

The last couple of months have been ones of mixed fortune for Rolls-Royce Motors, and while nothing but good news has come from overseas, things at home have unfortunately not looked at all promising.

To get the bad news over and done with, the recent national engineering strike has severely disrupted production at most of Britain's manufacturing companies including Rolls-Royce Motors. The dispute has now been settled, but, as most of Britain's national dailies seem to agree, no good whatsoever has come of it.

Daily Mail

London, England, Friday, October 5th, 1979.

By battering Britain's engineering factories with strikes for more than two months, 1½ million workers have won for themselves a hefty increase in basic pay, more holidays, and opened the way to a shorter working week.

What are they covenanted to give in return? Nothing.

The deal contains no link between more leisure and money for more production. All there is for appearance sake is some pious guff about 'working harder'.

Tell that to the shop stewards.

It might, if you are an obsessive searcher after silver linings, have been even worse. The 39-hour week could have come this year instead of 1981. The fifth week of annual holiday could have been given in one dollop instead of dribbled out in stages till 1983.

But no amount of brave faces put on by the Engineering Employers' Federation can mask the massive damage that the strikes themselves have inflicted and the further loss of competitiveness this something-for-nothing payout will impose on British industry.

On the shop floor of Britain, it is the lemmings who are the masters now.

Now to concentrate upon the good news, the opening of a new American headquarters for Rolls-Royce Motors Inc was given lengthy coverage in most national dailies on both sides of the Atlantic. And, of particular note, was this article in the *Financial Times* which saw the opening as an indication of "vigour and success" when more and more British motor companies are driving along the road to decline.

FINANCIAL TIMES

London, England, Thursday, September 13th, 1979.

The opening by the Duke of Kent of a new North American headquarters for Rolls-Royce Motors seems almost an inevitable development in the life of a company with products to sell like the Silver Shadow II and the Corniche.

Despite the rise in petrol prices and the fuel crisis, there seems to be no shortage of those wealthy enough to pay an average of \$84,000 (£38,000) for the privilege of garaging a Rolls-Royce.

David Plastow, Rolls-Royce Motors Group Managing Director, bristles a little at the suggestion that all his company has to do is set out its stall in the US and wait for its customers to sign their cheques.

The Car Division of the old Rolls-Royce company which went public in May 1973 under Mr. Plastow's direction had not, in fact, been a consistently profitable operation but there were opportunities, particularly in North America which the new management believed might transform the situation.

The operative word in the Company became "commitment" which was interpreted as devoting people and resources to developing an American market.

Since 1973 the story has been one of impressive progress. A 68-strong dealer network is now spread across the country which is comfortably capable of selling the 1,100-1,200 cars a year which the British factories provide.

To dwell in the USA a moment longer, the news was recently broken to the press on both sides of the Atlantic that Rolls-Royce Motors is to take over the marketing of Lotus cars in the USA in an unprecedented act of co-operation between two of Britain's foremost motoring companies.

THE GUARDIAN

London, England, Saturday, October 20th, 1979.

Rolls-Royce Motors is to take over the marketing of Lotus cars in the United States, it was announced yesterday. The deal has been signed in London by the Chairman of Lotus, Colin Chapman, and David Plastow, Group Managing Director of Rolls-Royce Motors.

Lotus believes the link-up will improve the sale of their Esprit,

Excalibur and Elite models—and eventually bring them up to the 1,100 a year level of Rolls-Royce sales. This will be more than treble present annual sales.

A Rolls-Royce Motors spokesman said the Company would take over the existing Lotus dealer network and find new outlets. It could be that some dealers would be selling both Rolls-Royce and Lotus cars.

For Diesel Division too, the prospects in overseas markets have taken a turn for the better despite a sharp drop in demand from the industrial diesel engine market. Most of Britain's national dailies have carried reports about two possible orders for British tanks—both of which could trigger an explosion in military diesel sales in the not-too-distant future.

The Daily Telegraph

London, England, Tuesday, October 2nd, 1979.

The Government has sanctioned, in principle, the sale of up to 200 Super-Chiefstain tanks to Jordan.

The price, specifications, penalty clauses, and delivery dates have still to be worked out.

The price would vary according to the communications equipment, weapons, and other accessories mounted in the hull.

One hundred and twenty-five Rolls-Royce diesel powered Super-Chiefstains were built for the Shah of Iran and these could be supplied fairly quickly to Jordan, when the deal is finally settled to replace the 200 ageing Centurions now in service.

Initial discussions between King Hussein and Sir Roland Ellis of the Defence Sales Department of the Ministry of Defence, took place about 10 days ago, but negotiations are expected to continue until the end of the year, if not longer.

Meanwhile, as a result of the ever-increasing Russian threat in Europe, the Army Board is considering the possibility of ordering a further 200 tanks for Britain's Army of the Rhine.

They, too, would be based on the Shir tank, designed initially for the Shah but mounted with Chobham armour—which can resist most armour-piercing shells—and redesigned to meet service requirements in Europe, as well as being equipped with Rolls-Royce CV 1200 diesel engines.

To conclude with a matter for those interested in the financial

wheelings and dealings of the stock exchange, it was again *The Daily Telegraph* that revealed that shareholders in the original Rolls-Royce company have salvaged more than £40 million from the financial wreckage left after the company went bankrupt in 1971.

The Daily Telegraph

London, England, Monday, October 8th, 1979.

More than eight years after the spectacular collapse of Rolls-Royce, the receiver and joint liquidators of R-R Realisations, the company set up in 1971 to deal with the liquidation, have announced that they have completed the operation by salvaging a total of over £41 million for Ordinary shareholders in the crashed group.

