

# Lionheart

The story of Leo Exton  
1887 to 1960

by

Denis Foss

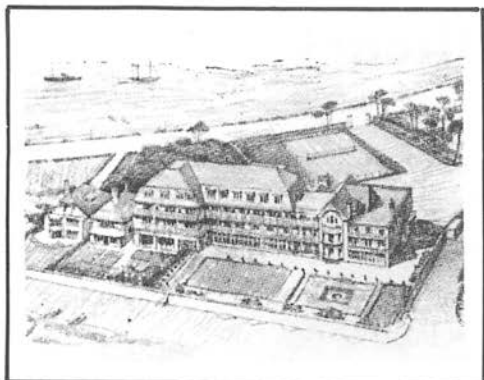


“Leo & Queen Exton”

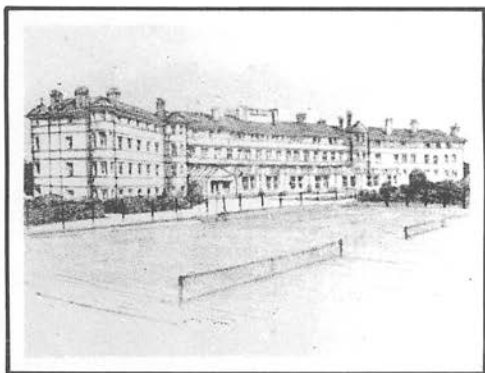


Linden Hall Publishers





SANDBANKS HOTEL



HOTEL BURLINGTON



PALACE COURT HOTEL

## FOREWORD

“My Husband.”

He looked like a film star, and danced like Jo Coyne (leading champion dancer in those days.)

Altogether glamorous.

At the time of our engagement he was living with a married woman who drank.

I did not know until after we were married that Leo took his first drink when dressing and continued every evening to boost himself.

In fact it was this that made him sociable.

I discovered he was a very nervous man, frightened of people and did everything under influence of alcohol. It gave him the courage to run businesses and to mix with people and be a success with them.

His clothes were part of his desire ‘to make a dent’ in the world. Sometimes if he saw a specially well dressed guest in one of his hotels he used to go to their rooms and read the name of their tailor from inside the suits hanging in the wardrobe.

Ambition ran him.

I did not mind this. I only saw my glamorous man whom women desired, and he had chosen me for his wife.

I was determined to be a film star wife, deep, abstruse, and difficult to know.

After our three children had grown a little older, he began to feel guilt about his way of life, and wondered if a faith would be a help. We went everywhere to find a faith, churches of all denominations, listened to radio talks.

He said, “All the Christians tell you how to live when you have a faith, but no one says how you can find one.”

Then a letter came from the children’s kindergarten teacher, inviting us to a houseparty in Oxford.

This book is the story of what happened as a result

## **Chapter One**

### **BEGINNINGS**

Move to Bournemouth; Linden Hall Hydro; Bournemouth Ice and Ice Cream Factory; Boscombe Motor syndicate; 1914-18 war; Shell factory; Grosvenor Hotel, Swanage; Westover Garage; Ice Rink; Oxford Group House Party.

## **Chapter Two**

### **PIONEERING**

Communists; Indoor Swimming Pool; The 'Big Five'; Ice Revue; Bournemouth Markets Co. Ltd; Y.M.C.A.; Palace Court Hotel; Moral Re-Armament; Bournemouth in war.

## **Chapter Three**

### **AFTER THE WAR**

Re-opening Linden Hall Hydro; Labour Party Conference; Union Influence; Westminster Theatre; Institute of Directors; British Hotel and Restaurant Association Conference; Licensing Laws; His last evening for his family and friends; Tribute at the Electric Cinema.

## CHAPTER 1

I was privileged to know intimately and to work closely with my uncle Lionel Exton, who everybody called Leo, a man whom I came to love and respect tremendously. Although we often disagreed, we never fought.

He was thirty years older than me and it was not until I was 18 that I got to know him at all well.

His father and mother had moved from Lincolnshire to Bournemouth in the late 1890s when he was a young man still at school. His father, J. T. Exton, had bought a coal and corn business which prospered in a quiet way.

J.T. bought a house, Linden Vale, opposite the lovely Boscombe Chine gardens.

Being a proud man, he wrote to all his friends in Lincolnshire asking them to come and stay in his beautiful new house; but none of them came. He then had the thought to turn it into a hotel. One result was that he bought the houses on either side, joined them together and so was created the first Exton Hotel, called Linden Hall, later to have the name Hydro added.

For himself and his family he bought another house just behind it, called Clare Lodge, which later played a significant part in his relations with his eldest son, my uncle Leo.

J. T. sent Leo to learn the hotel business by working at the Belle Vue Palace Hotel in Berne, Switzerland.

When he returned from a year in Switzerland J.T. decided he was capable of looking after the hotel, so J. T. and his wife Marsy decided they would take a round trip to Australia to visit relatives who had recently settled in Bunbury, Western Australia.

When J.T. and Marsy Exton arrived back at Linden Hall from Australia they wanted to go to their usual accommodation in Clare Lodge, the house behind the hotel that he had bought for them, but Leo had to tell them they could not sleep there as there had been so many enquiries for rooms that he had let them. Much to J.T.'s annoyance they had to find accommodation staying with some friends.

J.T. did not know whether to lose his temper with Leo or to congratulate him for his business acumen. It was the start of Leo taking control of the running of the hotels.

J.T. had come back smitten with the idea of cold storage and talked incessantly about what he had seen in Australia. Leo took this as an opportunity to break out on his own. He borrowed £1,000 from his father and set up the Bournemouth Ice and Cold Storage Company in Palmerston Road, Boscombe.

In those days before refrigerators, butchers, fishmongers and caterers needed a place where they could rent cold storage space and also ice for keeping foodstuffs fresh in the hot summer weather. Whenever you passed a fishmonger you saw the fish on a slab, or meat on a butcher's, sitting on crushed ice.

Leo soon ran into difficulties. First of all the locals could not believe that it was possible for a young man like him to make good ice, and thought only ice that had come from a long way away was any good. It took efficiency of delivery and quality of ice and cheaper prices to woo them away from their previous suppliers who had had it sent down from London by train each day.

At the same time another firm, Bournemouth Markets, opened up with bigger and better cold storage space, and delivering the ice from the railway station.

An error in the storing of apples and butter nearly bankrupted Leo's company so he went to his competitor, Bournemouth Markets, and suggested that they took over all the cold storage business and he took over all the ice deliveries. This deal saved his company.

# Programme

Christmas



1934

To Welcome you.  
To wish you a happy Christmas here  
And for you and all your friends  
a glad new year.

New Year



1935

Linden Hall Hydro, Bournemouth

### The Record of 1934

During the year 1934 Linden Hall Hydro has again been making history.

The number of its guests, during Summer holidays, has broken all records and their enthusiasm has never been greater.

During the year the hall-rooms has been re-built and enlarged and the very best ideas in decoration, equipment and furnishing have been incorporated in it.

The hall-room lounge has been re-decorated and re-furnished entirely.

When our visitors assemble for the Christmas Holidays they will find that the new Sports Stadium at Linden Hall Hydro is an enterprise of the first importance on the part of the management.

It houses a magnificent indoor swimming bath, 60 feet long and 24 feet wide, heated to a temperature which will allow of its use and enjoyment all the year round. The appointments of the bath and the modern showers have been carried out in the completest and most pleasing way.

The newest methods of dealing with the water have been adopted. It is being continuously filtered and then purified by a sunlight treatment which keeps it crystal clear. A swim in the bath is at once a pleasure and a tonic.

Adjacent to the Swimming Bath a new Squash Court has been built so that enthusiasts after their game may plunge at once into the water.

The Sports Stadium contains, too, facilities for every game associated with a holiday on board ship including deck tennis and similar games.

### LINDEN HALL HYDRO

Bournemouth's Brightest Spot.

### CHRISTMAS 1934

#### Special Holiday Terms:

For 1 week ..	22/6 per day each person.
For 6 days ..	25/- " " "
For 5 days ..	27/6 " " "

Children sharing parents' rooms will be charged 13/6 per day inclusive during the Holidays.

Guests who stay for longer than one week will be charged at the usual Tariff rates after the first week.

Bookings cannot be accepted for less than 5 days during the Holidays.

These terms are inclusive of Bedroom, Baths, all meals and the full Christmas Programme of Festivities.

All bookings from the 28th December onwards will be charged at the normal Tariff rates.



LINDEN HALL  
HYDRO

Programme of Festivities

CHRISTMAS  
1934

FRIDAY, <i>December 21st.</i>	Ping Pong Tournament. Dancing.	8.30 p.m. 10.0 p.m.	THURSDAY, <i>December 27th.</i>	Ping Pong Tournament. Dancing.	8.30 p.m. 10.0 p.m.
SATURDAY, <i>December 22nd.</i>	Tennis Tournament. (if wet, Deck Tennis). Cinderella Dance.	2.0 p.m. 8.30 p.m.	FRIDAY, <i>December 28th.</i>	Treasure Hunt in the Hotel. Staff Carnival Supper & Dance. All guests are invited to help make this a great evening.	5.30 p.m. 9.0 p.m.
SUNDAY, <i>December 23rd.</i>	Treasure Hunt in Cars. Dancing. London Cabaret Show.	2.15 p.m. 9.30 p.m. 10.30 p.m.	SATURDAY, <i>December 29th.</i>	Swimming Gynklana and Sports in the New Indoor Swimming Bath Competitions against the Burlington Hotel. Cinderella Dance.	3.0 p.m. 8.30 p.m.
MONDAY, <i>December 24th.</i> CHRISTMAS EVE	Swimming Sports in the New Indoor Swimming Pool (heated). Coddion Cinderella Dance. Christmas Tree. Small gifts for all. Children's Games. Grand Head Dress Dinner and Dance. (Prizes).	3.0 p.m. 8.30 p.m. 5.0 p.m. 6.0 p.m. 7.0 p.m.	SUNDAY, <i>December 30th.</i>	Professional Entertainment. Ballroom Dance.	8.30 p.m. 9.30 p.m.
TUESDAY, <i>December 25th.</i> CHRISTMAS DAY.	Thé Dansant. Grand Fancy Dress Gala Dinner and Dance. Midnight Carnival Supper.	4 p.m. 7.0 p.m. 12.0 a.m.	MONDAY, <i>December 31st.</i> NEW YEAR'S EVE.	Tennis Match, Linden Hall v. Burlington, at Hotel Burlington. New Year's Eve Ball. Special arrangements to welcome 1935.	2.30 p.m. 8.30 p.m.
WEDNESDAY, <i>December 26th.</i> BOXING DAY.					

Indoors—

Dancing, Bridge, Billiards, Squash, Rackets, Swimming Bath, Ping Pong, Deck Tennis, etc.

Out of Doors—

Hard Tennis Courts, and, within easy reach, Golf Links (5 courses), Ice Skating, Riding, etc.

Some forty years later he was able to repay this debt when he was called in to save Bournemouth Market when they were on the verge of bankruptcy.

A good car was what every young business man wanted at that time. Leo needed one particularly. He was tall and quite good looking and inordinately shy. Although many of the girls noticed him, he thought he needed a symbol. Hence the desire for a car that was different and attractive.

At that time a new firm had begun putting cars on the market. These were the Bedford Buicks, which were the American Buick being assembled in Bedford for the British market — the forerunner of the huge Vauxhall enterprise of today.

Leo had a drinking and flirting pal called Tom Beechey Newman, the son of a local off-licence proprietor.

Being kept short by their fathers of the sort of cash they wanted to appease their egos and to attract the girls, they did not have enough to buy a decent car. Leo was told by a guest staying in the hotel that for every two cars he sold, Buicks would give him another free.

Leo had a brainwave. He wrote to Bedford Buick and pointed out that they had no local dealer and asked what were the requirements for him and his partner to take over the agency.

