

MUSEUM news



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Lord Montagu of Beaulieu

Edward John Barrington Douglas-Scott-Montagu,
3rd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu, 20 October 1926 – 31 August 2015



Edward, 3rd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu, was the devoted custodian of his family's 7,000-acre Beaulieu Estate in Hampshire. He was also a champion of the historic vehicle movement and founder of the National Motor Museum. He played a major role in the preservation of England's historic houses and the development of the UK tourism industry.

Edward Montagu inherited the Beaulieu Estate on the death of his father, John Montagu, a motoring pioneer, when he was just two years old. The family seat, Palace House, was built around the original gatehouse of Beaulieu Abbey, a Cistercian monastery founded on land granted to the Order by King John in 1204. The

Estate was sold to Lord Montagu's ancestor, Thomas Wriothesley, 1st Earl of Southampton, by Henry VIII in 1538.

Montagu's birth in 1926 came as a great relief to his father, who at the age of 61 was desperate for a male heir to his title and the estate. After finally fathering the son he had longed for, it was a sad irony that John Montagu died in 1929 leaving Beaulieu to be managed by his widow and trustees until Edward reached the age of 25.

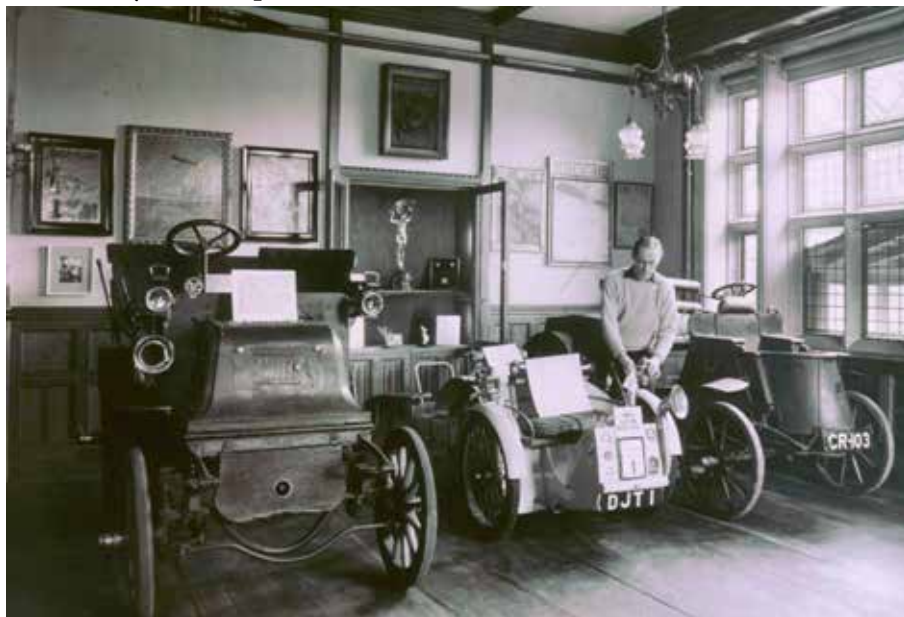
By the age of two, Edward Montagu was thus already a peer of the realm, and gradually came to realise he was also heir to an estate. In 1937, at the age of ten, he attended the coronation of King George VI. The youngest peer in attendance, he wore a

James Bishop writes: In 1974 Lord Montagu entered his National Motor Museum for the Museum of the Year Awards. It caused some debate among the judges: one, a retired director of a London art museum, was concerned that motor cars were not an appropriate subject for a museum. Reluctantly, he was persuaded to visit Beaulieu and was greatly excited by what he saw. The museum won the award, sponsored at that time by National Heritage and *The Illustrated London News*, and Montagu became an avid supporter of the charity.

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special costume for minor peers and carried a black velvet bag containing sandwiches to sustain him through the day.

In 1936 he went to boarding school, attending St Peter's Court, Broadstairs, a feeder school for Eton College where his name was already down. However, just as he was about to go to Eton, war intervened and he and two of his sisters were evacuated to Canada, where they would spend the next



two and a half years. He returned to England when he was nearly sixteen and belatedly took up his place at Eton.