A final payment of 8.41p per share is to be declared on Nov. 15th, making a pay-out of 63.41p per £1 Ordinary stock unit in all.

The original joint liquidators were Rupert Nicholson of Peat Marwick, who retired two years ago, Keith Wickenden, formerly a partner in Thornton Baker and now chairman of European Ferries, and Sir William Slimmings, of Thomson McLintock.

Guy Parsons of Peat, who took over from Mr. Nicholson, describes the winding-up which raised a gross total of £251 million and cost £4.6 million as "the most successful liquidation of all time".

Just before the final collapse, shares were changing hands at a few pence, for their curiosity value, with very little hope even that unsecured creditors would be fully repaid, let alone shareholders.

But, comments Mr. Parsons: "The initial basis for success came in 1973 when Rolls-Royce Motors was successfully floated off for £38.4 million, and later the same year when the Government agreed to pay £87.9 million for the aero-engine assets".

At the time of the aero-engine agreement, the liquidators told the 80,000 shareholders that, for the first time, there was real hope that they would get some money back, although the estimate at that time was of a payment of "not less than 10p per Ordinary stock unit".

But after that, comments Mr. Parsons: "There was quite a lot of other things which went our way with the properties and concerns we had to sell and debts to collect".

When the P&O liner SS Persia was torpedoed in the Mediterranean in 1915, more than 300 lives were lost. One of the victims was Eleanor Thornton, personal assistant to John Walter Edward-Douglas-Scott-Montagu, 2nd Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.

Miss Thornton is popularly believed to have been the model for Charles Sykes ARBS when he created the legendary Flying Lady or Spirit of Ecstasy mascot for the Rolls-Royce motor car.

Her role in the story of Rolls-Royce has been an intriguing mystery for nearly 65 years and her life and career have received scant



attention in the many books and articles that have been written about the company's history, achievements and personalities.

Now, in the year of Rolls-Royce's 75th Jubilee, her story can at last be told.

Edward, 3rd Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, gave Journal writer Paul Tritton exclusive access to his father's personal papers and has directed him to new lines of research.

Paul has traced people who knew Miss Thornton personally or who were closely acquainted with her friends and relations.

From these sources he is able to present the first-ever biography of

The Lady in the Legend

On an October day nearly 100 years ago, colleagues of Frederick Thornton gathered to present him with a large and ornate clock, embellished with a gleaming and suitably inscribed brass plate. A traditional gift for someone retiring from a responsible position after distinguished and loyal service. With the clock came a beautifully written testimonial conveying the following tribute:

"Presented to Frederick Thornton by the employees of L. Clark, Muirhead & Co., telegraph engineers, who beg to record their profound regret at the loss they have sustained consequent upon his retiring from the management of the above firm, and wish to express their sincere thanks for the impartiality they have always experienced at his hands. They heartily wish him prosperity and, above all, good health which they trust he may long be spared to enjoy".

The clock and testimonial are now treasured as the oldest heirlooms of the Thornton family, whose male line is now extinct. They are also two rare clues to the early life of Eleanor Thornton. For Frederick Thornton, engineer, was her father.

"SPANISH BLOOD"
Frederick Thornton's role in the management of L. Clark, Muirhead & Co. is obscure. The Muirhead Group, of which L. Clark, Muirhead was a founder, has no record of him but his name does appear—but only once—in the archives of the Society of Telegraph Engineers (now the

Institution of Electrical Engineers). Thornton applied to join the Society as an associate member whilst an employee of Warden, Muirhead & Clark of Westminster, London. A copy of his application form, dated 6th May 1876, still exists but his name does not appear in any of the Society's published lists of members.

Over the years, many papers and records vital to biographical research have been lost or destroyed and therefore details of several aspects of Thornton's career and personal life will never be known. What seems beyond doubt, though, is that he travelled widely, supervising the installation of telegraphs. He is known to have visited Africa and is believed also to have visited Australia, China and Japan. It has even been suggested that he was an Australian, because the only description of him that has survived is that he was "a big man, like most Australians". We do not know who first made this remark and it certainly cannot be accepted as proof of his origins.

As well as being told about the possible 'Australian connection', we heard another theory—supported by▷



1. Frederick Thornton: "a big man, like most Australians."

2. Spanish blood: (left to right) Eleanor aged sixteen, her sister Rose aged nine and her mother Sarah Anne.



stronger evidence—about Eleanor's family. This contended that she was of Spanish ancestry and was perhaps born in Spain. The only photograph we found of her father suggests that her Spanish forebears are unlikely to have been paternal. The picture shows the bearded, bowlerhatted features of a typical middle class Victorian gentleman. Another rare photograph shows that her mother, although bearing the very English names Sarah Anne (née Rooke), had a slightly Spanish look about her. If Eleanor did not inherit this, then her sister Rose may have done. A photograph of the two girls together reveals that Rose had beautiful 'Spanish eyes'.

Two more items of evidence that support the 'Spanish ancestry' theory then came to light. First, we found that Eleanor's second name was Velasco, of obvious Spanish origin. Next, we were shown a letter written by John, 2nd Lord Montagu, in which he stated that Eleanor "had fine old Spanish blood in her veins, besides her English descent".

But although partly Spanish by name, and, evidently, by descent, Eleanor was born not in Spain, but in London. For several months her unusual combination of Christian names thwarted our attempts to discover where and when Eleanor was born. Never entirely convinced by the 'born in Spain' theory, but with no definite year of birth to work on, we examined the indexes at the General Register Office at St Catherine's House, London, where all births registered in England and Wales since 1837 are recorded. Estimates of Eleanor's age at various important times in her life suggested she was born sometime in the early 1880s but there was no entry for anyone by the name of Eleanor Velasco Thornton. It seemed then that two essential facts would be missing from this story: her date of birth and the place where she was born.