In reply he was told that they had to have a showroom with enough space to have at least one car on show all the time. Leo and Newman went to see Newman's father who allowed them to have one of his shop windows as a show room.

As soon as Leo got the agency he started trying to sell cars to some of the guests staying at Linden Hall and he was lucky enough to sell one to a gentleman who came from Eastbourne. By the time the car was delivered the customer had gone home, so Leo had to drive over to Eastbourne to deliver it. When he arrived there he found to his horror that the gentleman lived at the top of a very steep hill, which Leo was sure the car could never climb.

He thought about this for a minute or two, then he parked at the bottom of the hill and walked up to the house. When the gentleman came to see him he

said with a smile, but feeling very unhappy inside, 'I've parked the car at the bottom of the hill as I thought you would probably not have a garage up here.'

The gentleman replied, 'Quite right, very sensible of you.' He paid the cheque and Leo caught the train back to Bournemouth.

Once the car business was going well and they could afford to employ people, Leo was again bored. It was then he began experimenting with a new product which had come from Italy via America and which was catching on in the UK — ice cream. Soon his first company became the Bournemouth Ice and Ice Cream Company and the hotels were welcoming this new addition to their menus.

Then the 1914-18 war broke out. There was no conscription at the beginning of the war and very soon the Ministry of Defence decided that the Boscombe Motor Syndicate, which had by now extended to large showrooms and workshop, was suitable for the production of shells. Leo was given a quota of shells to produce and the job of turning the premises into a factory.

The machines were installed under a Ministry expert, the raw materials purchased and they started producing satisfactorily for the War Office Procurement Office.

But not fast enough for Leo. He watched the making of the shells and, although not a trained engineer, he came to the conclusion that the way they were done was too slow and inefficient and could easily be improved.

The process meant that a shell was made in three stages, all involving lathes. A lump of metal was turned into the shape of a shell cover, then the bottom end was bored out with threads inside so that a brass end could be screwed in to hold the explosive; the other end was bored out and threaded to hold a detonator.

Leo experimented with an old engineer who was working for him and eventually they devised a way of setting the lathe so that all three of the turning jobs and the setting of the threads could be done at the same time.

This increased production threefold.

**A few words from the Bournemouth  
Motor Syndicate to their Employees.**

**TO THE MEN.**

In case any of you have not read the magnificent speech of Mr. Lloyd George at Carnarvon on Saturday last, we want you to read these extracts from it, together with our comments. We have put all Mr. Lloyd George's words in inverted commas.

"No great ends have ever been achieved in this world without great sacrifices, and they must not be confined to one class or one section of the community. We must not choose able bodied men between 18 and 41 (who do not happen to be indispensable to a business) and say the sacrifice is THEIRS—we must ALL share in it. The general community has not suffered in this country anything comparable to what it has suffered in other belligerent lands.

**"TO WIN THE WAR WE MUST ENDURE MORE.**

"The sacrifice has been delegated too much to the men in the trenches, and nobly have they borne it. We must ALL be prepared to give up something for the victory of our native land and the cause for which it stands.

"The first thing we have got to give up, is to give up grumbling. Don't always do the things you like. Do the things you are best fitted for and most required for, and that will help the Army and the essential national industries."

These words apply with special force to those of you who have to come off your machines to give place to the women.

"The next thing is—out with your ready cash! Even with unready cash! It is indispensable in order to carry on the war. If you cannot give much, give what you can."

How many of you men have invested in the War Loan, or even bought any War Savings Certificates? Could you not put aside all your overtime money for this object, or your bonus? Remember NO AMOUNT is too small. If every working man saved 6d a week, it would amount to over £100,000 per week! There is still a fortnight in which to invest in the new War Loan and you are not asked to GIVE your money, only to LEND it to your country—and it will bear a rate of interest which never before has been given on such firm security.

We are perfectly prepared to help any man for this purpose if he will approach us, by advancing him a proportion of his wages to put into the War Loan, or to buy War Savings Certificates at 15/6 each.

Remember above all things that whatever money you put into the loan is not locked up for 30 years. If you need it three or five years hence you will get it back in full, because the Government has arranged that the loan shall never fall below par as Consols have done.

Another point Mr. Lloyd George mentions is the food supply, and the announcement of Lord Devonport upon the question of rations. While this is essentially to your wives or mothers, much assistance can also be given by you men, by determining not to exceed the very liberal allowances laid down.

The Germans have declared war to the knife: let us reply by war to the knife and fork!

The last point he mentions is TIME.

"There must be no hanging back, there must be no loitering, there must be no lingering. Time is the deadliest of all the neutral Powers. Let us see that we enlist him amongst our allies. The only way to win time is not to lose time. You must not lose time in the field, in the factory, or in the workshop. Whoever tarries when he ought to be active is simply helping the enemy to secure the aid of the most powerful factor in this war—TIME."

If we all take these matters to heart, and each one makes up his mind INDIVIDUALLY to "do his bit"—remembering all the time those on the other side who are giving their limbs, their eyes, their lives for the same end—we shall have

**PEACE IN 1917.**

## TO THE WOMEN.

In addition to the men, may we make a special appeal also to the women (without whom, as we all admit, this war could never be won!)

**FIRSTLY—TO USE YOUR SUPREME INFLUENCE OVER THIS QUESTION OF FOOD RATIONS.**

There can be no question but that if the Germans succeed in their submarine plans, we are bound to be beaten—seeing that we are an island nation, and can neither subsist ourselves nor keep our armies supplied with munitions, save by the use of the seas.

**SECONDLY—TO INVEST AT THE VERY LEAST HALF YOUR WAGES.**

Many of you have never been wage earners previously—therefore always remember that the money you now earn is, in reality, paid you by the Country, and that therefore your highest duty is to **LEND** all you can of it to the Country, not to **SPEND** it.

Pardon us for mentioning these matters, but our only excuse is the seriousness of the position to which we are now coming.

*Dated February 5th, 1917*

*(Signed)* L. EXTON,  
T. BEECHY NEWMAN.

The Ministry were staggered at their production figures, sent some experts down to see how it was done, and immediately gave Leo the job of touring the country, showing other factories how they could alter their plant, avoiding sending away to machine tool firms and yet treble their output. Many years later Leo showed me a certificate from the Ministry thanking him for his initiative and efforts which included some such words as 'Your work on shell production significantly helped to shorten the war'. Leo was such a modest man that he never showed any of these things to anyone. In fact he seemed even to be a little ashamed that he had not actually been in the fighting.

Towards the end of the war J.T. had bought a house called The Grove in Swanage, ostensibly as a holiday home for his family. But his obsession for bricks and mortar made him extend the building and turn it also into an hotel and he called it the Grosvenor.

It was at this time that J.T. took ill and died. When Leo saw the accounts which his father had kept secret from him, he was horrified to find the hotel company was in debt to the tune of £28,000, equivalent today to about half a million. J.T.'s passion for bricks and mortar had outstripped his wisdom with money.

Leo had to buckle down and start to raise enough money to pay off the debts. So he worked and also worked his sisters, paying them and himself virtually nothing until the debt was paid off.

When the war ended, the Boscombe Syndicate, as with many other factories engaged on war contracts, nearly went broke. Suddenly there was no demand for its product, there was a large stock of metal, many machines and quite a large staff with nothing to do.

Luckily cars began to sell again fairly quickly and he was also able to redeploy some of the staff in the ice factory and the hotels.

The hotels had boomed during the war, and the ice factory, which had been employed making tents, began to gather speed and this tided him over.

It was obviously time to expand the hotel business. New wings were put on Linden Hall and the Grosvenor. It is interesting that in those days Linden Hall

did most of its business in the winter, with elderly wealthy people coming to Bournemouth from the North to avoid the cold, and every bathroom had a tap which carried seawater as bathing in seawater was considered therapeutic.

By now Leo was too busy with all his businesses to oversee the day to day running of the hotels, so he handed this over to his sisters; and he had become enamoured of the attractive daughter of an engineering inventor and wanted to marry her.

At the same time my mother had been left by my father, with three sons of her own and a daughter of a friend of my father's who had lost his wife at childbirth as he was leaving to return to the front in France. Mother received no money from my father, and we existed for quite a long time on the small allotment from this girl, Jane's, father.

Leo offered my mother the job as manageress of Linden Hall at a salary of three pounds a week all found, and the rental of a house nearby for the children, with a live-in family to look after us.

The next phase of Leo's life was a time of consolidation of his family. In the early 1920s he married Grace. She was always known as 'Queen' and was a lady of considerable style. Leo worshipped her and could refuse her nothing.

He bought her a lovely house at Sandbanks, on the edge of the sea. Only a sandy beach in front, and only a road to walk over at the back before you were at the beautiful Poole harbour. They had fallen in love with this site and soon after they were married Leo bought a houseboat which was moored in Poole harbour where they spent the weekends.

By 1926 Leo and Queen had three dearly loved children, Leone, Valerie Ann and John Clive.

By this time Bedford Buick had become Vauxhall, the Boscombe Motor Syndicate had become the distributor for the Bournemouth area and they were doing well. I remember Leo had the 'poshest' sports car of that era, an AC Special, and Queen had a cream tourer Vauxhall with the bonnet Vs painted a bright red. It was the most distinctive car in Bournemouth.

One of the engineers who had worked at the Boscombe Syndicate making shells during the war was a clever man called Boon. He joined the Ice Cream factory as Chief Engineer and was soon made a director. He began designing new machinery for manufacturing, packing and selling ice cream. So Leo started a new company for him called Boon's Patents. Boon's automatic mixers, packers and, later, penny-in-the-slot machines to dispense milk or ice cream were in use all over the world. They did no manufacturing, but only designed, invented and sold the ideas to firms like Vickers, and others.

I remember well the first coin-in-the-slot ice cream dispenser being tried out on Bournemouth pier. On the first day I had the job of rushing down pretty well every hour to refill it as it was so popular. I counted £1 15 in the money box at the end of the day, all from 2d ice cream bars.

Leo was making a lot of money. He was also spending lavishly. He had expensive friends who drank a lot, went racing, gambled, had fast motorboats and lived the life of rich playboys. He had also got involved with the wife of one of his closest friends, who knew all about it and did not mind as he was philanthropic himself. But throughout this period Leo was uncomfortable. He loved Queen deeply and permanently. But his need for success, for conquering, was insatiable.

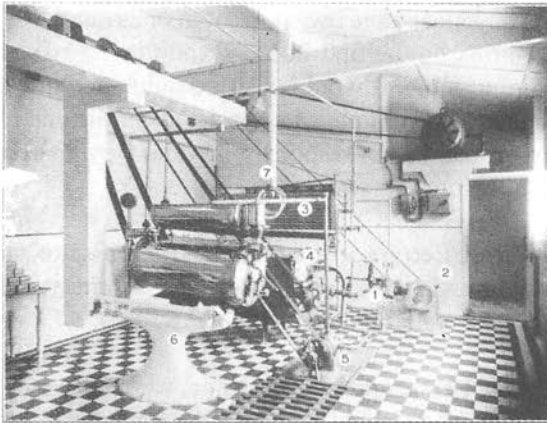
At that time the fastest growing make of car in the country was Morris. The company who held the agency in Bournemouth were expanding fast and they wanted to acquire a prime site. But the directors quarrelled and parted company and a family of industrial pipe makers called Sharp, based in Parkstone, were left with the problem of developing a site they had acquired in the Westover Road, which was becoming the most important business street in Bournemouth, and with the other directors taking their money out they were in serious danger of going bankrupt.

As so often seemed to happen, they came to Leo for help.

Ever since he had been in Switzerland he had always wanted to build an ice rink in Bournemouth and he saw this as an opportunity to build it on this prime site. So he and Newman sold Boscombe Syndicate and invested their money in what became the Westover Garage.



# Creemier Ices !



Where Creemier Ices are made.  
Note tiled floor and walls to ensure perfect cleanliness.