In 1945, having completed his schooling, he joined the Grenadier Guards and was posted to Palestine as part of a peacekeeping force. When he left the army at the age of 21, he went to New College Oxford where he read modern history. During this time, he also took his seat in the House of Lords, where his maiden speech was about his experience in Palestine.

A keen party-goer, Montagu enjoyed mixing with the artistic and bohemian set as well as being part of conventional society. "I suppose I should have realised that sooner or later... I would end up in trouble" he would later write.

In his second year at university an altercation between the Bullingdon Club and the Oxford University Dramatic Society led to his room being wrecked, and he felt obliged to leave.

Edward Montagu was now determined to carve out a career for himself. "Some eldest sons were sufficiently affluent to retreat to the family estates and lead a life entirely devoted to their

management and enjoyment", he said. "This was not an option for me, nor did I want it."

Instead, he secured a position with the advertising and public relations agency Voice and Vision, where his first job was to launch the now classic comic *Eagle*. He publicised the first issue by hiring a fleet of Daimlers mounted with huge model eagles to tour the country distributing vouchers for the first issue. Over a million were printed and all were sold.

When Edward Montagu took over the running of the Beaulieu Estate on his 25th birthday in 1951, he found that he could expect only £1,500 a year from his inheritance, a figure that would barely cover running costs. "In 1951, to any sensible, rational being, the house was a white

elephant", he would later say. "The wise solution was to get rid of it. For me, however – neither entirely sensible nor rational – that was unthinkable."

Various solutions were considered, but eventually he decided to open the house to the paying public (the abbey ruins and grounds had already been open for many years). In his own words, Edward Montagu's early attempts to attract visitors to the house were "charmingly amateurish".

Palace House was not as grand as other stately homes, such as Longleat, which had opened its doors a couple of years earlier. What was needed, therefore, was an extra ingredient. Montagu later recounted: "What catapulted me permanently into the major league for the future was the idea of commemorating my father's life... by exhibiting veteran cars. Without it, my life would have been very different and I doubt whether I would have been able to remain as owner and occupier of my ancestral home."

The idea would prove to be a winner. In 1952, there were no other motor museums in the country and it also gave Montagu the opportunity to pay tribute to the father he had never known, who as an MP had been an eager campaigner for the needs of early motorists, and publisher of the first motoring journal *Car Illustrated*. The only drawback to this plan was that, at the time, he only had one veteran car, a 1903 6hp De Dion Bouton which had previously been used by the estate electrician. A call-out to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders produced the additional exhibits he needed to start a small motor museum in the front hall of Palace House.

On opening day, Edward Montagu told his private house

guests that if they received more than a hundred visitors by 6pm they would have champagne with dinner. The doors opened at 11am and by 12.30pm the hundredth visitor passed through: they had champagne with lunch.

Soon after the opening of the house, Edward Montagu embarked on a lecture tour of America to publicise both his stately home and Britain's other historic houses. It proved a great success. However, on his return he would face a difficult time.

The infamous Montagu trials of 1953 and 1954 resulted in the peer being charged with homosexual acts, which were then illegal. He pleaded not guilty but was convicted and given a twelve-month sentence. On his release, he immediately went about rebuilding his life and developing



the estate. While not wanting to hide his bisexuality, he was also determined to keep his private life private and refused to comment on the events of the trial, a silence broken only in 2002 with the publication of his autobiography *Wheels within Wheels*.

The backlash against the heavy-handed prosecution of Edward Montagu and his fellow defendants contributed to the establishment of the Wolfenden Committee, which in 1957 recommended the

decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults in private. A decade later, this recommendation was implemented. Speaking on the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the Wolfenden Report, Edward Montagu said, "I am proud ... that the so-called Montagu Case had more effect on changing the laws than any other factor... I think because of the way we behaved and conducted our lives afterwards, because we didn't sell our stories, just returned quietly to our lives ... that had a big effect on public opinion."