JA GIRL CALLED NELL
It was some time before it became obvious that her unusual Christian names were hindering, not helping, our enquiries. Invariably we had seen her name written either in full, or given as Miss E. or E. V. Thornton. People we interviewed who had known her, or known of her, called her Eleanor or sometimes 'Thorn'. It was only later, when records of her school days were discovered, that we found that as a girl she was called Nelly, or Nell.

Back at St Catherine's House we again perused the hundreds of names of children named Thornton. But this time we looked for girls registered as Nelly, not Eleanor. Several were found. Full birth certificates were applied for and one of them gave four convincing pieces of information:

When and where born: 15 April, 1880, 18 Cottage Grove, Stockwell.

Name and surname of father: Fred Thornton.

Name, surname and maiden name of mother: Sarah Ann Thornton, formerly Rooke.

Occupation of father: Mechanical Engineer.

Stockwell is now part of the London Borough of Lambeth. No 18 Cottage Grove and all the other houses in the area were demolished when the LCC's vast Fenwick Estate was built in the 1960s.

When and why Nelly Thornton became known as Eleanor Velasco Thornton is a mystery. Although she was registered at birth as Nelly she may have been christened as Eleanor Velasco. We have been unable to trace any baptism records to confirm this. Another possibility is that she came to dislike being called Nelly or Nell by people other than her family and childhood friends and gave herself grander names when she started her career.

AHER FAMILY BACKGROUND
Although only a few facts and theories have been handed down in documents and as hearsay, the following outline of Eleanor's family background can be pieced together. In 1876 her father was working in Westminster for a firm of telegraph engineers. At about this time he met and married Sarah Anne Rooke. In April 1880, whilst they were living in Stockwell—only a few miles from Westminster—Eleanor was born.

About four years later the Thorntons had a son, Frederick. The family's home at this time is not known and we attempted to find out by obtaining baby Frederick's birth certificate. All that is known about him is that he died of yellow fever in West Africa on 16 January 1905. He was then 21 but as his date of birth is not known the year in which he was born could have been 1883, 1884 or 1885. His birth is not in the registers at St Catherine's House. Was the family living abroad when he was born, perhaps whilst father Frederick was engaged on some important telegraph contract for a foreign government?

The family certainly moved around a lot in the 1880s, for the Thornton's



3. Early home: Nicosia Road, Wandsworth.

third and last child. Rose, was born on 19 June 1887 at 24 Charlotte Street, Leamington Spa, a town 90 miles north west of London. Rose's birth was registered six weeks later by her father, who recorded his occupation as 'engineer'. Was he by now working temporarily in the Midlands?

Although 24 Charlotte Street was evidently the Thorntons' home in the summer of 1887 it appears that the family did not live there for very long. Street directories were published in Leamington Spa every two years from 1870 until well into the present century but only the 1888 edition (no doubt compiled in 1887) lists Frederick Thornton at 24 Charlotte Street.

Soon after Rose was born the Thorntons moved back to London, probably to a house in Nicosia Road, Wandsworth. By 1889 Eleanor, now nine years old, was a pupil at the Wandsworth High School for Girls in Rosehill Road, about a mile from Nicosia Road. At Easter that year she won a hymn book as a Divinity prize. The fly leaf bears the inscription: "Awarded to Miss N. Thornton, Class 2. N. Bertram, Principal". As it is likely that Eleanor would have needed a full year in which to make a strong enough impression on her teachers to win a prize, early 1888 is probably the time the Thorntons left Leamington Spa.

No documents or directories survive to tell us which house in Nicosia Road was their home but as all the road's original three-storey Victorian homes are still standing, it's there somewhere. Eleanor's school in Wandsworth is also untraceable.

SHER NANNY, MISS NORTH
Sadly the only trace of the Thornton family in Wandsworth is grave number 07512 in Wandsworth Cemetery. Here are buried Sarah Anne, who died in February 1911 aged 62, and the ashes of Rose, who died in September 1945 aged 57. Margaret Ann North, who was 'nanny' to Eleanor, Frederick and Rose and their mother's devoted companion, is also buried in the grave.

Frederick Thornton senior is buried in Kasonga, Central Africa. His career after he left L. Clark, Muirhead poses many unanswerable questions. He retired from the management on 17 October 1882 yet there is something about the wording of his testimonial which suggests that he was not of retirement age and was perhaps moving into a new venture. By "retire" did the colleagues who worded the testimonial really mean "resign"? Whatever his age, Frederick Thornton raised a family in the 1880s and continued working. Nearly 20 years after departing from L. Clark, Muirhead with his clock, he went to the Congo to survey a telegraph system for the King of the Belgians. Three days before he was due to return home he fell from a horse and on 4 March 1901 he died of his injuries.

But what of Eleanor's life after she won her Divinity prize in 1889? Unable to find any trace of the Wandsworth High School for Girls, we realized there was no hope of finding any school records of the progress of individual pupils. And without an account of her abilities as a scholar, our biography of Eleanor would lack details of one of the most important periods of her life. Where did she complete her education? Was the Wandsworth school only a primary school? If so, where was Eleanor educated as a teenager?

THE SCHOLARSHIP GIRL

Having reached an impasse, we acted on a hunch. Rose Thornton, we learned, attended the Grey Coat Hospital, Westminster, from 1901 until 1904. Had Eleanor been a pupil there about seven years earlier (the difference in their ages being just over seven years)?

