

The 9th DUCHESS of ROXBURGHE

March 2023

The Duchess was born **Lady Mary Crewe-Milnes (1915-2014) #15070** on the family tree. Lady Mary's father was **Robert Crewe-Milnes, 1st Marquess of Crewe** and her mother was **Lady Peggy Primrose**, one of the first of seven women appointed as magistrates in 1919 following the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919. Her maternal grandparents were **Hannah Primrose, Countess of Rosebery** and **Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery**. A goddaughter of Queen Mary, she was the first wife of **George Innes-Ker, 9th Duke of Roxburghe (1913-1974) #14591**. They married in 1935 but divorced in 1953. During divorce negotiations she was advised by her lawyer not to leave the family home, Floors Castle, voluntarily as the settlement would be better if she was removed by her husband. The considerable lengths to which he went to persuade her to depart included turning off first the electricity and then the gas and finally the water. In the end she got her generous settlement!

She was a great patron of the Royal Ballet in the era of **Margot Fonteyn** and **Frederick Ashton** and in 1967 her mother, **Margaret (Peggy), Lady Crewe** died and left her the 300-acre estate of West Horsley, Surrey which included a large country house dating from the 16th century. She lived there for the best part of 50 years but sadly was not able to keep the property in good condition. Without warning him in advance, when she died aged 99 in 2014, she left the whole estate to her great nephew, **Bamber Gascoigne**, the historian, author and original *University Challenge* quizmaster who was already nearly 80 years old and married to **Christina**, a celebrated potter, but without children. What were they to do with this enormous grand, but unexpected, responsibility?

Having wrestled with the problem for some considerable time and mindful that their house had hosted a 35-course dinner for Henry VIII and allegedly been visited by Sir Walter Raleigh's severed head they came up with a plan to do it justice. They decided to sell off those items of furniture that did not belong in the house having been brought in in the 1930s, which raised nearly the £10 million seed capital required to convert the whole estate to a magnificent hub for the visual and creative arts. As a central part of the plan, they were able to welcome Grange Park Opera to a wonderfully romantic spot just beyond his aunt's ancient orchard. Here they built, in record time, a 5-storey opera house based on La Scala to seat 700. Visitors would arrive in the late afternoon and enjoy a saunter through the fragrant gardens before taking their seats. During the interval dinner

is served in the grand rooms of the house and when the evening is over, they return through unspoiled moonlit countryside.

To oversee the provision of facilities for all manner of arts and crafts and to ensure the historic house's survival Bamber Gascoigne gifted the house to a charitable trust, the Mary Roxburghe Trust, which established a governing body experienced in conservation, the arts and commercial management. Gascoigne died in 2022, after a life of extraordinary eminence and climactic generosity.