By 1956 the vehicle collection, which now included several motorcycles, had outgrown the house and Montagu established a separate home for them in some large sheds in the grounds. The Montagu Motor Museum was born. In the same year, he also launched *Veteran and Vintage* magazine, which he published until its sale to IPC in 1979 (it later became *Collectors' Cars* and eventually *Classic Cars*). Over the years he also became a successful author, *The Gilt and the Gingerbread*, *The Motoring Montagus* and *Jaguar: A Biography* being the best known of the 21 books he wrote on motoring and heritage topics.

By 1959 the vehicle collection had grown even further, and a new building was therefore constructed. It was officially opened by Lord Brabazon of Tara in the presence of many luminaries from the world of motorsport, including Stirling Moss, Tony Brooks and Graham Walker.

Another of Montagu's passions at this time was jazz, and in 1956 he held the first of six Beaulieu Jazz Festivals on the lawns of Palace House. These were later recognised as pioneering



events in the burgeoning music festival movement that followed, and top performers such as John Dankworth, Cleo Laine, Humphrey Lyttleton and George Melly drew large audiences to Beaulieu. However, after what became known as the 'Battle of Beaulieu' at the 1960 festival, involving rival gangs of modern and traditional jazz fans, followed by further trouble in 1961 when 20,000 visitors crowded in for the weekend, Lord Montagu reluctantly called a halt to the events as they were having a detrimental effect on the village and the patience of its residents.

Undaunted, Edward Montagu put his energy into other ventures. Ever the entrepreneur, he noticed that the owners of old cars were having difficulty obtaining authentic tyres, so in 1962 he co-founded Vintage Tyre Supplies which remains the world's largest supplier of original equipment tyres for veteran, vintage and classic cars.

In 1963, Montagu created a

Photos: page 2: Lord Montagu with the collection in the Palace in the 1950s.

Above left: with his first wife, Belinda, whom he married in 1958. **Above right:** Lord Montagu and his second wife, Fiona, on their wedding day in 1974. Photos on page 3 by Allan Warren, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Douglas-Scott-Montagu,_3rd_Baron_Montagu_of_Beaulieu



Maritime Museum at Buckler's Hard, establishing the village as the second visitor attraction on his estate. Opened by the then Admiral of the Fleet, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, it tells the story of 18th century shipbuilding on the Beaulieu River.

In 1967, the now world-famous Beaulieu Autojumble was held for the first time. The inspiration came from the automobile swap meets Montagu saw in the United States and he was proud that the name he devised, Autojumble, was later given a place in the Oxford English Dictionary.

By the mid-1960s, Beaulieu was attracting over half a million visitors a year. Edward Montagu realised that a long-term plan was needed to fully harness the potential of its leisure and tourism business but in a way that didn't diminish the scenic and conservation value of the estate. He commissioned a leading planner of the day, Elizabeth Chesterton, to draw up a strategy for the redevelopment of the visitor site, a by-pass to divert traffic away from the

village, the construction of a marina at Buckler's Hard and a limited number of residential developments elsewhere on the estate. The overall plan was seen as far-sighted and was the first such large-scale private plan to be accepted as the basis for county planning policy.

The plans for the new Motor Museum and its visitor buildings were then drawn up by the architect Leonard Manasseh. They centred on the design of a new 40,000 square-foot museum with space for at least 200 vehicles. To achieve this, Montagu founded the Beaulieu Museum Trust.

As chairman of the charity, his enthusiasm and drive won the support of the motor industry and other sponsors, and within a couple of years the necessary funds to start construction work had been raised.

This ambitious project, which Montagu's advisors had warned against, came to fruition on 4th July 1972 when The Duke of Kent came to Beaulieu to open what was to become Britain's National Motor Museum. The newly designed visitor complex separated the new motor museum buildings from the historic abbey ruins and Palace House. It also



relocated the car parks, diverting the bulk of visitor traffic away from Beaulieu village. The new buildings, which included a purpose-built admissions centre, cafeteria, motoring research library and offices, won several awards. The most significant of these, the prestigious National Heritage Museum of the Year, was awarded in 1974. In the same year, a monorail was installed, passing through the museum at high level.

It didn't stop there. In 1989, the National Motor Museum Collections Centre opened to provide an administrative centre for the Trust and to house the ever-expanding motoring libraries and archives. The reference library is one of the largest of its kind and together with the photograph and film libraries is used by commercial and private researchers from all over the world.