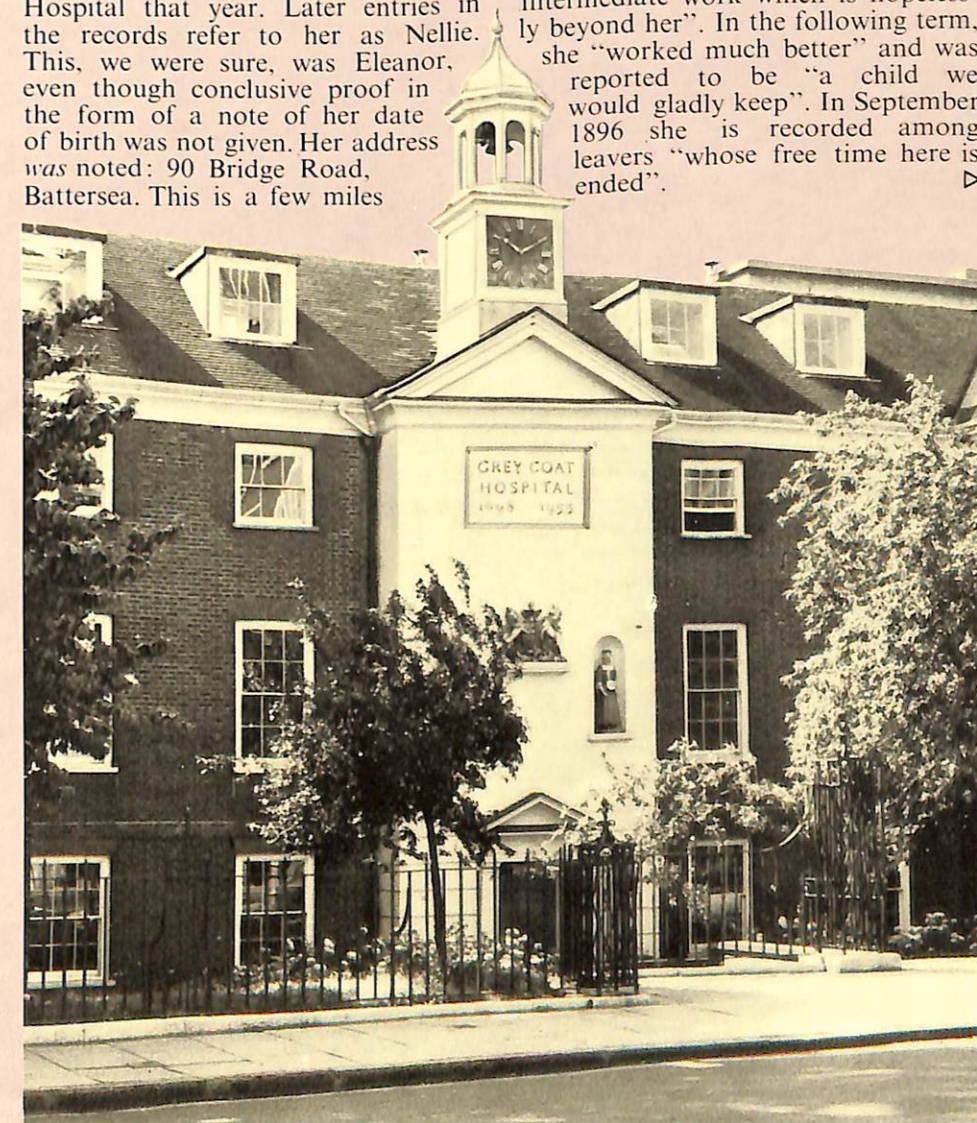
The hunch worked. A search in the school's archives revealed a report written in September 1894 by the Headmistress, Elsie Day. This lists 31 new admissions to the school—and the nineteenth name on the list is: N. Thornton. She was one of four girls who won a London County Council scholarship to the Grey Coat Hospital that year. Later entries in the records refer to her as Nellie. This, we were sure, was Eleanor, even though conclusive proof in the form of a note of her date of birth was not given. Her address was noted: 90 Bridge Road, Battersea. This is a few miles

from Wandsworth and evidently, by 1894, the Thorntons had moved yet again.

The Grey Coat Hospital was founded in 1698 to care for and educate poor children from the parish of St Margaret's, Westminster. It became a girls' school in 1871, a time when educating girls was widely considered to be a waste of money. The school's magnificent frontage, although restored after war damage, still looks much the same as it did when Eleanor was a 'Grey Coat' pupil.

We also discovered term-by-term reports of Eleanor's progress at the school. The first, for the third term of 1894, shows that she was a member of the 'Remove' and was "a painstaking good worker who has found the new subjects rather a strain". In 1895, in Form V³, she was "working earnestly" in the second term and "steady and painstaking" in term three. She passed the College of Preceptors Examination (3rd class, 2nd division) in Scripture, Grammar, Geography, History, Arithmetic, Euclid and Drawing.

In the first term of 1896, Eleanor seemed to be trying to be too ambitious. Her report reads: "A good painstaking child—very delicate and ruining her work by wanting to do intermediate work which is hopelessly beyond her". In the following term, she "worked much better" and was reported to be "a child we would gladly keep". In September 1896 she is recorded among leavers "whose free time here is ended".



4. Teenage school: Grey Coat Hospital, Westminster.

CLAUDE JOHNSON'S SECRETARY

Towards the turn of the century and in 1897 at the earliest, Eleanor went to work for Claude Goodman Johnson. Johnson later became the *eminence grise* of Rolls-Royce and was the company's first managing director. But at the time he engaged Eleanor he was Secretary of the newly-formed Automobile Club of Great Britain and Ireland (now the RAC). As secretary to Johnson, Eleanor would have met all the famous motoring pioneers of the day, including Charles Rolls. It was as a result of meeting John Scott-Montagu (a few years before he inherited the title of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu) that she later became associated with the legend of the *Spirit of Ecstasy*.