1. PIPE delivering Cream from Pasteurizer.
2. DISCOLIZER working at a pressure of 2500 lbs per sq. in emulsifying the Cream. This is the reason why "Creemier" Ices are so smooth.
3. CREAM COOLER, cooling the Pasteurized Cream instantly and so destroying any active bacteria.
4. CREAM RIPENING VAT, maintained at a constant low temperature to ensure that the cream is perfectly fresh.
5. CREAM PUMP, pumping the ripened cream to the "Cherry Freezer."
6. CHERRY FREEZER. Cooled by brine. Capacity 80 to 100 gallons per hour. Delivering the frozen Cream into cans untouched by hand.
7. STEAM SPARGE, used for sterilising daily, all parts exposed to the cream

The most modern ice cream making machine  
in the country at that time

# Frozen Delights !



The first ice cream dispensing machine in  
the world — Bournemouth Pier.

When planning the building, Sharp and Newman thought the right thing was to turn the top floor into offices and rent them out to help cover running costs. But Leo was determined to have an ice rink. He fought to have one in this building. The others said 'No'. They must have the showroom on ground floor level. Leo said, 'Let's put the ice rink on the first floor.' Experts were asked. They said it was commercially impossible. It would cost too much and it was impossible to make enough money to make it pay. Leo insisted. In the end he told Sharp and Newman that he would accept responsibility and that, if it did not pay, he would pick up the bills himself.

I remember the opening night well. Leo got so tight that he tried to skate and fell over on the rink, with the mayor and all the town's bigwigs laughing at him and Queen disappearing to hide her embarrassment.

Leo and Queen's two daughters, Leone and Valerie Anne, were both going to a little children's school in Canford Cliffs, run by a young lady called Gweneth Medwin, handicapped by polio. She had one leg in a brace, but was a bright, charming and wonderful teacher.

One of the things she believed in was giving her pupils a living faith in God. She taught them about a practice she had been trying for some time with almost miraculous results. That was two-way prayer. You not only talked to God about your needs, but you took time to sit quietly and listen and wrote down what you believed God was trying to tell you.

The girls came home one day and were prattling about their time of listening and saying in so many words what God had said to them. Queen overheard this. She had already noticed a big change in her little daughter Valerie Anne's peace of mind. She was asthmatic and very sensitive, and Leone too seemed to be less perturbed and more relaxed.

Queen told Leo about this when he got home. He decided this was dangerous mumbo-jumbo and determined to speak to Miss Medwin and put a stop to it. He was not religious in the least, although he often went to church with the family as Queen felt it was important for them.

Eventually, when he got some time from his many interests, he and Queen went to interview Gweneth Medwin. They were both completely won over by

her simplicity and calm and because she said, 'I was in a personal mess although I was religious and prayed every night but, when I started listening to God and began doing what He told me, my life was completely changed.'

They could not escape the sincerity of the girl, nor her peace and fearlessness. Don't forget, Leo was one of the biggest and most forceful business men in the area and well known.

She told them that she had learned about guidance from the Oxford Group and asked if they would like to meet someone. Leo quickly said, 'No, thank YOU'. He was thinking of his lady friend, his self-indulgence and, most of all, of what his friends would say if he took an interest in such things.

Queen was much more deeply moved. He had been worried for some time about the direction their marriage was taking. She suspected a lot, but knew very little.

In the summer when there was an Oxford Group houseparty in Oxford Gweneth Medwin sent an invitation to Queen Exton. In her letter she said, 'If you were to go to this houseparty you would never be the same again.'

Afterwards Queen told Gweneth that this remark stuck in her mind and that she had persuaded Leo to call in at the houseparty at the Randolph Hotel in Oxford on their way back from visiting their daughters, recently moved to boarding school at Felixstowe.

Leo told her afterwards that he had got his secretary to send a telegram to the Randolph Hotel telling him he was urgently needed back in Bournemouth for business reasons.

The one meeting he attended that afternoon made him stay the whole weekend and when they drove back to Bournemouth they took Gweneth with them.

To her surprise and delight, during the following week Leo told Gweneth that they were going back to Oxford to the houseparty next weekend and asked if she would like to go with them as their guest.

Just before the end of that weekend Leo got up and said he wanted to give all that he had learned there to the business world.

The houseparty completely captivated him. His wartime period of caring for national issues had made him dissatisfied with his success as a local business man, and although he had made a lot of money, it held no real attraction for him. He was interested in creating and developing, and you need money for that, but deep down he felt he had talents that could be used to help the whole country, particularly as there were three million unemployed at the time, which did not include the early retired, women or youngsters under 21.

When he got home Leo found that something had completely changed in him. His drinking, womanising, or even his golf and bridge which he loved, seemed to be by the way, unimportant time wasters. He had been a heavy gambler, never playing a round of golf without wagering at least £50, which was big money in those days.

Gweneth later remarked that, although Leo was such an important business man in Bournemouth, he was always nervous when he met anyone new, and needed a cigarette or a quick drink before he went to meet them. Gweneth also said that when she told some friends that Leo was working with her in the Oxford Group they said, 'No, that's impossible. He belongs to the fastest set in the area.'

Indirectly it was Leo's daughter, Leone, who had started all this. She was a pupil at Gweneth Medwin's kindergarten. When Gweneth came back from her first meeting with the Oxford Group, having had a quite amazing and unexpected experience of Christ, her guidance from God was to tell the children that, although she often prayed 'Thy will be done', she had never stopped to find out what God's will might be, so she had decided to listen each morning.

When she told the class, it was Leone who said, 'If YOU can listen to God why can't we?' Gweneth had not thought of this, so it came about that every morning after break they listened to God together.

Gweneth wrote about that time, 'In the very early days I knew Queen when she brought the two girls to school in her cream and scarlet coupe hung around

with children as she gathered up all the children who lived in the Sandbanks area to bring them to school.’

Gweneth said that Queen Exton was a most generous and kind woman — artistic, a devoted mother and a loyal wife — but that after his change she found Leo’s dedication to remaking the world through business rather trying; he so often filled the house with people who were asking how they could change and help.

Funnily enough, about this same time I too had met a young lady who had been changed through meeting the Oxford Group. I was intrigued by her beauty and the fact that she was totally impervious to my strong efforts at seduction; something I had never experienced before. She told me about the Oxford Group, something I had vaguely heard about but not come across.

Later, Queen Exton’s nephew, Harry, whom we called Wog, came to me saying he had committed himself to going to a religious meeting to please his aunt and couldn’t think of a way to get out of going. Had I any ideas?

I asked him what sort of meeting it was and he told me it was the Oxford Group. I immediately replied, ‘Let’s go to it. They have very lovely girls.’ And we did.

And that was the start of the long close personal friendship with my uncle Leo, over thirty years older than me, more experienced in life and business, but a real chum with a bond that transformed both our lives.

## CHAPTER II

### Pioneering

At this time there were long queues of unemployed in Poole, as in most of the country, and Leo had the thought that he might do something to solve this problem.

I had been unemployed for several months and this same thought had come into my mind. But Leo felt he was so separated from the unemployed by his affluence and way of life that he could do nothing until he understood their situation better.

It so happened that three of our closest helpers and collaborators were communists, all local leaders of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement which was wholly communist led.

One day we saw in the paper that there was going to be a communist march on Poole Town Hall where they would hold a meeting. We decided to go to the meeting which was chaired by an ex-Londoner called Harry Laundry.

Laundry had had to leave London because he was 'too hot' and might get arrested. He had led a march of unemployed men straight through a large church in Battersea and left a coffin on the altar during the Easter Communion Service. So many were involved that the police dared not do anything about it. He also led another and even larger group carrying coffins down Piccadilly, marched in to the Ritz Hotel and deposited coffins in the lounge; and in Battersea Park on Empire Youth Sunday, at that time a big day, when the guardsman went to unfurl the Union Jack it was found to have been replaced by the red flag - the work of Harry's son. Harry and his men had later commandeered a tram and defended it against the police for several hours. Harry, being quite small, escaped through the crowds.

When we met Harry he was as full of fire as ever. He had lost one child through malnutrition, had caught TB himself and had been sent at the party's expense to a cottage in Broadstone to recuperate. But nothing could stop him; he was on fire with revolution.

Leo felt that nothing could be done unless he and his fellow industrialists and businessmen knew and understood these men who fought so hard and self-sacrifically. I remember well the first time Leo visited Harry's little cottage. When he arrived Harry was not there. It had been impossible to make an appointment as Harry was not on the phone and moved around 'underground', but somehow Leo obtained his address and drove out to see him. Harry's wife treated Leo royally and asked him to take a seat. Leo happened to walk towards the largest and best chair in the room when Beatrice, Harry's wife exclaimed, 'You can't sit in that chair. It's Harry's.' Leo moved to a small upright chair. Thus began a fundamental change in him where he saw that his obvious 'sins' were not the most important; more, the assumption of privilege, the assumption of superiority, on which he had traded all his life, had to change. I remember Leo used the experience, saying to Harry when he came in, 'There's not much equality in this home, Harry, when you have a special chair.'

At the same time Leo felt he had an even greater responsibility for his shareholders and his staff, and that it was necessary to make profits to supply the money to help these people and create new jobs and new industries. .

Again, he sought guidance and the thought came to change the whole complex of Linden Hall. It had been for many years a normal holiday hotel which survived in winter with residents and weekends where no questions were asked, and I remember seeing roulette tables being run and crowds from outside playing the tables; and of course 'one-armed bandits', then strictly illegal, stood proudly and openly in the Winter Garden, later to become the billiard room. Linden Hall was also going through a spate of lesbianism, headed up by an American woman who came and took a large suite of rooms and corrupted most of the girls in the place with cash, drinks and flattery.

We had a Russian Bath (sauna) and several different spray baths, forerunners of the jacuzzi, and medical electric baths and trained physiotherapists on the staff.

Leo woke one morning with the thought to build an indoor swimming pool, squash courts and sports centre, to be included in the terms of staying in the hotel, to attract new clientele.

I remember driving Leo all over the country visiting pools that had recently been built. He felt that if it was something that God wanted it had to be the very best that could be obtained. The same with the squash courts.

The costs appeared to be enormous. Leo's brothers and sisters, all of whom were shareholders, opposed him. Only my mother, who was managing the hotel, backed him although she was very fearful. She had a lot of cleaning up of her own life to do and personal guilt is a timid-making disease unless it is brazened out and great risks are taken, which was not mother's style.

At one time I waited for Leo to come out of the directors' meeting, hearing a terrific row going on inside and thinking that that was the end of the swimming pool. Leo told me that the others had refused to finance the pool project and he had accepted it as a personal commitment that if it went wrong he would be broke.

Of course when it completely changed the fortunes of the hotel they all wanted to be included, which he gladly did. Some of them never forgave him for being right.

This was the beginning of Lanz Sports Club, still flourishing in the mid 1980s.

A year or two later a large house which had been the seaside home of Lady Louis Mountbatten's grandfather, Sir Felix Cassel, came on the market. It was right on the sands at Sandbanks, between Poole Harbour and the sea.

Exton hotels decided to buy it and turn it into an hotel. They joined two houses alongside it and built a new wing which included a ballroom over a swimming pool. This became the Sandbanks Hotel.

Just after the first world war, one of the large London hotel companies had decided that, as Linden Hall Hydro at the Boscombe end of the town was doing so well, there was a market for a large specifically built hotel, which they called



the Burlington. I don't know what it cost to build but, not many years after, they put it on the market as it was not making the profits they expected. Exton Hotels offered them £15,000 and they accepted it for this hundred-bedroom purpose-built modern building.

Exton Hotels too had difficulty in making it pay, until they began pumping it up with the overflow of the other hotels.

Later they took over the running of the Royal Victoria Hotel in Swanage which was owned by Groves Brewery, Weymouth.

They now had five hotels, all in excellent sites, and each with special charms.