While he was most closely associated with the motor museum, Edward Montagu's underlying focus remained the management and improvement of the Beaulieu Estate. In 1978 he worked with the Nature Conservancy Council to establish a nature reserve on the southern part of the estate adjoining the Solent foreshore. He also founded a charity called the Countryside Education Trust. This now operates two centres on the estate, including a residential centre on a small farm, and welcomes over 5,000 children and adults each year.

From the time he first opened Beaulieu to the public, Lord Montagu worked to establish an association for the owners of stately homes. Some of the old guard opposed this, especially when a membership fee was suggested, but in 1973 the Historic Houses Association was finally

formed with Lord Montagu as its President. Today, the organisation represents 1,600 houses and has 42,000 friends. He was also closely involved in establishing the Association of Independent Museums, of which he was Patron.

In 1983, in recognition of his innovative approach and commercial success, the government invited him to chair its new Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, which he soon renamed English Heritage. Those who feared the insensitive commercialisation of ancient sites were proved wrong, although Montagu did make them more visitor-friendly, with improved interpretation and facilities. When the government decided to abolish the GLC, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was said to have endorsed the transfer of its historic buildings to English Heritage because "Edward Montagu will know what to do with them."

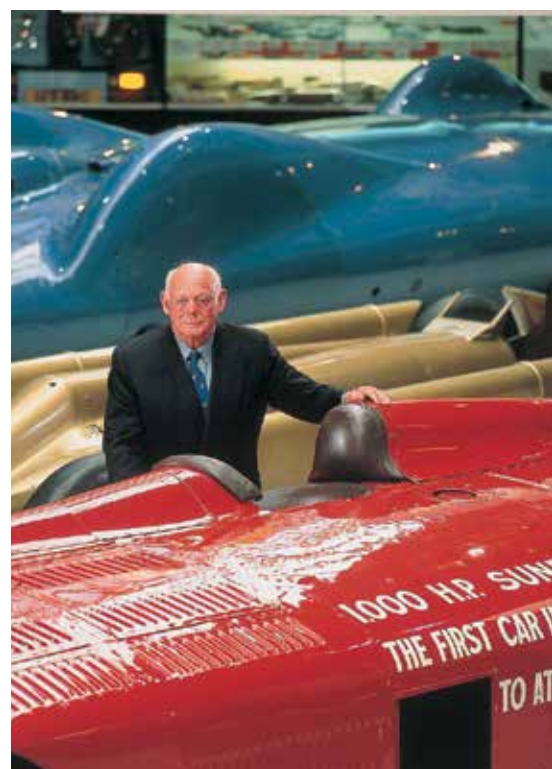
Montagu regularly attended the House of Lords and when the 1999 reforms were implemented he was one of the Conservative hereditary peers elected to remain. Over the course of six decades, he spoke on motoring, tourism, museums, historic buildings, conservation and the New Forest.

Lord Montagu was an active in many clubs, associations and organisations and held the Presidencies of the Tourism Society (1991-2000), the Southern Tourist Board (1977-2004), the Museums Association (1982-1984), the Institute of Journalists (2000) and was Trustee of National Heritage. He was Chancellor of the Wine Guild of the UK from 1983 and President of the UK Vineyards Association from 1996. He was also instrumental in setting up

an advisory group that became the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs, of which he was President. In 2012 Lord Montagu received the accolade of a lifetime achievement award for his dedication to preserving automotive history over many decades.

Lord Montagu played as hard as he worked. He was a keen shot, loved foreign travel, went wind-surfing off his own foreshore and regularly competed in historic motorsport events. He also had a passion for the theatre, opera, gourmet restaurants and parties, for which he never lost enthusiasm despite mobility difficulties in later life.

Edward Montagu was first married in 1959, to Belinda Crossley. They had a son, Ralph, in 1961 and a daughter, Mary, in 1964. The marriage was dissolved in 1974, after which he married Fiona Herbert in 1974 with whom he had a second son, Jonathan, in 1975. His elder son, Ralph, succeeds to the barony.



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