

MEMORIUM TO MARY ANNA MARTEN (nee Sturt)

The Trust would like to record the death of Mary Anna Marten (nee Sturt) OBE who passed away on 18 January 2010 at Crichel Manor, Wimborne Dorset (the Sturt Family home) The following article combines information from The Telegraph 19 April 2010 and The Times March 8, 2010.

Mary Anna Sturt was born in London on September 12, 1929, the daughter of the 3rd and last Lord Alington of Crichel and Lady Mary Sibell Ashley-Cooper. Her mother died in 1936 and in 1940 aged 11 she inherited the Crichel estate when her father died on active service with the RAF. She was largely brought up by her grandmother, the Countess of Shaftesbury. Her godmother was the Duchess of York (later Queen Elizabeth) and, as a child she was often in contact with members of the Royal Family.

She joined the Brownies' pack at Buckingham Palace with Princess Margaret, and went to Miss Faunce's Parents' National Union School at Lancaster Gate which moved after the outbreak of war to Wimborne St Giles, the home of her grandparents, the Earl and Countess of Shaftesbury. She then went to Cheltenham Ladies College.

Mary Anna met her husband on her first day at Somerville College, Oxford, where she read History – a cousin invited her to a lunch hosted by Lieutenant Commander George Gosselin Marten, an equerry to George VI. Coming down from Oxford after a year, during which she had been a member of every political party, she married Marten in 1949 at Holy Trinity, Brompton, in the presence of the King and the Queen (her godmother), Princess Margaret, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Duchess of Kent, Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone and Major General, the Earl of Athlone.

She and her husband, known as Toby, soon became involved in the Crichel Down Affair. This concerned 725 acres of farmland, some of it on the Crichel Estate that was compulsorily acquired under pressure by the Air Ministry for a practice bombing range in 1938. Four years later Winston Churchill as prime minister, promised that it would be offered back to the owners. Inevitably the postwar Labour administration had scant sympathy for the rights of the landowner, but it came as a shock when the Churchill government's return to power in 1951 produced no change in official policy.

Mary Anna was aided by her husband who resolutely knocked on official doors to no avail. She then brought the issue into the open by writing a letter to The Times. This mentioned "veiled nationalisation of land" and announced that a protest committee had been formed and that an inquiry was being demanded "as it appears that the rights of farmers and landowners and extravagance with public money may be involved"



While Mary Anna Marten was busy with what was to be their family of five girls and a son, her husband uncovered a trail of disingenuousness, dishonesty and bureaucratic incompetence until the revelations of the inquiry prompted rumblings on the Tory backbenches in the Commons, eventually leading to the resignation of the agriculture minister, Sir Thomas Dugdale, and the return of the property. Mary Anna Marten celebrated with a shopping trip to London.

Mary Anna maintained an ambivalent relationship with the Conservative Party, which she considered neglectful of rural interests. She was a patron of many local charities, and a member of the appeal committee for the spire of Salisbury Cathedral.

During this time the couple and their children lived in a farmhouse on the estate before moving into Crichel House in 1962 to embark on an ambitious programme of restoration. They pulled down an Edwardian wing, repaired the roof and improved the water supply. The house had been refurbished by James Wyatt in the 18th century and the Martens were able to reveal an elegant upstairs salon which had been divided into three rooms.

Toby devoted himself to looking after the 18th century house with its 400 acres of parkland and ornamental lake and the neighbouring farms, while his wife concentrated on a fine collection of art and antiques. She had a good eye for jewellery and was pleased to identify a lost turquoise "Coburg Eagle" brooch, one of 12 designed by Prince Albert and given by Queen Victoria to her train-bearers after her wedding. It is now in the British Museum.

As Mary Anna's children grew up she became a trustee of the British Museum, taking a particular interest in the Romano-British department and its staff, and chairing the buildings and development committee for the Great Court, which was completed for the Millennium.

Throughout her life Marten was an enthusiastic traveller. She visited Iran frequently and developed an interest in Persian culture and archaeology. She also visited Russia more than 30 times. In St. Petersburg she formed close friendships with staff of the State Hermitage, including the head of the Oriental Department, Dr. Vladimir Lukonin. When Lukonin died in 1984 Marten was the prime mover in setting up a fund in his memory - The Vladimir G. Lukonin Memorial Fund which was launched in 1988.

Mary Anna was appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Dorset and OBE in 1980 and High Sheriff of Dorset in 1989. Her daughter Victoria McDonough attended her mother's funeral as High Sheriff in the dress and hat which her mother had worn when she had held the office. Mary Anna Marten's funeral was held at St. Giles Church Wimborne, St. Giles on Friday January 29, 2010.

A further sad epitaph to the passing of Mary Anna Marten was the initial sale of many of her valuable Persian and Iranian artefacts and more recently Crichel Manor itself. The original Journal of Sturt's River Murray Expedition was sold to the British Government and now resides with the British Museum. Several years ago the Journals were offered for sale in Australia but the purchase price was rejected by state and federal authorities alike. A sad reflection on how Australia regards its history.



Crichel sits in a park of 400 acres and features a crescent-shaped lake. In 1742 the original Tudor house of the Napier family was largely destroyed by fire. Crichel was rebuilt for Sir William Napier between 1744 and 1746 and extensively remodelled in the 1770s by Humphrey Sturt, who inherited the Estate in 1765. Sturt engaged James Wyatt to redesign the interiors; Wyatt

employed Biagio Rebecca for painted décor, John Linnell and Ince and Mayhew for furniture, and John Devall for the chimneypieces. Edward VII visited Crichel in 1905.