They published a magazine, 'The Big Five,' and had an inclusive tariff whereby guests could stay in one of the hotels but use the facilities and have their meals in any of the five. Each had distinctive features. The Grosvenor was situated overlooking the bay in Swanage, with lovely terraces, an open-air swimming pool and its own bathing beach, a fine ballroom, which had some sort of entertainment each day, including a cinema, a cocktail bar and a 'kiddie bar' with a low bar with low stools, designed by Enid Blyton for the children.

The Burlington had a beautiful situation overlooking Boscombe Pier, and excellent hard courts for tennis. The Sandbanks, besides its swimming pool and all the other features, was right on the beach. The Royal Victoria was old and attractive, and Linden Hall of course had its sports stadium and hydro electrical baths.

So there was a dance at one of the hotels each night and a cinema at another, which any of the thousand or so guests staying in the big five could attend, and enjoy all the facilities.

It was at this time that a wealthy company in the leisure business sent a man — now a household name — to stay and see how it worked, who then went back and started up holiday camps based on what he saw in Bournemouth, with variations to suit the clientele for whom he was catering.

The next thing was the ice rink. It was losing money. Leo's co-directors wanted to close it down and pass the losses on to him as he had promised when they built it. He spent hours trying to find an inspired answer that not only created profits but increased facilities for the ordinary people and work for the employees.

It was then that Leo had the idea of ice shows. It seems impossible that no one had done it before but the truth is that they had not.

There were a number of professional skaters on the staff all winter who were laid off in summer when they literally struggled to keep alive.

Leo called them all together and brought in a bright young man named Neale, and suggested they try to do an ice show. Neale produced a rather sketchy script and Percy Pearce, the band leader, produced some music. But they came to Leo and said there was not enough of them to make a creditable show. It was then that Leo realised that his responsibility was not only for his own staff but that he could do something for a far wider number. So he told Neale to write to ice rinks all over the country and ask if any of them were interested.

Of course most of the highly skilled skaters and showmen and women had to make their living as professional coaches so that they could do the things they wanted to do, experiment etc., in their own time for nothing. The thought of being paid to do what they had been working out for themselves was very attractive.

The first show was a sell-out all the summer. Leo's opponents on the board did not like being proved wrong once more, but they liked the money that poured in.

Within three years they were asked to tour their shows and became the forerunners of these marvellous ice shows which have given pleasure to so many millions.

I remember during the war coming with my ship to New York and seeing in a theatre on Broadway the fabulous ice show 'Holiday on Ice' and finding that I knew all the leading performers and many of the chorus who had started at the

Westover Ice Rink. By now the show had been taken over by big money promoters and Leo had moved on to other and more important things.

Leo and I met every day and shared our guidance and fought to help each other to be different.

It was interesting that when we started with the Oxford Group the team in Bournemouth consisted of Gweneth Medwin and a couple of others, but very soon we had a team meeting of something like forty — mostly young people like myself — at Richmond Hill Congregational Church every Monday night. Soon we were joined by my brother Hannen who, like me, was in a moral mess and who longed to be able to do something to help his country.

This team impacted the town so much that the Corporation announced that, because so many people were sending in conscience money for fares they had dodged paying, each tram would be fitted with a conscience box. They published the amount these boxes garnered each month — a quite remarkable amount.

It was interesting how the unemployment in Poole began to drop; how even Harry Laundry got a job, perhaps the key one for the whole area. Leo persuaded George Harrington, Managing Director of Bobby's, the biggest department store (later taken over by Debenhams), to take Harry on in the packing department. George thought there would be a revolution but he felt it was right and decided to risk it. Harry was the hardest worker in the firm and created a new atmosphere in the place because he had learned, he said, from his friend Leo Exton that the only way to get cash to help the unemployed was to have prosperous businesses. Not only that, he relaxed his fight to get the workers organised and fighting for what was their right, but there was a change from destructive to constructive ways.

Harry opened doors to us to visit many of his left wing friends in London. All of them became different to some extent, although none became the force that Harry was. Only their bosses like Leo and George Harrington who, in his own way, was a great leader of change in commerce.

By then we had a number of business men actively working with us. One day the Chairman of the biggest wholesale fruit and vegetable firm in

# Rita the Spy

PROGRAMME  
1935

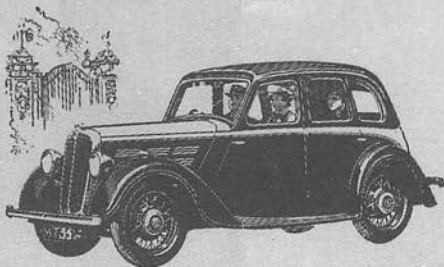


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# "RITA THE SPY."

"RITA THE SPY" is an original production, introducing features never before shown in this or any other country. It transplants the artistes from the screen on to the stage, and thence to the ice, the tale revolving round a pleasure cruise and a missing copy of a Secret Pact.



The British Secret Service Department send their Agent, Major Linklater, to obtain and pay for the missing document. The meeting place for this purpose is Hammerfest, in Norway, and in order not to create suspicion the British Agent embarks on the cruising liner "Arandora Star."

In the meantime the Foreign Government, having discovered their loss, and learnt that the copy was on its way to England, arranges, through the Chief of their Police, for Rita, their seductive spy, to recover the document at all costs. With promises of reward, and with threats of banishment if unsuccessful, Rita is forced into undertaking her mission.

However, Major Linklater's instructions were discovered by Sybil Hethrington, a typist at the Foreign Office, and by secret code she informs the Continental Police of Major Linklater's mission.

In due course the ship reaches Hammerfest, and Major Linklater is seen in a small house meeting the go-between, where he receives a copy of the stolen Pact, hands over the payment, after which he returns to the ship and carefully places the document in a locker in his cabin.

For the purposes of enabling Rita to meet Major Linklater and so recover the Pact, the Foreign Authorities arrange for her to make a

forced landing from an aeroplane at an inaccessible Eskimo Settlement, and a false S.O.S. message is sent to the "Arandora Star" to bring this about.

It so follows that the ship alters its course and becomes frozen in, and for the amusement of the passengers a sports carnival is arranged on the ice. In the midst of these celebrations a party of Eskimos are seen approaching, and with this comes a sudden snow storm. Among this party of Eskimos is one known as "The Lady of the Snows," none other than Rita, the seductive spy. She is welcomed to the ship's party, and not only enters into the fun, but takes a leading part. All the time at the back of her mind is the idea of stealing from Major Linklater the Pact, in which endeavour she is eventually successful.

The wind changes, the ice breaks away, the ship is free, and the carnival is brought to an end, which closes Act I.

Act II shows the cruising party landed at Bonheim for the National Festival. Major Linklater is seen amongst the party, and realizing that the loss of the Pact means the ruination of his career, determines at all costs to recover it.

In the final Dance of Desperation, Rita turns



traitress to her country, and returns the Pact to Major Linklater, and now up with the curtain . . .

# "RITA THE SPY."

STORY AND DIALOGUE

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "GYPSY DREAM" AND "GAY VIENNA."

Film Directed by NORMAN WHITTEN.

Technician: EDWARD VAUGHAN.

Production Manager: E. H. POETT.

Ice Revue and Ice Ballets Produced and Directed by PHIL TAYLOR.

Musical Arrangements and Orchestra Directed by PERCY PEARCE.

Scenery by BERNARD GORDON.

Costumes by H. & M. RAYNE, LTD., and BOBBY & CO., LTD.

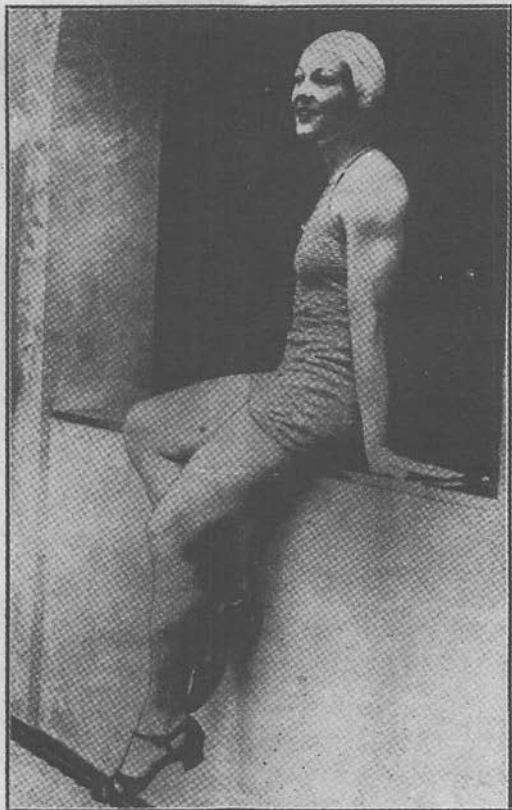
Cruising Scenes on board the "Arandora Star," by courtesy of the BLUE STAR LINE.

## CAST.

MAJOR ROBERT LINKLATER, D.S.O., M.C.	of the British Secret Service.....	PHIL TAYLOR
RITA THE SPY.....	of the Foreign Secret Service Organization.....	EVELYN CHANDLER
NANOOK and POLA.....	Eskimos.....	RUDOLF ANGOLA and ELSIE DERKSEN
RICHARD ANGEL.....	An Artist on Holiday.....	LARS GRAFSTROM
DOLLY and MAISIE.....	Musical Comedy Stars on Holiday.....	ELSIE HEATHCOTE and RONA THAELL
CHARMARTRIE.....	of the Opera—on Holiday.....	PHILIP ROLYAT
MARIA.....	Nigger Nurse.....	MAX EDWARDS
KENNETH.....	Passengers on Board the Liner "Arandora Star"	JACK SANTALL
CLAUDE.....		WILLIAM STYLES
JOHN.....		JOHN MORLEY
ROSEMARY.....		OLIVE GOATER
CAROL.....	Passengers on Board the Liner "Arandora Star"	JOYCE GOATER
DAWN.....		MARGARET HODY
LUCIENNE.....		LILY MORLEY
PAULINE.....		JOAN HARLEY
SALLY.....		JOAN GRAVELL
PRUE.....		EDWINA BLADES
MYRTLE.....		IRIS SHELMEKDINE
HON. HUGH CALLENDER.....	Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs.....	W. WARNER
SYBIL HETHRINGTON.....	A Government Typist secretly in pay of the Foreign Secret Service Agents.	PAT McLOUGHLIN
NIKLAUS.....	Chief of the Slavic Police.....	M. WHITE
BOROVITCH.....	Secret Service Intermediary.....	L. MARSHALL
OLAF.....	Slavic Police.....	J. MORRIS
IVAN.....	do. ....	N. GARNER

The Management reserve the right to make alterations without notice, where necessary.

"RITA THE SPY"



**EVELYN CHANDLER**, *The Leading Lady*,

*looking lovely in Beach Wear supplied by* **BOBBY'S**

*The Swim Suits and Cruise Clothes worn by the Cast in the Film were supplied by*  
**BOBBY & CO., LTD., THE SQUARE.**





Robin Cousins revisits the Westover Ice Rink at Bournemouth with manager John Neal. 13.8.1980,  
who was responsible for the production of Rita the Spy in 1935.

Bournemouth Markets came to Leo and said, 'We are losing money badly and would close down but we have over a hundred shareholders, mostly elderly ladies or retired people who depend on us for a living, and we are desperate. We'd like you to join our board and help us.'

Leo said, 'I am a very busy man. My interests have shifted from making money to winning people for Christ. I simply do not have the time.' The Chairman went away very worried. But next morning Leo had the thought, 'You must do this. In itself it is unimportant, but God can use it to effect major changes in the nation.' So he asked me to ring up and find out the minimum shareholding necessary to be a director. When he found it was only £200 I wrote out a cheque for him, he signed it and I went round to Bournemouth Markets, delivered the cheque and told the Managing Director that Leo felt it was right to become a temporary director to see if he could help in any way.

A phone call came that afternoon. Could Leo attend a meeting at 11 a.m. next day? He put off another appointment and I drove him round to the meeting and sat outside waiting for him. On the way back to Linden Hall he told me what he had heard. He had no clear guidance on his next moves but had agreed to attend another meeting the next day.

