stud and the Cottesmore, therefore, strenuous though they were, had to be squeezed into his spare moments. Grace had had a full-time job with the Red Cross as well as fulfilling as many engagements as she could, entertaining convalescent soldiers, collecting war comforts and joining in the many patriotic activities where her presence or active help could be most useful.

Surprisingly, of the two of them, Hugh felt the strain the most. By the end of the war, for the first time in his life, he had lost some of his exuberance. Only his capacity for spending remained unimpaired.

His cigar bill alone was £3,000 a year and there were no arguments the Trustees could use to make him pull in his horns. In the interests of wartime economy he had dispensed with his private orchestra and cut down drastically on his stables, but these were the only economies he was prepared to make.

With the onset of peace his role started to change. He now played the part of elder statesman in the sports he had once adorned. The old power of the National Sporting Club was passing to the British Boxing Board of Control, but Hugh sought no part in the new management of affairs. When he gave up the Cottesmore, he bowed out as a Master of Foxhounds, but remained as a wise counsellor to his successors.

As a result of his connection with the National Stud he had been elected a Steward of the Jockey Club and racing had become his main active interest. His life became largely governed by the Racing Calendar so that he knew exactly what his programme would be as far as a year ahead.

With Grace he would take up residence at Carlton House Terrace in May until Goodwood Races in July. He would always take a house for Ascot week near the course and it became traditional for him to drive down the course in his yellow carriage on the opening day behind the King and Queen. He had a house in the main street of Newmarket, with a garden which backed on to

the sale ring to which he had a private entrance. It was a small house which he decorated with rose chintzes and papered throughout with rose patterned wallpaper. All the prominent names in the racing world used to come to this little house for dinner, and George V himself was a frequent visitor.

At the end of July he would usually go to stay with the Princess Royal in Yorkshire until the time came for him to go to Lowther for the grouse shooting. From there he would visit all the northern meetings, and especially Doncaster where he would take a house for the St Leger meeting. In Edinburgh for the Scottish meetings he would take over a small hotel completely for himself and his guests.

It was not an economical way of life. In each of his large houses, including Barleythorpe where he still went in the autumn and the spring, a housekeeper held sway with a skeleton staff. A few days before the appointed date for him and Grace to take up residence, grooms, valets, lady's maids and household officials would go ahead to make everything ready.

Whenever he went to Lowther the first department to be favoured with his special attention was the stables. The stable-yard at Lowther was a religion with him. It was the holy of holies, only to be entered by the authorised staff or by Hugh Lonsdale himself. Only by his express invitation was any visitor ever allowed to view the stableyard, and then never unaccompanied. It was one of the unwritten laws which everyone was expected to observe. For an offender to



'Warden of the Marches' winning the City & Suburban. 21 April 1926

plead ignorance was no excuse. It was most unlikely that he or she would ever be asked to Lowther again.

Any economy in the stables was unthinkable. Every day the thirty-odd stable hands would be busily occupied polishing and grooming to a standard of perfection which was almost unbelievable. Each morning the complicated design of the Lowther coat-of-arms would be reproduced in powdered, coloured chinks on freshly laid sand in the yard. It was a work of the most meticulous and painstaking detail. There it would remain until the time came for Hugh's morning inspection, when his dogs would joyfully romp over it and ruin the picture. The following morning the first task of the stable lads would be to re-create the masterpiece in all its perfection.

The highlight of each week was the Sunday inspection which took place immediately after luncheon. As Hugh walked into the yard followed by his favoured guests, one groom would hand him a freshly laundered pair of yellow gloves; another would carry behind him a basket of chopped carrots pulled that morning in the Lowther gardens. Then, followed by a retinue of guests, he would visit every horse in the stable to feed it carrots from his own hands.

If really distinguished guests were staying, Hugh would sometimes order a review of all his horses. Positioning his party in the yard, he would order the horses and ponies to be trotted out in turn with a groom holding the bridle. On these occasions he was not above arranging that all the horses were shown



Nine times winner 'Warden of the Marches' photographed outside his stables in 1926



A parade of carriage horses in the stable yard at Lowther. Any economy in this department was unthinkable.

twice. His meticulous attention to standards made his horses so alike that even the most knowledgeable had difficulty in telling one from another. By this device he was able to show to his duly impressed guests a stable twice as large as he actually possessed.

From time to time, too, he would call for a review of all the gundogs on his estate. The keepers stood in line with their yellow labradors at their heels. As Hugh passed by, each dog was supposed on a word of command to sit down and stand up again after he had passed. The show was rather spoiled during one review when one of the dogs instead of sitting down sat up and begged!