By all accounts Eleanor was a woman of exceptional intelligence, talent and



5. Opulent Office: No. 168 Piccadilly (top office above centre bay windows).

ambition: a career woman by today's standards. She has also been described as charming, gracious, loyal and of striking appearance when dressed in the elaborate gowns and hats of her era. If she was not beautiful then she was certainly handsome and elegant in the stately, Edwardian manner and extremely attractive in the eyes of the young men she met during her business and social life.

John Scott-Montagu was among those who were impressed by her business abilities and captivated by her good looks and in 1902 he persuaded her to leave the Automobile Club and join his staff. Eleanor has been described as his secretary but this underestimates her responsibilities 'personal assistant' or 'private secretary' is a more accurate job title.

In 1902 Montagu was preparing to launch *The Car Illustrated*, Britain's first motoring periodical and Eleanor perhaps more than anyone else helped him overcome the many problems involved in planning a venture of this kind and maintain publication for the next 13 years.

The first issue of the magazine appeared on 28 May 1902, when Eleanor had been working for Montagu

for about three months. Their first office was in Piccadilly Mansions, 17 Shaftesbury Avenue, a building overlooking Piccadilly Circus.

After a few years the magazine moved to 168 Piccadilly. This was and arguably still is the most famous street in the world but if Montagu had had his way it would be a very different thoroughfare than it is today. He wanted Piccadilly to be widened to make more room for motor traffic. He expounded these and other advanced ideas in various magazine articles and speeches. His personal diaries, especially the one covering the years 1903 to 1905 (the year in which at the age of 39 he became the 2nd Lord Montagu of Beaulieu) give a fascinating insight into the punishing routine he followed whilst combining the duties of being a politician, landowner, editor, publisher and political writer. In helping him organize all his various activities Eleanor must have been an assistant of the highest calibre.

THE FRINGE OF SOHO

The offices where Eleanor worked from the time she joined Montagu's staff still exist. Piccadilly Mansions stands on the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue and Sherwood Street, on the fringe of Soho and is in an area that now warrants the description 'fly blown'. Inside the main entrance some idea of the building's former opulence is afforded by marble wall panels and an oak staircase.

No. 168 Piccadilly, opposite Old Bond Street, is today distinguished as the premises of Cogswell and Harrison, the gunmakers, but it is just around the corner, in St James's, that the last and most elegant of the places where Eleanor worked is to be found.

The St James's area is bordered by Piccadilly to the north, St James's Street to the west, Pall Mall to the south and Lower Regent Street to the east and even today it is probably more evocative of London before the First World War than anywhere else in the capital. On winter evenings, when the office workers have gone home and the side streets are free of traffic, the age of hansom cabs, muffin men, cobbled streets and gas lamps shining wanly through the fog is very easily recalled.

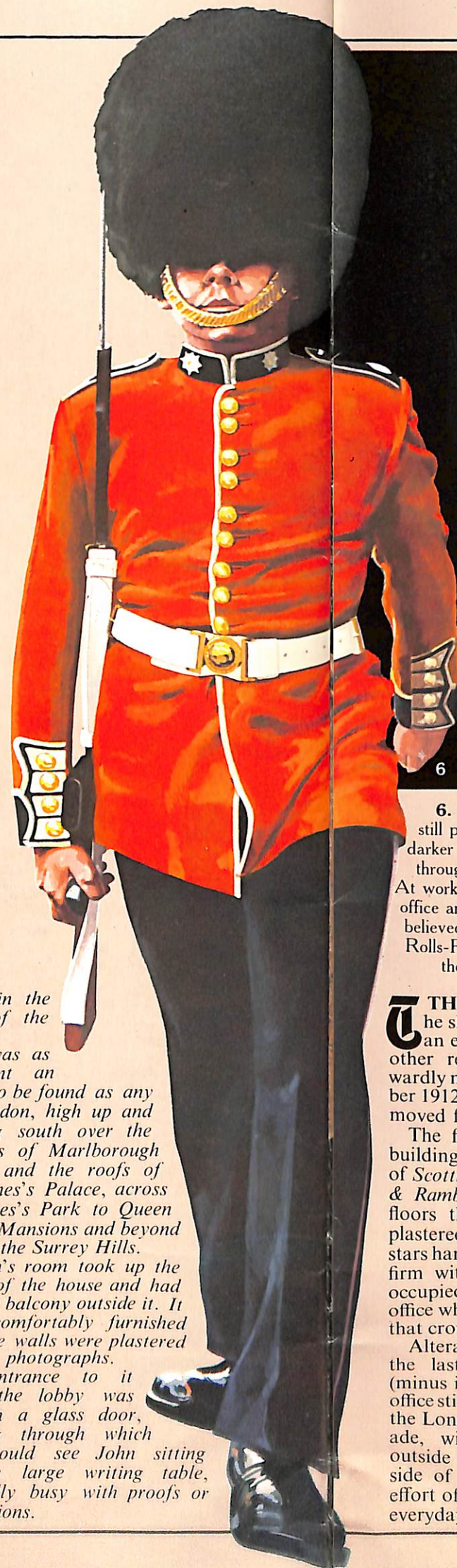
At 62 Pall Mall, opposite Marlborough Gate, Montagu bought a vacant site and on it built a tall, narrow town house. Lady Troubridge and Archibald Marshall write this description in their book *John, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu: A Memoir* (Macmillan, 1930):

Here the shop was set up again, with offices above it. The shop disappeared later as other interests took John's attention but to the end of his life he occupied the highest floor but one as his office, in which he did all the work that crowded in upon him, and with the help of Miss Thornton and afterwards Miss Clowes . . . still carried on some of the industries which had been set in

hand in the days of the paper.