When he arrived in the morning Leo asked me to type out a letter of resignation from the board of the Markets. I asked him why. He said, 'I want to put this letter of resignation on the table at the start of the meeting as I am clear that God wants me to make a suggestion that they are most unlikely to accept, and I can retire gracefully.' I asked him what it was but he felt it was something he should keep to himself.

At the meeting Leo told the directors, 'It seems to me that there are many leakages of profits through fiddle in this company. For instance, 'he said, turning to the Managing Director, 'I expect that you take your own greengroceries home each weekend as a form of "perks", and you also fill your car with petrol at the firm's expense. It's a normal form of perks in many companies. But looking at this company's figures and walking around and talking to one or two people I find that it is accepted as normal that all of the employees do the same. This is one of the major leaks but, far worse, it sets an atmosphere that gives the staff the excuse to carry out all sorts of fiddles which are infinitely more damag-

ing to the profit margin. The only way to stop this rot is for you to resign and get a tougher man and someone who has never been involved to take over.'

Then he left the room.

We waited outside while a fierce argument went on indoors. Then the Managing Director himself came out and said, 'The position is so desperate I have offered to resign. Will you come back into the meeting?'

Leo went back. The Chairman said, 'It is all very well for our Managing Director to resign but, if he does, who will run the business?' Leo said, 'I have thought about that and I have got the very man, if he will come. He is at present managing a milk round in South London and his name is David Bowerman.' There was immediately a howl of protest, saying, 'The fruit business is a highly skilled and risky one and it cannot be left to a man with no experience. It will go broke.' Leo told them, 'You have enough experts in the firm. What is needed is a capable man who can co-ordinate them and who first and foremost is absolutely honest. I know this man Bowerman well. He is committed to a life of absolute honesty. He is young, bright and hardworking. Of course, if you don't want him, that's your look-out and I might as well resign again.'

He left the room once more and we waited together outside. We heard more heated discussion, then the Managing Director came out and said it was agreed to employ Mr. Bowerman and see what he could do, but as General Manager, not Managing Director. Leo said, 'That's fine, as long as you resign as well,' to which he agreed, indicating he was grateful for Leo's clear thinking.

It so happened that David Bowerman had had guidance to write to Leo for a job at about the same time.

Leo wrote to David to come and see him. When David arrived they talked deeply about what made their lives tick. Leo told him that he was the man for the post at Bournemouth Markets, despite his lack of experience, knowledge of the fruit trade and the district, on the basis that he was going to be insisting on absolute honesty and that he would seek the guidance of God each day. As David said, 'That is what I call real trust.' David Bowerman took over as General Manager and another director was promoted Managing Director.

When this Managing Director walked out in a huff, Leo backed David to take over the whole business, wholesale as well as retail, even though one of his directors said, 'He will never be any bloody good. He says he can be honest in the fruit trade.' Leo stood by him against all the others and it turned out to be a success.

One has to remember that Leo had only 200 shares in the company and no experience of the trade.

David Bowerman quickly won the loyalty of the staff by inviting all of them to meet him and telling them why the firm was liable to go bankrupt. He asked them to tell him all the fiddles, admitting that they were not paid a living wage. He upped their commission, incorporated into the firm's general running some of the ideas the salesman had been working on the side. Of course a few incurable rogues had to go but some 90% of the employees stayed happily for many years.

David Bowerman also put his finger on another loss-making side of the business.

Beside the wholesale business they also ran twelve large retail shops which, although making a profit themselves, made most of the other greengrocers assume wrongly that they got special prices and were unfair competition, so whenever they could they bought from other wholesalers.

In most cases Bournemouth Markets made the purchases easy for the managers of the shops, and this brought an atmosphere into the firm that made the staff feel the company cared for them as people. It was perhaps the earliest of the sales to management with which we are so familiar today.

Later David Bowerman was selected by the government to do a survey of the whole industry and had a profound effect on the distribution of fruit and vegetables throughout the U.K.

★ ★ ★

While all these changes were going on some of the local businessmen in Bournemouth had clubbed together to raise money to build a modern and excellent YMCA Club on a very expensive site on the Westover Road. The building side was in good hands but when they came to the fitting out and the catering they needed help. As so often tended to happen, they came to Leo for help and he used the expertise of his hotels' business to do this without any charge at all.

At about this time, in the 1930s when unemployment was still high, Leo got involved in the biggest building project in Bournemouth.

I say 'got involved' because it was not of his choosing.

A millionaire who had made his money miles away from Bournemouth had conceived the idea of developing a site, also in the Westover Road, into one of the most modern hotels in the world. His theory was that, with so little building and other enterprise going on, if he invested in a building that was so good that one of the big chains would snap it up in time, it would be cheaper to build then and would serve two purposes — give employment and, in the long run, make money.

He found a local architect with imagination and flair, and a builder needing work for his labour force, brought them together, bought the site on Westover Road and began building what was to become the Palace Court Hotel.

As the building proceeded the plans were circulated round most of the big chain firms and they sent experts to see the site. It soon became obvious that none of them would ever become interested enough to buy the place. Certain elementary mistakes had been made in the design, such as the new single rooms being too small and having insufficient rooms for such an expensive building on such an expensive site.

It was clear to anyone who knew the hotel business that they had to purchase extra site space, which at that time was not available. It is interesting that some years later they were able to purchase the front section of a multi-deck car park next door and make the hotel viable.

At the time they were worried that their money was going down the drain. The architect had become a director of the company and was not being paid, nor was the builder. Although the financier was picking up all the costs, no one was getting anything out of it.

The architect, A. J. Seal, came to Leo and asked him to join them on the board as he was by far the largest hotelier in the district. He would not be paid, nor would he have to invest any money, but they needed his expertise to advise them how to continue in order to save all they had invested.

Leo immediately involved his brother-in-law, Clifford Balls, to oversee the catering and fitting out side of the building, and Clifford appointed me as his clerk on the premises.

I was eighteen and very brash, but I had learned to listen to God and was endeavouring to live a life of absolute honesty.

Leo made certain conditions for his becoming a director. They were that he would have absolute freedom to do what he felt was in the best interest of the industry and the nation.

From the word go he said he was going to institute a new code of employment for the staff — basically a living wage, not dependent on tips, and improvements to staff accommodation.

Of course his co-directors were scared stiff, but his reputation as a man of genius in making business pay forced them to support him.

I shall never forget the many conferences held during the building, fitting out and furnishing of Palace Court. Apart from the telephone operator, I was the only member of the hotel's staff on the books.

The directors all used to come on a Sunday morning. Being fully engaged in their other professional jobs, they could not come together on weekdays. They would walk round this huge building, each time finding more things to criticise, and leave shaking their heads. Leo would walk round silently behind them, see them safely away, then turn to Clifford Balls and say, 'You seem to doing all right. Carry on.' Then Clifford and I would spend an hour or so planning what

were the most important things to be covered during the next week and he would go and I would see no one officially until the next Sunday.

Privately I saw a lot of Uncle Leo, but I don't remember him ever asking any question about what I did all the week. He let me know that he expected me to do what God told me to do and he trusted that this would be for the best. The courage of the man! His reputation with these leading businessmen left in the hands of an inexperienced young man of eighteen, whose only qualification was his experience of God's guidance.

The fact that the hotel opened on time and was ultimately a success, made a profit and sold well, and that the directors all remained friends until the ends of their respective lives tells its own story.

Leo sold his house at Sandbanks and moved into the penthouse flat at Palace Court to be available if needed, which he often was.

To work the new idea of having no tips in a five star hotel proved impossible because the guests would not co-operate. They picked up the notices on the dining tables which read 'The Staff, being adequately paid, request the guests not to leave gratuities,' and put tips under them.

But at the same time we had a small team of people at the top who had met the Oxford Group — the Swiss manager, M. Fleury, his secretary, Nellie Poole, and the publicity man, Cecil Edwards. Without the teamwork of these skilled people of completely opposing temperaments, but who had learned that they were working for some bigger objective than just their salary, which caught on with the rest of the staff, it would never have got off the ground at all.

Leo and I learned a lot of lessons which were vital later on. The most important being that you cannot cure an institution like tipping by just banning it. It was necessary to change the attitude of staff and visitors. In itself tipping was just like a spot on the face, a mere symptom of greater ills that could be cured. But we were to do something about this after the war.

The next year or two I was to see little of Leo except at Oxford Group meetings. He had many businessmen friends, and some trade union friends, with whom he worked, learning new ways of changing the commercial attitude of the





country, while Hannen and I were in with about twenty other young people and our crowd was growing.

I spent six months working in a kitchen in Germany and in various hotels in Switzerland learning my trade. I also got married, had a child, ran the Victoria Hotel at Swanage and worked for Fruit and Flowers. In all these Leo had a helping hand but always at a distance. I gained very much from his reputation and the fact that we had learned to love and trust one another.

Then the war broke out. It was at this time that the press had renamed the Oxford Group 'Moral Re-Armament' because of the campaign for moral and spiritual re-armament which they had launched to strengthen the morale of the nation at that dangerous time.

When war began Leo and Queen felt it was necessary to move out of Palace Court so they bought a beautiful house called Red Tower, right in the middle of Bournemouth in a quiet backwater, and they also bought a small farm north of Bournemouth for their daughter Valerie to run a riding school. It was there that Leo introduced one of the earliest motordromes in the country, a place where people could learn to drive and to practise driving without having to go on the roads. There were no driving schools at that time.

I had been to nautical college and served part of an apprenticeship but had had to give up through an accident. Within weeks of the outbreak of war I was away on a ship as 4th Officer and did not see Leo again for several years.

Later when we worked together again after the war Leo told me of some of the 'miracles' which occurred during that time — and they were miracles, some of them to be copied all over the country.

The first was in turning the Westover Garage into a shell factory. His experience in World War I was invaluable, but perhaps his most significant contribution was his friendship with the trade union leaders who came to love and trust him. Many of them remained close personal friends for the rest of their lives.

Soon after war broke out Bournemouth was closed to visitors. With two piers, some 15 miles of beach and two tides every 24 hours, it was an obvious place for the landing of troops if the Germans decided to invade.

The piers were mined, the beaches plastered with anti-landing devices and tank obstacles and land mines. It had become totally unsuitable as a holiday resort, so the government made it necessary to hold a permit to enter Bournemouth.

This meant that many hotels were in great financial difficulties, as were the grocers, butchers and greengrocers from whom they bought their supplies, and of course the wholesalers who supplied them. In fact most of the trades people were in debt with no obvious way of paying off the debt.

But so many of them owed money to someone who owed money down the line that it became obvious to Leo Exton that, if all these debts could be collated, many of them would cancel out.

When he put this forward to his business friends and some councillors they all agreed it was a good idea, but who could they trust to make sure this was done honestly and efficiently?

In the end they asked Leo to take it on, which he did, and in a short time the whole situation had been virtually cleared up. Although it took longer for everyone to finally balance. It was during this time that the hoteliers voted for Leo to come on the executive of their association without him even being a member. But he obliged and was a calming and sane influence throughout the war years. I know because, when the war ended and I returned to Bournemouth he handed his seat on the executive over to me, and his many friends told me of his calm and inspired leadership without ever holding office.

## CHAPTER III

### After the War

I had been with the Pacific Fleet from Australia to Tokyo Bay, finishing up watching the signing of the peace on board the USS Mississippi.

We took the ship back to Sydney and I felt it was time I got home to see my wife and daughter whom I had not seen for over a year.