Second to the stable-yard his great interest at Lowther was the gardens, although he hardly knew the name of a single flower. When he inherited Lowther, the gardens at the back of the castle extended for a mere hundred yards or so. Moreover they were dull gardens. Only the great avenue of yews which dated from A.D. 927 lent any interest. They were planted by the first Lowthers to live on the site in order to provide wood for their bows. Today the yews are amongst the oldest in the world. Some are over a hundred feet tall with spans of over eighty feet.

When Hugh first inherited, the park which surrounded Lowther was vast, but it was not big enough to satisfy Hugh, principally because his neighbours, the Howards at Greystoke Castle, had a larger one. By dint of flattening the fences of twenty farms he enlarged it until it was the biggest in the country – bigger than Windsor Great Park, and certainly very much bigger than Greystoke, until then the largest private park in England.

Hugh lavished money on the new gardens he created. To the south-west of the castle a natural terrace runs high above the Lowther River. This was developed into a mile-long border of trees and ornamental shrubs. An old watering-place for cattle known as Jack Croft's Pond he converted into an exotic ornamental lake. Two miles of beautifully trimmed yew hedges were a feature of a garden which he created in the image of the gardens at Versailles. Each year thousands upon thousands of annuals were bedded out to form a blaze of



*Hugh with
ten of his
beloved golden
retrievers.*

colour in August and September in the borders between the yew hedges and the wide, exquisitely manicured grass pathways which ran between them and which radiated out from a central hub like the spokes of a great floral wheel.

A rock garden, dotted with lily ponds and all manner of arbours and bridges, was created for the Alpine plants and dwarf trees which Grace collected avidly on her travels all over the world, and which was her special province. In another corner of artificially created waterfalls, sheltering behind tall shrubs, every conceivable sweet-scented flower was concentrated in lavish profusion; beyond, and equally hidden away, a Japanese garden was constructed where, in addition to the masses of Japanese water-lilies and irises set among tiny islands and hidden paths, there were, at every turn, life-size bronze birds, scarlet lacquer bridges and Japanese stone shrines.

The *pot-pourri* had been created by Hugh from a wasteland of rocky scree. He went on adding to it year by year as some new idea took his fancy until his gardens extended to well over a hundred acres. Nor was he content for very long to leave anything in one place. On a whim, the rose garden would be uprooted of its 25,000 rose-bushes and 25,000 new ones planted in their place, while the Trustees, who had been trying to get some money spent on a tenant's farm or a new afforestation scheme, wrung their hands in anguish.

His views on trees was odd to a point of eccentricity. He liked what he chose to call 'dark green trees'. When he started to visit Lowther in the winter he was depressed to see the fine avenues of hardwoods without their leaves. The estate workers were occupied next winter with cutting them down and planting yews or fir trees in their place. As a result of this idiosyncrasy he cut down a wonderful beech avenue which ran right through the park.

As has been remarked earlier, Hugh's relationship with the Trustees had undergone a considerable change since the days when old Jim Lowther could call him to order. Distinguished body of men though they were and

headed by James Lowther, whose presence as Speaker dominated the House of Commons, they found Hugh increasingly impossible to manage. He resented bitterly, as a small boy resents authority, that he should have to ask the Trustees for anything. He regarded them as the enemy to be bamboozled and deceived on every possible occasion. He resisted with all the power at his command the constant pressure put upon him by them to spend money for the improvement of the estate. Nothing was to be done from which he could not benefit in his own life-time. Every penny that could be spared must be given to him to keep him going in the style in which he considered he was entitled to live.

On one occasion he persuaded himself that nobody would notice if a Rubens, which was a family heirloom and therefore under the control of the Trustees, were to find its way on to the market. 'Sell it to anybody except Duveen,' he instructed. 'He has a reputation I hear all over London of buying for too little and selling for too much.' It was eventually bought by a firm of distinguished dealers for about a quarter of its value. Unfortunately for everyone concerned, the Trustees did find out and the purchasers were ordered to return the picture. As it had already been resold to France, a compromise was reached whereby the purchasers paid a similar sum to the Trustees as they had paid Hugh Lowther. In this way they got the picture for only *half* its value, Hugh kept his money and the Trustees had to be satisfied.

They did not do even as well as that when Hugh discovered that for years they had been running their own fire insurance whereby the Trustees had accumulated a reserve fund out of income. So successful was this operation that the fund amounted to almost a quarter of a million pounds. When Hugh discovered this secret hoard he made their lives so miserable that they eventually closed the fund and handed him the kitty.

To Hugh the Trustees were the Great Enemy. Anybody who had anything to do with them was suspect. Between him and the agents appointed and paid for by the Trustees a state of cold war existed. On the surface he treated them with politeness, even with consideration, but beneath the surface he watched, like a cat watching a mouse, for them to put a foot wrong. They were the



A Spy cartoon of Mr Speaker Lowther, Hugh's senior trustee, who later became Viscount Ullswater.