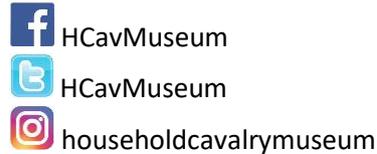




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Podcast 14 ~ HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY ANECDOTES

Maundy Gregory

According to the Italian poet, Dante Alighieri, hell is divided into nine descending Circles, each of which is subdivided into specific sins. In which, if any, of these pits of eternal pain would a modern-day Dante find the soul of Trooper & Private John Arthur Maundy Gregory, the son of a High Church Anglican Vicar and a ‘genteel lady of reduced circumstances’ who claimed to have the blood of eight English kings in her veins?

If there was a good fairy in attendance at Gregory’s christening in 1877, her influence was to be short lived. After a conventional middle class secondary education in Southampton, Gregory progressed to Oxford University where he did little of the academic work required for a pre-ordained career in the Church. Instead, he developed a taste for the theatre, in pursuit of which altogether more appealing calling he abandoned Oxford before graduating.

Gregory’s ten-year engagement with the world of greasepaint, wigs and make-believe involved him successively posing as a playwright, actor, director and, latterly, as a producer, in which incarnation he could well have been the model for Max Bialystock in Mel Brooke’s comedy, *The Producers*.

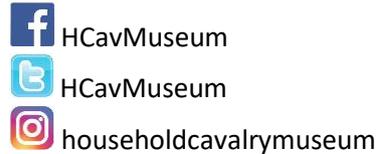
Although Gregory’s role as a theatrical impresario ended in 1908 with bankruptcy for his company and significant losses for his backers, Maundy had learnt one vitally important fact from the charity benefit performances with which he usually opened his season: the untitled and newly rich were willing to pay handsomely to rub shoulders with old money, titles and royalty.

After a period of two years, during which Gregory – that’s him in the top left corner - kept a low profile and apparently started working for the Special Intelligence Bureau (later MI5), he



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re-emerged in 1910 as the editor of *The Mayfair Society Journal*, a magazine that covered the social life of London's elite. Whilst editing and publishing *The Mayfair Society Journal*, Gregory set up a detective-cum-credit-rating agency which proved to be a useful side-line, for it enabled him to leverage for profit both his journalistic knowledge of London Society and his work for MI5.

Unfortunately for Gregory, one of the first casualties of the declaration of war in August 1914 was *The Mayfair Society Journal*, although his detective agency continued in business for MI5 until, on 10th July 1917, Gregory was called to the Colours.

His first posting was to the Household Battalion (Reserve) in Windsor, the training unit for the infantry Battalion formed by the Household Cavalry. This was followed, for reasons that have been lost in the mists of time, by service with the Irish Guards at Caterham. However, although he never admitted this after the war, in neither Regiment was Gregory commissioned nor did he experience any overseas service or fire a shot in anger.

By early 1919, Gregory was once again a civilian and in search of profit, although he was by no means destitute as evidenced by the fact that he had a house in St John's Wood which he shared platonically with a retired and divorced actress called Mrs Edith Rosse. Together, the two of them were to be seen spending lavishly in London's smartest restaurants and hotels.

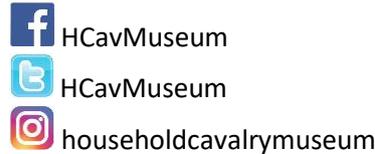
It was probably this high profile, combined with his journalistic contacts, which brought Maundy to the attention of Lord Murray of Elibank, on the left, a former Liberal Chief Whip who had been tasked by Prime Minister Lloyd George with restoring the Party's finances.

Lloyd George, that's him on the right, the 'Welsh Wizard' and successful wartime Prime Minister, who knew full well the power of patronage that lay in his hands. He also knew that this patronage could be linked to financial reward for his Party, so he established a fixed tariff for the acquisition of titles, with the only qualification being the ability to pay.



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Maundy Gregory, on the left, was uniquely well-suited and qualified for the task of selling honours. He embraced Murray's approach with enthusiasm and established an office near to the Palace of Westminster from where he operated a new publishing venture, the *Whitehall Gazette*. Gregory's substantial fees and commissions from the trade in titles enabled him to adopt an even more lavish lifestyle than before the war. In 1927 he acquired the Ambassadors Club in Mayfair, top right, and, in 1931, he added to his entertainment stable a country house hotel in Surrey which – as a result of the purposes to which Gregory put it – was described by a contemporary as 'the biggest brothel in south-east England'.

Annoyingly for all concerned, a socialist MP called Victor Grayson uncovered what was going on but, before he could publicise the scandal, he mysteriously disappeared. The last sighting of Grayson was entering Maundy Gregory's house in St John's Wood.

In the years that followed, Maundy Gregory's fortunes rose and rose – and then fell and fell. In 1932, desperate to avoid bankruptcy, he asked Mrs Rosse, who had recently rewritten her Will making him her sole heir, to bail him out of Carey Street. Mrs Rosse refused, fell ill and died.

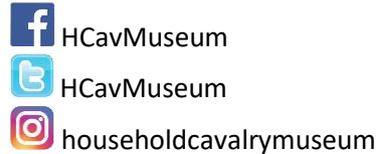
No sooner was she in her coffin and buried at Maundy Gregory's insistence in a riverside grave at Bisham, seen here, with the lid unscrewed, in a cemetery that flooded regularly, than he sold up her estate and paid off his debts. Substantial circumstantial evidence has since come to light that Mrs Rosse had been poisoned with arsenic, a poison which disappears when a body is immersed in water.

Despite the sale of Mrs Rosse's estate. Maundy Gregory was still in need of cash and he then tried to sell a knighthood to a retired naval officer, Lieutenant Commander Edward Billyard-Leake, who reported him to the police. Maundy Gregory was arrested, charged under the Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925, fined and jailed for two months. Significantly, Gregory never revealed in Bow Street Court the clients for whom he had acquired honours and, on his release and with no visible means of support, he moved to France. There the



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fraudster and double-murderer lived for the rest of his life on a remittance paid to him by...
the Conservative Party.

So much for probably the greatest rogue ever to have worn a Household Cavalry cap badge.
This and the other stories in this series are drawn from my book, *The Drum Horse in the Fountain*, which is available on Amazon. Next week I will be looking at rather more virtuous members of the Household Cavalry. Until then, thank you for watching.

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‘NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THIS...’

**A weekly series of podcasts about the Regiments of the Household Cavalry
written and recorded by
Regimental Historian, Christopher Joll, formerly of The Life Guards**

**These anecdotes are drawn from
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