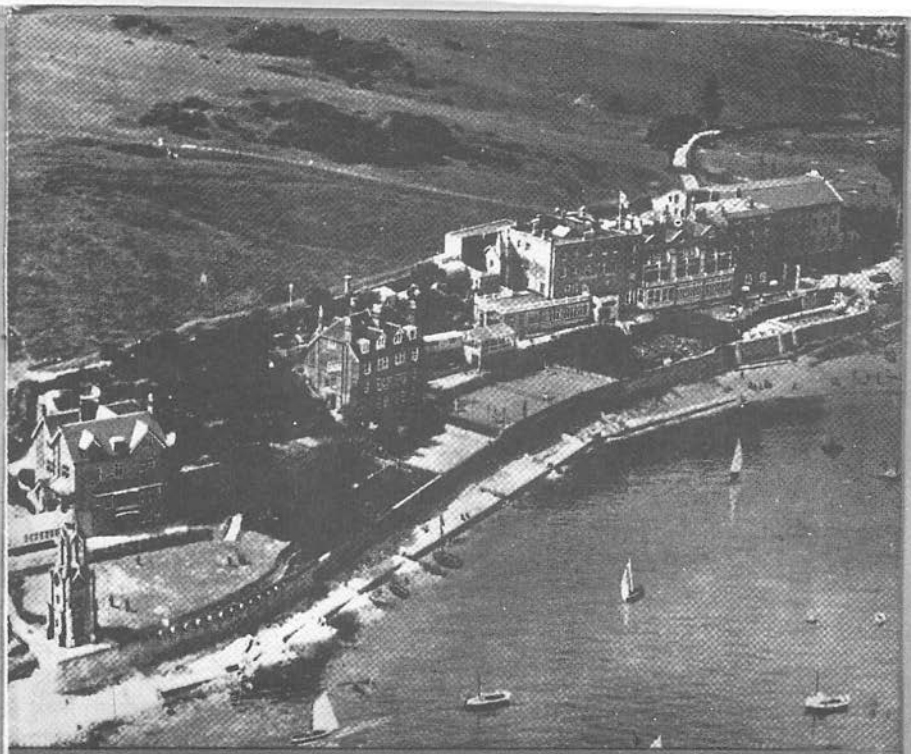
When I arrived in Sydney I found there were no passages available, so I settled down to work ashore with some of the many friends I had made during our visits.

Very shortly I had a letter containing a suggestion that had come to Leo in his quiet time one morning.

Of the five Exton hotels only one, the Grosvenor at Swanage, had remained open during the war. The others had all been taken over as barracks, offices or a training centres.

The War Office had informed the Exton Hotels company that they would be handing back the hotels to them, all in a dilapidated condition. The directors regarded this with horror.

The Grosvenor was being run by Leo's brother-in-law, Clifford Balls. Each of his sisters as well as his brother were in their late 50s or early 60s, and there were no members of the next generation who had any experience of running hotels except myself. So at a meeting of the directors it was decided that they would sell the Burlington, Linden Hall Hydro and probably the Sandbanks, keeping the Victoria, near the Grosvenor, where Clifford Balls could oversee the rehabilitation during the quiet winter months. Even then it was an enormous task for a man of his age and with his other duties.



AERIAL VIEW OF HOTEL GROSVENOR AND ANNEXES

Photo by Aero Pictorial Ltd.

# *Hotel Grosvenor*

"ON THE WATER'S EDGE"

## *Swanage*

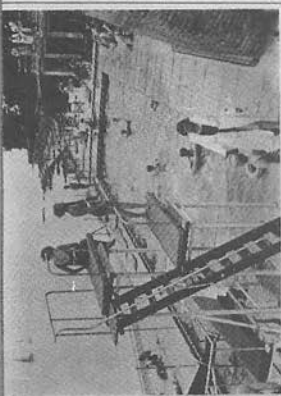
Telephone Swanage 2292/93

Telegrams "Grosvenor Swanage"

FULLY LICENSED

THE EXTON HOTELS CO. LTD.

A.A. and R.A.C.



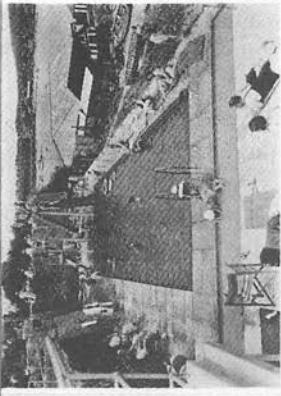
You can bathe in the purified Sea Water Swimming Pool in our own gardens or in the open sea from our private beach in front of the Hotel - Swimming Instructor in attendance.

Swanage and Studland Golf Course with Panoramic views overlooking Poole Harbour is two miles distant from the Hotel.



"THE GROVE" Circa 1850

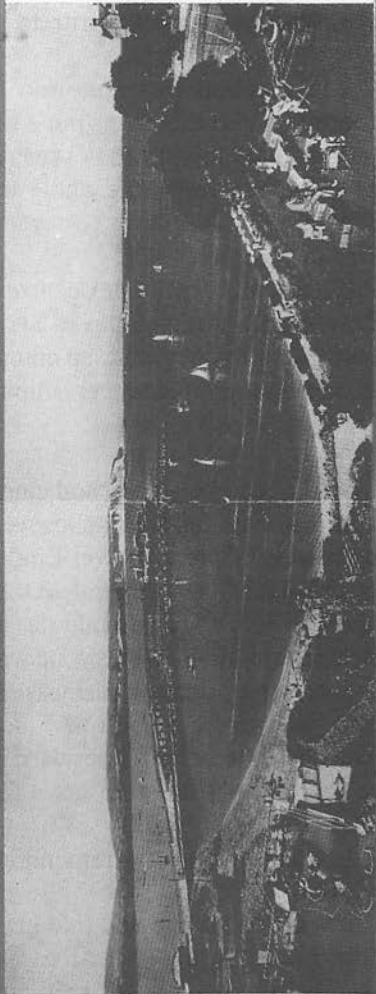
The original residence forming the entrance and central block of the Grosvenor of today.



The extensive lawns and gardens, with their unsurpassed vistas of sea and cliffs, prove an ideal retreat, and afford a haven of peaceful serenity within the Hotel grounds.

Bournemouth only 10 miles from Swanage via that delightful village of Studland and the floating Bridge at Sandbanks.

VIEW FROM ALL BEDROOM WINDOWS FACING SEA



INCLUSIVE  
TERMS  
upon  
Application

SPACIOUS  
GARAGE  
for 60  
Cars

One morning Leo had the thought that God wanted him with my brother Pat and me to buy Linden Hall, form a new company and see what new things God had in mind for the hotel industry if we tried running it as a team who sought guidance together.

So he asked Pat to write to me and see what I thought of the idea.

My reaction was none too favourable. Firstly, I had been told by the authorities that there was not a hope of getting a passage home for at least six months. Secondly, I had not seen my wife, Nancy, for a year, and had only seen her five times during the whole six years of war. I did not feel married and nor did she.

Then a minor miracle occurred. I got an urgent phone call from the manager of the P & O group offices in Sydney, who had been our agent, saying that if I could get to Sydney from up country by the next day he could get me a passage on one of their passenger ships taking returning prisoners of war back to Britain.

I dropped everything and caught the ship. On the passage home I had time to think about, and seek an answer to, my personal problems. I felt in my heart that it was right to take over Linden Hall, although it meant raising £85,000 to buy the place — the equivalent today of more than ten times that amount — the huge sum needed to rehabilitate (which turned out to be a further £45,000) and getting the staff when everyone was grabbing whom they could from the returning forces to open their businesses, very few of them with any hotel experience. There was also the point that, apart from two months while I was waiting in Australia, when I had supervised the opening of an hotel for a conference, I had not seen the inside of an hotel for six years.

It was obviously a tremendous gamble, but somehow it seemed right.

I wrote to Nancy and told her the suggestion. She had made a new life for herself, running American Red Cross canteens, feeding enormous numbers of GIs. I finished my letter by saying, 'I don't feel married. I don't even know if I still love you. I have not got over the excitement, fear and complete absorption of being part of winning the Pacific war. But one thing I do know; we fought this war to preserve the standards and ideas that made our country great, and that

included sound homes, happy families and caring for children. We have a child and it seems to me she has a right for us to try and make a go of our marriage for her sake.' I suggested that Nancy should go away and have a few days on her own and ask for guidance what was the right thing to do.

She spent a weekend at Ilfracombe and on the Sunday she went to a local Baptist church where a woman preached on JOY, saying it meant Jesus first, others second and yourself last.

This she felt was a clear indication that we should make the effort. I tell you this because if it had not been for Leo we would not be together today. I had been offered a top job in Australia; there was a young lady of great beauty and talent waiting to be asked to marry, which looked much more attractive than going back to a war-wracked Britain to a wife when I did not know if she loved me or wanted me, or even if it was possible.

But these last 40 years have been richly rewarding.

Before Nancy could come and join me I stayed with my brother Pat at the Exton's home. Mother came down and she felt she had the responsibility of raising some of the money. We felt that no one should have more than £1,000 worth of shares so that no one could force anything through. I had only £500. Pat had £750. Leo put up a thousand each for himself, Aunt Queen, Leone and Valerie. Nancy's father put £250 each for her and her sister. The rest of the money was raised by my mother calling on people and persuading them to buy shares.

Leo fought his sisters and got them to put up a £50,000 mortgage. They insisted on some pretty stiff conditions, but at least we were under way.

Leo was insistent that we should go on, even after walking round the hotel and seeing the devastation.

The surveyor who went with us said that would cost at least £45,000 before we could open and the building allowance office said that we could only spend £2,000 because of the restrictions controlling the supplies of materials desperately needed all over the country. I then nearly gave up. Leo stood firm. He said 'We will do as much as we can with that money and then apply again.'

There was not a lock in the place — they had all been stolen. It was impossible to buy locks but out of the blue the ex-handyman, Bob Woodrow, aged nearly eighty, appeared and offered to make them for us. He sat down in the cellars and one by one produced locks which lasted for many years.

I took on staff as they knocked on the door, whatever their background. One or two of our pre-war staff came and offered their services and were snapped up. Some of the workers from Leo's shell factory became some of our greatest stalwarts. They loved him so much that they worked hours into the night with no overtime pay to get the place cleaned up, re-plastered etc. Some arrived in uniform, not yet demobbed. It was a shambles.

The big moment for me came when we had some accommodation ready for Nancy to come and join me. Sue could not come. It was in the middle of term at her school in Bristol.

I could give you a list of a thousand things which appeared impossible, but which were overcome seemingly miraculously. For instance, all the furniture from our first floor — the best and most expensive in the hotel — had been subject to a compulsory purchase order by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries when they took over the hotel and they had taken it with them when they moved further from the coast.

New furniture was impossible to buy. Bill Robinson, who was husband of the chief shop steward in Leo's shell factory, came and repaired, modified and made presentable the furniture which had been in the staff rooms before the war. It passed muster, but only just. We had to take what carpets and furniture the furnishing shop had, without any reference to matching or planning, just to be open. Leo's vision and faith was unshakeable. He knew it was what God wanted.

As the work progressed we gathered together staff and planned the opening which was to be for the Labour Party Conference. We knew we had a second rate hotel and staff, but somehow felt that God would pull us through.

On the day the delegates were due to arrive we came down to have breakfast in the dining room to find the head waiter in tears. He had set up the tables ready for the evening meal next day, with all our new tablecloths, and both the



dining room and entrance lounge newly carpeted. In the morning he found that rats, with which the hotel had become infested during the war, had eaten away the carpet under the middle of the dining room swing doors and climbed on to every table to get at the butters which had been put out ready with plates over them. Every table cloth had rat footmarks or droppings and all had to be washed and ironed and put back for that evening. There were 180 delegates coming to say.

But the conference from our point of view was a great success and through it we got to know personally as friends some of the top Labour leaders. I sat for 2 sessions on the platform at the conference between two cabinet ministers, and was included in the planning of some of their new moves. They had just come into government for the first time since the war and, like me in my job, were feeling around to see what was needed for the country.

While we were working ourselves into the ground to get the place going (for instance Nancy, helped by Leo's daughter Leone, cleaned 110 basins, plus baths and lavatories, on the night before we opened), people began to come and ask for work because they felt there was a different atmosphere.

We converted some of the staff dormitories into separate rooms for staff, built several flats and bought an extra building which we converted into four flats for our staff. Housing was so hard to come by immediately after the war that this new housing turned out to be a great attraction in the difficult problem of getting staff. Something we had not even thought of.

