

## THE BARONET AND THE BOSS by Ian Welland

In my early working years, I was a General Rates Officer with Wycombe District Council. Part of my area of responsibility was for the collection of unpaid rates in West Wycombe Village, so this included possibly the richest Baronet in Britain at that time, Sir Francis Dashwood.

I had known the Dashwoods from a younger age when I was caught scrumping in the grounds of West Wycombe Park as a twelve-year-old. I only did the deed once. But my capture ensured an unlikely acquaintance with his Lordship and son, Edward.

The shooting rights at West Wycombe and Bradenham were rateable and so every Spring, the Estate faced receiving a summons for non-payment. I would travel to West Wycombe Park and call in to collect the cheques that avoided any need for his Lordship to be summoned to court! Each visit would include a pleasant chat with his Lordship, as well as a splendid afternoon tea courtesy of Cookie in the kitchen.

A few years later, my Council career took a different course and I ended up helping the Public Relations department with press releases and events. A special event to commemorate the re-opening of the Oak Room in High Wycombe was arranged whereby the guest of honour was his Lordship.

Sir Francis arrived on time and entering a room of crowded dignities, caught my attention. He called out, 'Ian my boy!' His Lordship shuffled straight over. 'How are dear boy; not seen much of you,' he said patting me on the shoulder.

'It's wonderful to see you, Sir Francis'

'Why don't you pop over one afternoon. We'd love to see you again.'

At that precise moment and sensing a good opportunity, my boss stretched out his hand and said 'Pleased to meet you Sir Francis, I'm Ian's Manager...'

His Lordship's face turned to thunder and he stared straight into my boss's eyes. 'And who might you be? Have we met? I don't think so, Sir. Impertinent, I say Impertinent!'

My boss, who shall remain nameless, went a bright red and a bumbling apology came hurtling out of his mouth. To ease his pain, I took control of the situation.

'Your Lordship, perhaps I can introduce you to Mr Cummins our Chief Executive who awaits across the room. This way, Sir.'

I led his Lordship over to Mr Cummins who in total contrast to my boss and with impeccable manners bowed and waited for his Lordship to extend a hand greeting.

Returning to my station, my furious boss turned to me and said angrily, 'how the bloody hell do you know his Lordship?'

'Oh that; well I was caught scrumping one day in the trees over the wall in Chapel Lane and got marched to his Lordship's office for a dressing down. I stayed for dinner. We've been friends ever since. Oh, and Cook's afternoon tea was and is amazing. We have often laughed about the scrumping, his Lordship and I. Believe me, he will chuckle about meeting you, no doubt!