It was as pleasant an office to be found as any in London, high up and looking south over the gardens of Marlborough House and the roofs of St James's Palace, across St James's Park to Queen Anne's Mansions and beyond that to the Surrey Hills.

John's room took up the width of the house and had a stone balcony outside it. It was comfortably furnished and the walls were plastered with photographs. The entrance to it from the lobby was through a glass door, looking through which you would see John sitting at his large writing table, generally busy with proofs or corrections.



6. Elegant Premises: Guardsmen still parade below 62 Pall Mall (with darker brown frontage) - photographed through Marlborough Gate. 7 and 8.

At work and on play: Eleanor in the Pall Mall office and on the running board of what is believed to be Lord Montagu's 40/50 hp Rolls-Royce (Photograph by courtesy of the National Motor Museum).

THE OFFICE THEY SHARED

The shop on the ground floor is now an estate agent's office but in most other respects 62 Pall Mall is outwardly much the same as it was in October 1912, when *The Car Illustrated* staff moved from Piccadilly.

The first and second floors of the building are occupied by the publishers of *Scottish Field*, *Scotland* and *Climber & Rambler*. On the third and fourth floors the walls of the landings are plastered with photographs of rock stars handled by the music management firm within. On the next floor, now occupied by an Italian company, is the office where Montagu "did all the work that crowded in upon him".

Alterations have been made during the last few years but the lobby (minus its glass door) survives and the office still enjoys a magnificent view over the London rooftops, Guardsmen parade, with much stamping of feet, outside St James's Palace on the other side of the street and it needs little effort of the imagination to picture the everyday scene here when Montagu and

Eleanor were busy producing their magazine.

To establish when it was that Eleanor's career and the creation of the *Spirit of Ecstasy* shared a common place and time it is necessary to go back to about two years before *The Car Illustrated* moved to Pall Mall. Around 1910 there was a craze for fitting funny mascots to car radiator caps - silly things like toy policemen, black cats and golliwogs. The directors of Rolls-Royce were dismayed at the way in which some of their customers were disfiguring their cars and so they commissioned Charles Sykes, a distinguished artist, to sculpture an official and suitably dignified mascot.

The way in which the *Spirit of Ecstasy* was conceived remains a mystery and will always be so because those who were directly involved are now dead. Sykes was at this time contributing to *The Car Illustrated* as a freelance illustrator, working from his studio at 193 Brompton Road, London SW.

According to one version of the story of the mascot, Montagu introduced Sykes to Claude Johnson, by now managing director of Rolls-Royce and the idea of the *Spirit of Ecstasy* evolved during a series of business and social meetings.

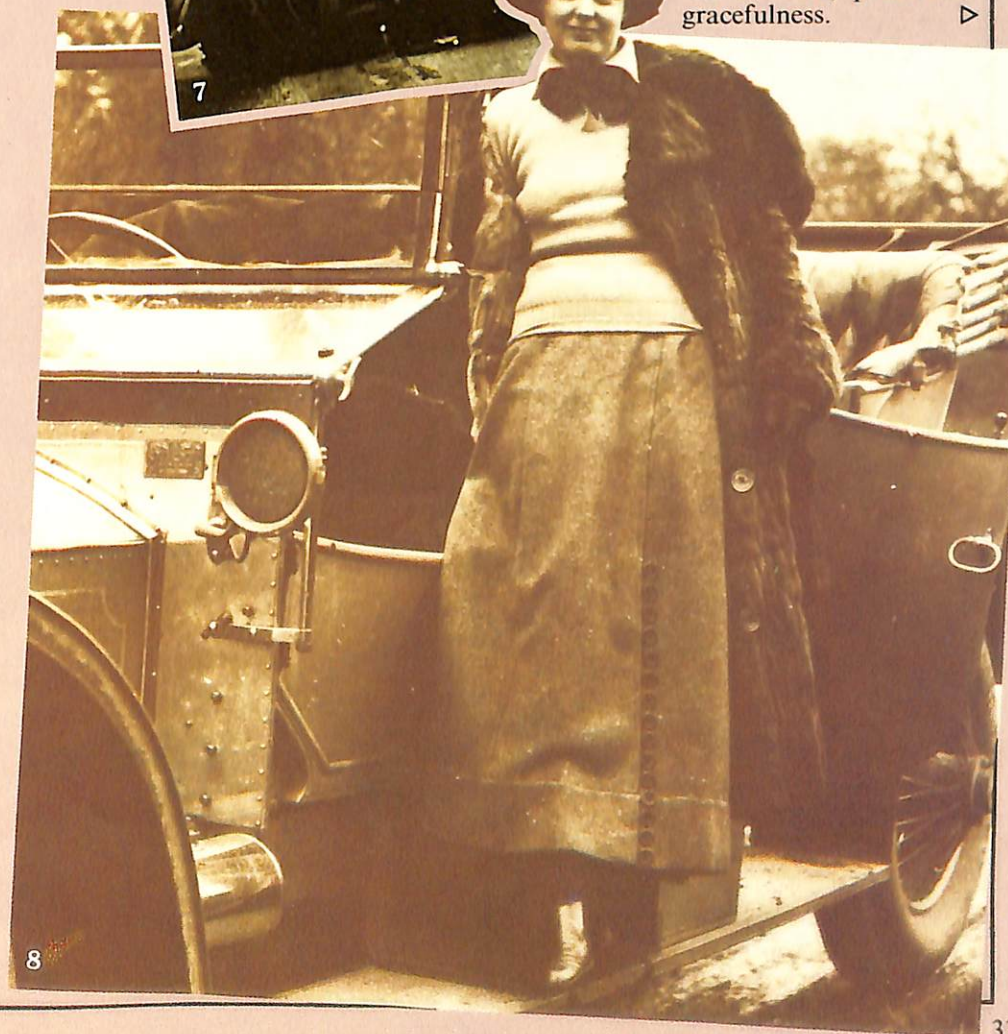
During this time Sykes is said to have been taken for a ride in Montagu's Rolls - Royce 40/50 and to have been inspired to create the *Spirit of Ecstasy* by the car's silence, power and gracefulness. ▶