Leo and I had both had the thought that we were not going to employ our staff 70 to 90 hours a week and sleep them in dormitories, which had been the norm before the war and had been re-introduced into most of the hotels in the area. But we had no idea how to alter this. We thought and prayed a lot about it.

Eventually we felt it right to send for the head waiter and to say to him that we wanted him to work out a scheme to work his waiters only 48 hours a week. He of course responded that it was totally impossible. They had to be around to get their tips. Breakfast started with commercial travellers as early as 7 a.m. Some dinners did not finish until well after 9 p.m. We did not attempt to cater for non-residents at that time. I remember feeling a complete fraud when I said

to the head waiter, 'It is the company policy that we should have a 48 hour week and if you are unable to institute it I may have to let you go and get a new head waiter who can achieve this.'

He came to see me a few days later and said, 'I have tried and tried to find some way to do this, but just don't know how. But I want to help introduce it as it seems to be right and necessary. Please help me.'

By then he had learned from other sources that Leo and I, and by then two or three other staff, had times of seeking guidance from God.

In the next few days we did find a way and several of the waiters' wives came to see us and said it had transformed their lives. The scheme turned on the waiters learning to be honest and trusting one another to pool their tips, and to look after guests on other waiters' stations if they happened to come into the dining room during their off period.

It worked so well that the guests began coming and saying they had never had such an atmosphere in any dining room before, nor seen so much co-operation between the waiting staff.

Very soon the kitchen and bedroom staffs came demanding the same hours, but saying it was impossible without employing a lot more staff. Within three months the whole hotel was working that way.

But not before Leo and I had had guidance to have two boards — one elected by the shareholders and the other elected by the staff, each board to consider the same agenda worked out by the Managing Director, Chairman and Secretary. Afterwards the minutes of each board would be pooled and agreement found.

As a result, the staff and directors of both boards got to know one another well, had social evenings together and visited one another's families. It was only this different atmosphere which made that tattered, old, badly furnished hotel become popular.

Some other hotels were asking us to tell them how it worked and we spent a number of evenings pooling our experiences. But none of them followed suit.

It was then that Arthur Lewis, the chief organiser of the hotel workers' side of the General and Municipal Workers' Union, came to call. Only a few weeks before he had called out on strike the workers at the Savoy Hotel, London, and had kept them out for several weeks by lying on the road where the tankers came with the heating oil. There had been sympathy strikes all over London.

Lewis arrived at our front door asking to see me. He asked to see every member of the staff. I said, 'Individually or all together?' He replied, 'I'd like to do both.' So I took him round with me and he interviewed each of the staff for five to ten minutes. Then after lunch the whole staff, some sixty of them, came into the dining room and sat down and he addressed them. He opened his remarks by saying, 'I was astonished when I interviewed you all to find that you have better hours, wages and conditions here than we had ever dreamed of, far beyond anything we ever thought of asking for. But it is because you are so well placed that I feel you should be members of the union to help your fellow workers get similar conditions.' He said a lot more. The staff asked what I felt and I said, 'It has for a long time seemed to me to be incongruous for each of us to have a vote to decide who would control our country and yet not have a vote to say who would control our standard of living and our security,' and that I did not know of any other instrument that could make this possible except a union and even not then unless the members took a responsible attitude to the union and made sure the union did consult them and carry out their democratically arranged wishes.

The staff doubted whether that were possible but some joined, although most took the attitude that they trusted us but not the union.

It is interesting that very shortly after this visit Arthur Lewis was elected MP for Newham East, which he held for thirty years or more. Even more important, the Minister of Labour at that time was Ernest Bevin and it was to Lewis, among others, that Bevin turned when he introduced the bill making our experiment the law. However it missed out the essential about dealing with the personal trust first of all.

It was this fact that convinced Leo that what we had achieved at Linden Hall, both in this sphere and in others, was not effective. In fact it made staffs in other hotels who still had the 90 hour week dissatisfied and the running of these

hotels harder. Trust and trustworthiness had to be fought for nationally and Leo saw the acquisition by Moral Re-armament of the Westminster Theatre in London as a way to bring this to the nation. So he and Queen moved to London.

Someone had had the idea of buying the Westminster Theatre to put on plays which showed the values and the ideals for which so many people had died in the war.

The story of its acquisition and of Leo's key part in this is a tale of many miracles.

He and David Bowerman and their wives were part of a group of twenty couples in business who had guidance to raise the money to buy the theatre.

Leo and his good friend Farrar Vickers, Chairman of Vickers Oils, agreed the price and promised the cash in less than one week. Leo rang David and said, 'How much money have you got?' David said he might be able to scrape together about £2,000. Leo then said, 'Are you prepared to pledge that to the Bank as part of the deposit?' David said, 'Yes'. Then Leo said, 'Will you pop down to the National Provincial Bank and see George, the Manager; say that I have just signed a cheque for £10,000 although there is nothing in that account and that you, David and I would stand for it.'

David saw George and told him the story and he said, 'If Leo says so, it's OK with me.' The cheque went through. Before the theatre was finally paid for, his trust in Leo was even more tested. But it helped George spiritually very much. As David Bowerman said, 'Leo had the ability to get people to trust him and he exuded trust in them.'

The sum required just to purchase the theatre was over £132,500, equivalent to £1.50 million today. The cash in the coffers was less than £5,000. Someone had to write a cheque to pay for it in faith. Leo's guidance was to do this on a private account in which he already had a £3,000 overdraft. I know.

I wrote the cheque and he signed it. He smiled as he did it and said to me, 'Please remember to ring George, the Manager of the bank, promptly

At that time, when hotels had been unable to keep the standards high because of staff and food shortages, many hoteliers found the Charter a great help in setting the style and quality needed to bring the industry quickly back to its pre-war reputation.

Leo received letters from all over the country thanking him for this initiative.

It was remarkable that he was able to influence the whole industry without ever holding any office higher than temporary committee member of a local association.



I remember a few interviews in which I was included. We lunched with Mr. Wilcox, the head of a pump making firm, formerly a partner of Aunt Queen's father. He listened, asked questions, pulled out a cheque book and gave a cheque for £1,000 saying, 'I want to help. I must think what way I need to change myself, but here is some money to help in what seems to me the thing this country needs most of all at the moment.'

The boss of BOAC, Sir Miles Thomas, came to dinner. He told us, 'I will be the most unpopular man in Britain tomorrow. Today I signed 7,500 redundancy notices and they will be received in tomorrow's post.' He told us how he had sent round to every department a note asking them to recommend people for redundancy — those who could retire early because of age, or youth who could find other jobs or because of incompetence with which the nationalised industries were overwhelmed. The lists had all carried names of labourers and junior clerks and no executives or highly paid people. If he had followed their guidelines he would have had to sack 10,000 to cover necessary economy. So he asked for a list of all the staff from all the companies and subsidiaries and crossed out names 'ad lib' until he had reduced the running costs sufficiently.

Sir Miles sweated over this for weeks and had asked to come and spend time with Leo as a man who could help and counsel him. At the time BOAC was costing the tax payer hundreds of millions a year.

I remember also Fred Bowring, Managing Director of a motor firm with branches all over the south of the UK from Wales to Kent. He rang up and asked if he could come to see us. He poured out his troubles — personal, matrimonial and commercial – and we found together the answer for them all. He is still a close and valued friend, though long retired.

All over the country Leo was called in to help businessmen and managers personally. It carried no kudos or honours, but it is possible he was one of the most effective people in the prosperity of our country at that time.

In nearly every town in the south of England I see a branch of a travel firm whose founder I remember coming to Leo in desperate straits and who would have gone bankrupt if Leo had not given him good advice and £1,000.

Later we, Leo and I, were partially responsible for changing the licensing laws because of following through guidance.

It affected the whole country but the clash came in Bournemouth.

Bournemouth had over 500 hotels, but only 15 were legally allowed to sell alcoholic drinks to their guests. In fact most of the other hotels did supply drinks, or rather bottles of drink, if requested but it meant that they had to break the law. The police knew all about it but did nothing because any action they took could only be harmful to Bournemouth's main industry, hotel visitors.

At this time Leo had become friendly with the Director of the British Hotels and Restaurants Association, Eric Croft. The Association had decided to have a conference in Bournemouth and to introduce for the first time an 'open forum', whereby members could bring forward resolutions they considered would help the industry without consulting the executive beforehand.

Croft came down on a preliminary organisational visit to Bournemouth, and Leo had suggested he came to see me, which he did. He asked if I had any controversial topic I could raise at the forum. I said there was one really con-

troversial issue, the question of hotels with over ten bedrooms being allowed to sell drinks to their residents; but as we already had a licence to sell drinks I did not think I should raise it.

On the first morning of the conference Mr Croft came to see me and said, 'Have you fixed someone to second your motion in the open forum?' I had forgotten all about it and said, 'I was only making a suggestion, not volunteering to propose it.'

He replied, 'I would be very grateful if you would. It is the most important issue of the conference.'

I thought for a moment and then said, 'I think perhaps you are right. I'll do it. I can easily get a friend to second it.' So the next day when the open forum started I was called upon to present my motion. I stood up and said, 'I propose that all hotels with room for ten or more residents should be granted licences to serve alcoholic drinks', and sat down. My friend and colleague and a close ally of Leo's, Bert Sutliff, got up and said, 'I second', and sat down.

The chairman asked, 'Is that all you are going to say in favour of your motion?' to which we both said, 'Yes'.

After a long pause the chairman said, 'Is there anyone who opposes?' Immediately one of the executives of the association, Leonard Gluckstein, barrister and director of the vast Lyons group, got up and said, 'Yes, I am opposing.' He then spoke for about thirty minutes, giving a well-researched, balanced reasoned opposition to the idea, but never mentioning the real reason which was the monopoly hotels not wanting any competition.

He was followed by one of Leo's oldest friends, a hotelier of national reputation, Harry Brown of Savoy Hotels, Bournemouth, who said, 'It seems to me that, if it takes thirty minutes to try and shoot down a proposal which took only a few seconds to make, someone like myself who runs a licensed hotel should stand up and be honest — not something we do very often in our trade association.

'If we are honest we all know that this motion is right and long overdue and that it is something we as an association should have raised with the government many years ago.

‘We didn’t because we thought it might hurt our businesses.

‘But we should also ask ourselves why we almost never get overseas visitors coming to Bournemouth, not even to the licensed hotels. It is because we have a reputation for being ‘stuffed shirts’ and restrictive and all our hotels suffer. People do not come to Bournemouth to stay in our hotel. In the first place they come because they have heard it is a place where they can get a very good holiday. Then, if they sit down in a dining room and order a bottle of wine and are told they can’t have it because of local licensing laws, they leave and never come back to Bournemouth.’

He continued to speak forcefully, almost rudely, for about ten minutes. When he sat down there was loud applause from about a quarter of the delegates. From the others there was complete silence.

When the vote was taken the motion was thrown out by three to one.

The immediate outcome was that all the hoteliers who were not permitted licences broke away from the main hotels association and formed an unlicensed association, and there was open war between them.

It was then that Leo and I and others sought guidance how to heal the rift. The answer came that all those who had licences who felt the law should be changed should join the unlicensed hotels association as well. About four of us did this to begin with, but gradually other members began voting with their feet by doing the same. Of course, all retained our membership of the main association as well.

In about two years the two were reunited and the law was changed to the benefit of Bournemouth and many other seaside resorts; not only because they were able to give a better service, but more because the minor ‘bootlegging’ which had been necessary to keep their guests was ended and a new honesty and relaxation was brought to the industry.

To spread these ideas I also had the thought to start a new Bournemouth hoteliers’ monthly magazine which went to all the hotels without charge, financed by the advertising. I edited it for the first three years, and it was a forerunner of the weekly papers given away free nowadays.



