

ERNEST JOHN ROBIN LUDLOW (K45-49)

The following is based on an obituary that appeared in the Telegraph on 25 January 2016



From a family of Watney brewers, Ernest John Robin Ludlow was born at Cross Deep Hall, Twickenham, on 2 May 1931. The Ludlows traced their ancestry back to the Welsh Marches, Nicholas de Ludlow, having been a wool merchant to King Henry III. His son, Laurence, built Stokesay Castle near Ludlow and was described as "the wealthiest man in all England".

He was raised in Twickenham, evacuated as a boarder to a school in Devon, and subsequently educated at Framlingham College. For National Service he joined the family regiment, the Royal Warwickshire, as a private. Named Best Recruit, he was posted to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, commissioned and promoted temporary Captain in 1956, the youngest post-war cadet to return to the RMA as a member of staff.

He then worked as a salesman with J Lyons & Co for a year, before moving on to be a sales representative for George Newnes (which owned Country Life and Woman's Own). He soon secured a job selling advertising for The Economist, where he stayed from 1959 until 1972, becoming advertisement manager for their Latin American edition.

He was headhunted for the Palace job from the world of advertising in 1971, interviewed by William Heseltine and Sir Michael Adeane, and after a glass of sherry with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, he was offered the job.

During his brief tenure, he oversaw the press for the Queen and her immediate family. He dealt with the key correspondents from the BBC, Thames TV and the Press Association and made a point of calling on the senior newspaper editors.

He was surprised to find that journalists were assigned dismal positions on royal engagements so as not to get in the way of the pageantry, and was particularly unimpressed with the press facilities for the State Visit of Queen Juliana of the Netherlands in April 1972. With better locations, the photographs and copy might have been more interesting.

At the Palace he got on well with Philip Moore and William Heseltine in the private secretary's office. He dealt with six State Visits, two abroad and four in Britain, and with the Duke of Windsor's funeral.

Before the Queen's State Visit to President Pompidou in May 1972 Ludlow paid two advance visits to Paris. On the visit itself, he was amused when the car conveying the Queen and the President from the airport suddenly stopped. Pompidou found that the Queen spoke perfect French and so decanted the interpreter on to the tarmac.

The death of the Duke of Windsor a few days later presented media challenges. Ludlow broke with precedent and invited Duggie Dumbrell, the Press Association's court correspondent, to the Palace to sit with him from 8.30am till 6pm each day, to see how he handled the press, leaving the loudspeaker-phone on at all times. Dumbrell asked how much he could report and was told: "Anything you like, so long as it is accurate."

Ludlow was anxious that it should be known that the Palace were not brushing the Duke under the carpet, and he confirmed the view of the Duke's private secretary, John Utter, that the Queen did everything possible to make the Duchess's stay as comfortable and easy as possible.

It was the policy of the Palace Press Office never to comment on the private lives of the Royal family, which did not stop constant requests for information. Throughout 1972 the media were absorbed by the riding career of

Princess Anne and her alleged relationships with male eventers such as Richard Meade, Mark Phillips and Andrew Parker Bowles.

As interest in Phillips grew apace, Ludlow asked the Princess directly if she was getting engaged. She replied that she was not. Weekly updates from her office confirmed this view.

Ludlow kept himself as informed as possible, even ordering Private Eye to be delivered to the Press Office, with its running serial, "Love in the Saddle" (WH Smith, the disapproving distributors, sent it in a plain brown envelope).

The press took Ludlow at his word about Princess Anne. In January 1973, however, Chapman Pincher wrote in the Sunday Mirror that the engagement would happen. Presently Ludlow told Fleet Street editors: "It is a safe bet that nothing is going to happen this year or probably next year either." He was quoted as saying the couple were "in love ... with horses".

Although he felt that he was doing well, others considered that he did not fit in and disapproved of his handling of the media. In 1973 his job was suddenly terminated. At the time Ludlow said publicly: "There is no ill will. But this is an unusual outfit compared with anything else in the world, and personal relationships matter."

In fact he was asked to leave. One evening he was called over to the house of Sir Martin Charteris, the Queen's private secretary, who told him: "I want you out. You can leave tonight." Ludlow offered to stay on until a successor was selected and that was agreed. Eventually Ronald Allison, who had been BBC court correspondent, replaced him.

Soon afterwards, Princess Anne's engagement to Mark Phillips was announced. The press chose to think that Ludlow had misled them, although he made the valid point that he had believed what he said at the time and that a lot can happen between a boy and a girl in six months.

In the long years after his departure, Ludlow looked back on his time at the Palace with nostalgia and considered it the most fascinating phase in a full and varied life. He also wrestled with the reason for his departure, concluding that Charteris was put out to discover that he had talked to Lord Plunket about an idea to move the press secretary's office to the front of the Palace without consulting him.

After the Palace he had several jobs in succession. He was deputy director of Aims of Industry, head of publicity at Strutt & Parker, a headhunter with Kiernan & Co (USA) London, and a partner in Boyden International (USA) London, before setting up his own headhunting business. In 1991 he joined Pauline Hyde and Associates. He became an independent consultant in "outplacement", assisting executives who had lost their jobs, as well as retiring members of MI6, to find new jobs. He retired in 2001.

Ludlow was also active in the Territorial Army, joining, in 1959, 3/4 County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters). Later on he held a number of senior appointments in the TA, and he was awarded the TD in 1979.

Latterly he was a governor of the Royal Star and Garter Home at Richmond, and the Clergy Orphans Corporation, which managed St Edmund's School, Canterbury and St Margaret's School, Watford.

Living in Warminster, he put his affairs in order after cancer was diagnosed with the consideration and efficiency that was the hallmark of his life. He faced his illness with equanimity and courage.

Ludlow's first marriage to Sonia Hatfield was dissolved in 1993. He then married Primrose King (née Palmer). She survives him as do his son and daughter from his first marriage.

He died on 19 January 2016.