6

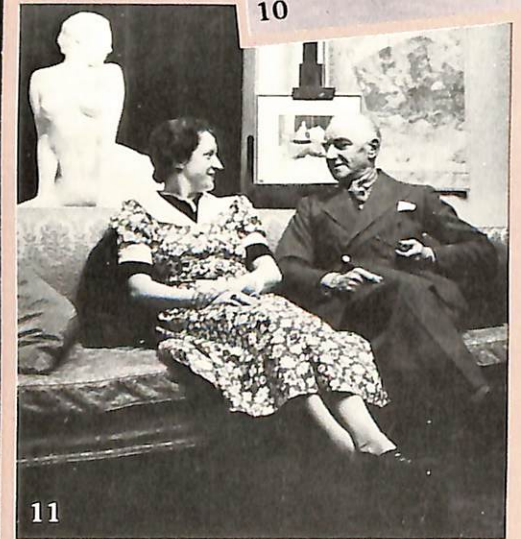


7



8

A ST ELEANOR'S PERPETUAL PRAYER accurate or not it's an interesting story and the theory that Eleanor was Sykes' model for the sculpture is at least supported by circumstantial evidence. By 1910 Sykes would have known Eleanor for a number of years, through his work as an illustrator for *The Car Illustrated* and there is no doubt that she posed for many of his works. Sykes, like anyone else in Montagu's circle of business associates and friends, would have appreciated Eleanor's



9 and 10. Contrasting studies: Eleanor was the inspiration for a cartoon entitled 'Saint Eleanor's Perpetual Prayer' (left) and the model for a pastel of Martha washing Christ's feet. 11. Distinguished artist: Charles Sykes and his daughter Jo.

attractiveness and indeed with this in mind he and another artist created a cartoon of her. This was entitled 'St Eleanor's Perpetual Prayer' and carried the caption 'Oh Ye Gods, shower upon this willing mortal everlasting work, that the curse of beauty may be forgotten'. More seriously, in 1907 Eleanor acted as his model for a pastel of Martha washing the feet of Christ. This belonged to Rose Thornton for many years and still exists. About a year later Eleanor was the model for a statuette of a Sybarite which Sykes submitted for the Royal Academy's summer exhibition in 1908. This was rejected by the judges because the figure had long hair and was standing on a cushion. Evidently this went against the purist principles by which sculptures of classical figures were

judged at the time. Sykes modified the design by cutting the figure's hair and casting it on a plinth instead of a cushion. Renamed Phryne (the celebrated courtesan of ancient Athens) it was accepted for the following year's RA exhibition, whose judges were probably totally unaware of its origin.

As a child Sykes' daughter, Mrs Jo Phillips—herself a sculptor—knew Eleanor well and she told us that Eleanor and Phryne were so alike that "it's like a repeat of history". She also sees a great similarity between the face and figure of Eleanor and another of Sykes' sculptures, a Bacchante (a priestess of Bacchus, god of wine).

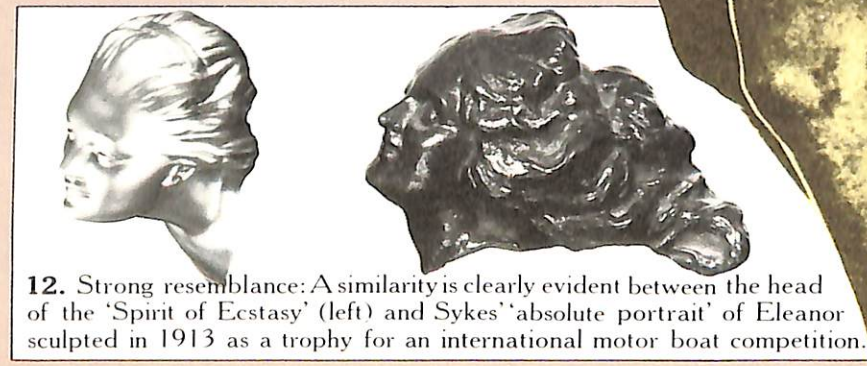
Jo's father and her mother, Jessica (who also modelled for Sykes) told her a lot about Eleanor. "She was an amazing woman", Jo told us. "She hated clothes. She needed to live with people who were free in their ideas. She loved life. She definitely had quite an influence on my father's work. I still think of her as Auntie Thorn".

But was Eleanor the model for the *Spirit of Ecstasy*? Edward, 3rd Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, was told that she was by Jane Clowes, who worked with her for many years. "I am absolutely certain that Eleanor Thornton was the model", he told us.

We were also told by another source that Dr Reggie Ingram, who was the 2nd Lord Montagu's doctor, believed that Eleanor was the 'Ecstasy' model. After the mascot was introduced Dr Ingram is said to have commented: "They shouldn't have put Eleanor's head on it".

ORIGINAL CASTINGS The fact that Eleanor was among the few people who were given an original casting of the *Spirit of Ecstasy* also suggests that she made a contribution towards its creation. The other recipients included Montagu and Johnson.