One day I drove Leo to the Ice Cream Factory, where he was and always had been the Chairman. He had a panic call from the Company Secretary saying they had convened an emergency board meeting to consider what to do. It had been a cold wet summer, sales had been bad and the factory was losing money, and the first rush for holidays abroad occurred that year.

I parked the car in the yard and the Managing Director hurried out to greet Leo, saying, 'I am so grateful you have come. The whole factory is on edge. All the directors are in the board room waiting for you.'

Leo looked at him quietly and said, 'I am sorry, they will have to wait a little longer. There is something I must do first.'

When we got out of the car he said to me, 'Come with me.' I thought he had to go to the lavatory or something but, instead of heading that way, he walked into the engine room where the giant compressors were, walked over to the little glass office and said to the chief engineer, 'Good morning, Dick. How is everything going?' Dick Cuff looked up gloomily and said, 'There is nothing that isn't running perfectly in this engine room, but we are all worried what is going to happen to the factory and to our jobs.' Leo smiled a little sadly and said, 'You look after the engine room; I'll look after the company. Don't you worry.' By this time all the engine room staff had collected round him and, although they still had some doubts, you could feel the easing of tension.

Leo did the same in the mixing room, in the freezing room, in the packaging and in the biggest of all, the distribution and transport.

The Managing Director, who had followed unhappily round with us, seemed even more upset, so when they went into the board room he turned to Leo and said, 'Now we can get down to some decisions.'

The agenda had been made up. The first item was the minutes of the last meeting and the second was to consider what to do to save the company after the poor summer sales.

Leo dealt with No. 1 and then said, 'We will leave No. 2 to last. Let us deal with other items first.' These were purely routine things which always occur on board room agendas. After dealing with them he turned to the board and said,

‘Before we deal with Item 1, I have some questions to ask you all. Tell me, last year was a record year, wasn’t it?’ They replied. ‘Yes’. Leo went on, ‘And the year before and the year before that?’ They all nodded. So Leo said, ‘We can’t expect to break records every year. Let’s get back to making and selling ice cream and make next year a new record.’

This is exactly what happened.

On another occasion we drove into the factory yard. When I stopped the car I began to open the door, but Leo said, ‘Sit still a minute. There is something odd about the sound of the machinery. Let’s listen a moment.’ When we got out he led me over towards the main engine room and as we entered the chief engineer, Dick Cuff, came out looking harassed and dirty.

‘What’s wrong with No. 2 compressor?’ Leo asked. Dick replied, ‘I don’t know. I have been working all night on it and can’t find the trouble. Who told you about it?’ Leo smiled and said, ‘No one. I can hear it. Have you tried....(he named some part I cannot remember)?’ Dick said, ‘No, damn it. I never thought of that.’ When we left the yard all the compressors were working. No wonder the engineers respected Leo so much.

At this time Leo was living in London. It meant that most weeks he had to go by train to Bournemouth to attend board meetings at some of the many companies of which he was Chairman. He would catch an early train, arrive in Bournemouth at about 10 a.m., be in a board meeting at Bournemouth Markets by 10.30, arrive at Linden Hall at 12.30, have an hour’s meeting there, lunch, then proceed to Westover Garage for a board meeting at 2.30 and catch the 4.30 back to London. Or it would be to Drake’s Wholesalers, or the Ice Cream Factory, or Schonfield’s food distributors, or Boon’s Patients, or several hotel and garage concerns of which he was a director and, of many, Chairman.

Leo had the ability of being able to take in the essential business details for a number of companies in totally unrelated trades at the same time and guide their thinking.

On one occasion he arrived at Linden Hall to find the main lift had stuck some twenty feet above floor level, and a minor panic going on. The lift repair men were being telephoned for, the Manager talking to the passengers to calm

them, guests waiting to go up in the lift.

Leo walked over, saw what was happening, said nothing but went into the lift control room and picked up a broom that was leaning against the wall. Using the top end he pushed it against the control switch which had stuck, gently brought the lift down, and walked away without saying anything and got on with the work he had come to do.

Also at Linden Hall he arrived one morning to find the book-keeper, assisted by the Manager, trying to find an error in the day book, a huge ledger which had to be entered and balanced every day.

The book-keeper and a receptionist had been going over and over the figures for half the night.

Leo walked in and said cheerily, 'Good morning to you all.' He looked over their shoulders at the book and said, 'Isn't that the trouble?' And, of course, it was. It was an uncanny and sometimes aggravating knack that he had.

Leo had no office or secretary in any of the companies of which he was Chairman. For two reasons. He used to say, 'Secretaries' chief value are to make sure that the bosses don't have to meet the people they don't want to see.' 'Besides', he said once, 'by using a different typist each time I visit a company I get to know many things that would never reach me if I had a permanent secretary.'

He had a way of winning the confidence of the staff members he met and drawing out from them what they thought of the way the business was going.

Many had returned to work for him after war service; some had transferred from one of his war time factories because they liked and trusted him, and he always made sure he had a word with each of them whenever he was in that business, and they had a chance to say their bit.

His philosophy for business seemed to be that there are three sides to a business — finance, the customer and the staff — and the one you needed to take most trouble with was the staff.

Leo's leadership began to stretch world wide.

His knowledge of the hotel industry played a significant part in the crucial Nigerian Constitutional Conference in 1953.

He took a deep interest in the African nations moving towards independence. When the leaders of Nigeria arrived in London for this vital conference with the British Government they found that the arrangements made for their accommodation were hopelessly inadequate and there was serious talk of their abandoning the conference and returning to Nigeria without holding the talks.

Some of his friends in Moral Re-Armament had come with them to London and they contacted Leo and appealed for help. Within a few hours he had them all welcomed in first class accommodation and the conference was a success.

One Nigerian leader said, 'Leo Exton and MRA brought humanity into the situation', and he became a friend to both for the rest of his life.

Leo believed that money, especially in the hands of business and industrial men and enterprises, must be mobilised to save our freedom. Behind his courtesy and forbearance, he was deeply impatient with the limited vision of men who would give £5 or £50 into the battle for the future of the world when they could easily have put in £5,000 or £50,000. He found from experience that people's lives changed deeply and permanently, and they became much happier and fulfilled, when they invested in remaking the lives of people and, in the long run, of the world.

Over the years some admired him, some criticised, some simply stood aside and watched with wonder, and many stepped forward and worked with him. Leo went ahead regardlessly, always with hope, always feeling the pain of those who would not accept the challenge, though many longed to do so, and he was always ready to learn where he needed to change to be more effective in the lives of others.

His influence on the lives of other businessmen is well illustrated by the change that occurred in 1938 in Richard Harman, Founder of the publisher, Blandford Press.

Harman had gone to Bournemouth on behalf of one of Blandford's monthly magazines, 'Hotel and Catering Management'.

He was interested and concerned about the poor state of the hotel industry as a whole and visited major hotel centres to investigate in depth.

While in Bournemouth he visited a barber for a hair cut. In the next chair there happened to be a hotel worker from Leo's Linden Hall. When Harman heard him say this, he turned to him and said, 'I understand things are difficult for hotels at the moment, and staff conditions are bad.'

'Not where I am working,' retorted the man. 'We have a great spirit in our hotel.'

Harman was fascinated and pressed for the name of the hotel and the proprietor. He then came back to the hotel with the worker, asked to see Leo and said, 'Do tell me the secret of your good teamwork and contented staff.' Leo declined to tell him but invited him to go with him to a weekend conference with the people from whom he had learned the secret.

At this conference, an Oxford Group house party in Eastbourne, Harman found new faith and vision for himself and for his firm. In the next years Blandford Press was to publish many books of character building content and quality which were read in all parts of the world and in more than 30 languages.

In the meantime Leo had been elected to the executive committee of the Institute of Directors and he and his friend Gordon Hassell fed new ideas and new standards into that august body.

Leo was asked to visit South Africa, the USA and Australia, where he met leaders of industry and commerce and government and was able to tell them of what he had learned.

For the rest of his life he became an adviser and consultant to eminent men of commerce and his friendship and help was greatly sought after.

By this time I had handed over the management of Linden Hall to Leo's son Clive, and had moved to London to work with Leo and with George Jackson

who, recently widowed, shared our home in Eaton Square.

I remember once Leo was asked to show a film of some of the changes that had occurred, in the board room of the amalgamated Electric Company, with the former Cabinet Minister, Lord Chandos, by the then Chairman of AEC, introducing it.

I also remember an hour spent in the private office of Garfield Weston, the international grocery and biscuit tycoon, where he and Leo discussed the needs of the world and what they could do as individuals and leaders of industry. About a year later Leo died. Garfield Weston saw the report in the papers and rang up the MRA offices, saying, 'I have never forgotten what Mr. Exton told me when he came to visit me, and have meant to do something with him so that I could play my part. I read in the paper this morning of his death and I want you to tell me what I can do to take over where he left off.' His contribution from then on was enormous.

As I type this I receive story after story of the people who came to Leo for help, some financial, but mostly for their lives, and of whole situations that were healed and set on a different track just because he did what he believed God told him to do.

During his lifetime Leo made a lot of money, and created wealth for other people.

In his early years he spent it on himself, his family and various extravaganzas. But after he changed he used his money in a completely different way.

He considered himself to be the steward of money given him by God. He never spent any money on his wife or family without seeking guidance from God and checking his thoughts with people he trusted.

Most of his business friends could never understand why he lived so frugally, although our home in London was in Eaton Square, probably one of the 'poshest' in the country, but that unbelievably only cost £4,600 when it was bought, and only £140 a year rates. It had a repairing lease.

We lived there for over ten years and sold it for £3,000, the purchaser pick-

ing up the £90,000 repair bill, which meant that Leo and Queen, their two daughters, my mother, and Nancy and I and, in holiday times, our daughter lived there with seldom less than five guests, and for some time as many as sixteen, and garaged three cars, all these years for £1,600.

Leo was able to use his income to help send people to countries all over the world where they were needed in the work of Moral Re-Armament. At one time the number of cars that he owned and lent to people in Britain who could play a part in changing the thinking of the nation ran into double figures.

He once said to me, 'I had the best fun in my life creating wealth for myself and others. I am leaving Clive very little money so that I do not rob him of the joy of "doing his own thing".'

It was about that time that he was approached to give a very large sum of money to publish a document on the ideological and spiritual crisis which was facing the world at that time — not so much in Britain, but in India, Ceylon, Burma and many other countries with huge populations that he cared about.

He had a time of quiet and guidance with his wife and daughters and they all felt he should give generously. He sold the vast majority of his sharholdings and gave a very large sum of money to cover the costs. The circulation of this document was finally 87 million.



Flying boat outside Hotel Grosvenor, Swanage

He once said, 'It is interesting but it seems the more I give away each year the more I receive.'

I know that one year he gave away several times more than his annual income but from many sources it all came in without him having to touch capital.

There are many businesses and families who are prosperous today because of the help he gave them, privately and quietly, without asking for or expecting anything back. I was involved many years ago when a firm which is now large and well known came to him asking for help. He gave them what was a large sum of money then, which I know was never repaid. He did not ask for it nor want it.

His last 25 years seemed to have a pattern and it continued to the very end. He had arranged to come to Bournemouth on 11th September 1960 to have a reception in the evening for all his relatives and closest friends, to be followed the next day by a meeting in the Electric Cinema of most of the commercial, civic and spiritual leaders of the town.

The evening was a happy, relaxed and warm time. He and Queen gave themselves completely. We all went to bed happily.

In the early hours of the morning my wife and I were awakened and told that Leo had died in his sleep.

We were not at all sure what to do about the meeting called for the following evening but those who knew Leo thought he would want it to go on. So it was turned into an evening of remembrance and thanks — bright, full of joy and gratitude to God for all that He had used Leo to achieve for others.

A man who, with all his connections, being a director of 35 companies and Chairman of 18 of them, with all his worldwide friendships and acquaintances, could easily have been a millionaire, gave himself and his money and time to others.

As for me, he was the closest I ever had for a father. I loved him dearly and owe him so much. He lives on in the lives of those who became different because they met him.