

Title tattle

A stinging portrait of four nobles whose sorry lives ended in drink, drugs and squandered fortunes

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SPLENDOUR & SQUALOR
The Disgrace and Disintegration of
Three Aristocratic Dynasties
by MARCUS SCRIVEN
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Splendour and Squalor is a witty, gossipy and profoundly researched portrait of four particularly dysfunctional 20th-century aristocrats. We all have some idea of what a proper English aristocrat should look like: borne along by a supreme sense of entitlement, never saying thank you, fearless in the saddle or on the battlefield, inbred, emotionally disconnected and as mad as a hatter. And on the first page here, such a stereotype is confirmed by the example of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 10th Earl of Shaftesbury – with an added, gruesome demise.

Before his death, Shaftesbury's only presence on the public stage had been as president of the Hawk and Owl Trust. On one



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Bad boy: the 7th Marquess of Bristol in 1996

elsewhere, shrivels to the merely pathetic.

Victor's son John, 7th Marquess of Bristol, went further in ostentatious, and possibly quite boring, decadence. He held parties where "all the cocaine was on the left-hand side of the mantelpiece, and all the heroin on the right". He himself took drugs through a little silver straw. At Ickworth there were weekend house parties complete with food fights. He died in January 1999, full of a cocktail of legal drugs and cocaine, the coroner saying, "I suspect that Lord Bristol is as deserving of sympathy as he is of censure." He left no heir, and the title passed to his half-brother, Frederick. Ickworth is today a luxury hotel and National Trust property.

Possibly the best thing in this book is its wonderfully stinging epilogue, just as you're ready to conclude, "Well, good riddance to bad rubbish, we're all honest meritocrats now." In place of the Montagus and the Herveys, we now have the likes of Lords Truscott and Taylor, who offered to amend government legislation for cash, and Lord Watson of Invergowrie (born Mike Watson), who set fire to the curtains of an Edinburgh hotel in 2004, when refused a drink at 2.15am. As Scriven acidly concludes, in comparison with the old order, the behaviour of today's life peers "convincingly suggests that the new elite has developed the self-regard and advanced sense of entitlement without the intervening centuries of uneven service and sporadic self-sacrifice". The old hereditary aristos may have been a rum lot. But are their replacements any better?

occasion, leaving a party, he crushed two dogs to death under his car. When it was pointed out, he said, "Oh...oh, yes I have", and drove off without further apology. He was murdered in 2004 by his Tunisian-Moroccan brother-in-law in collusion with his third wife, bequeathing "a pitiful legend and 9,000 acres of Dorset". The current 12th Earl is a techno DJ and performs regularly in Ibiza.

Marcus Scriven's four case studies include the especially sad example of Edward Fitzgerald, 7th Duke of Leinster, who forfeited an inheritance of £400m through gambling and appalling financial mismanagement, and killed himself with whisky and pills in 1976. One friend recalls him simply as "a very nice, very very hopeless man". Then there's Angus Montagu, 12th Duke of Manchester, who weighed 20 stone, was for a while a prison inmate in America and died in 2002 "soon after being crane-lifted out of his two-bedroom flat in Bedford". He also comes under the heading "nice but hopeless", though quintessentially U in one respect: "He didn't see why he had to repay loans."

The other two cases are more darkly gripping, and both are Herveys, a clan, the author

says, supposedly "programmed for lives of cruelty, self-indulgence, untamed lust and ultimate self-destruction". Forebears include John, the 2nd Baron Hervey: "Such a nice composition of the sexes," said the Earl of Bath, "that it is difficult to tell which is the most predominant." He was popularly known as Lord Fanny. Victor Hervey, 6th Marquess of Bristol, tried hard to live up to expectations. As a young man he cultivated criminal friends, conspired to steal jewellery from a flat in Mayfair, and later boasted of selling arms to both the Batista and Castro regimes in Cuba. Dinners at Ickworth House in Suffolk still involved large numbers of servants in full Hervey livery as late as the 1970s. Outside the front door flew the flag of the Monarchist League and the Hervey banner.

Victor drove an E-Type and a Rolls-Royce, the latter adorned with the Hervey coat of arms and mascot, "a snow leopard, finished in gold, bolted to the bonnet", showing all the understated sense of style of P Diddy. He ended up in Monte Carlo, swigging vodka from the bottle at 10am and singing God Save the Queen in front of the mirror. Aristocratic dash and magnificence here, as

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