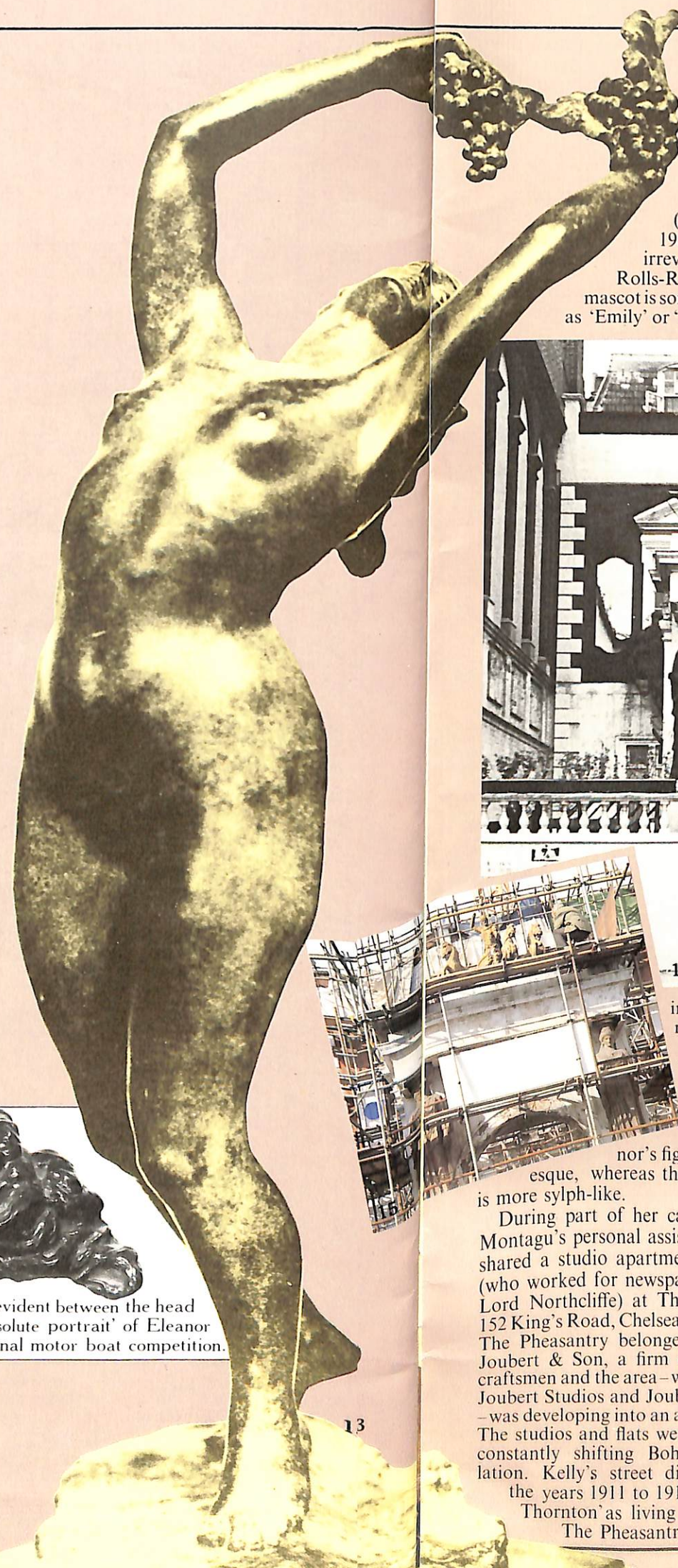
Jo Phillips is less sure than others we interviewed that Eleanor was the model or that any one woman was. For one thing, says Jo, the pose is such that no one could stand in such an attitude, arms swept back, for sufficient



12. Strong resemblance: A similarity is clearly evident between the head of the 'Spirit of Ecstasy' (left) and Sykes' 'absolute portrait' of Eleanor sculpted in 1913 as a trophy for an international motor boat competition.

time for an artist to make a sketch, let alone a sculpture. But Jo acknowledges that Sykes would probably have had a particular face and figure in mind when developing his design. Eleanor, as one of his favourite models, may well have been his principal inspiration.

Certainly the idea that Eleanor's face or figure or both are immortalized



in the *Spirit of Ecstasy* is a popular one. Kenneth Ullyett made the point in his book *The Rolls-Royce Companion* (Stanley Hall, 1969): "To the irreverent among Rolls-Royce owners the mascot is sometimes known as 'Emily' or 'Miss Thornton

That Eleanor lived amongst artists is of obvious significance in the context of her modelling activities. The Pheasantry is not the only known abode of the Thornton sisters. They also lived at Garden Cottage in Ditton Park, 23 miles west of London and two miles from Windsor. Whether they went there mainly at weekends and lived in Chelsea during the week, from where it would have been easier for them to travel to work is not known. Ditton Park was one of England's stately homes, dating back to Elizabethan times, after which it became the



in her flowing nightie". The strongest resemblance between Eleanor and the mascot is facial; Eleanor's figure was statuesque, whereas the Flying Lady is more sylph-like. During part of her career as Lord Montagu's personal assistant, Eleanor shared a studio apartment with Rose (who worked for newspaper publisher Lord Northcliffe) at The Pheasantry, 152 King's Road, Chelsea. In those days The Pheasantry belonged to Amedee Joubert & Son, a firm of artists and craftsmen and the area—which included Joubert Studios and Joubert Mansions—was developing into an artists' colony. The studios and flats were rented to a constantly shifting Bohemian population. Kelly's street directories for the years 1911 to 1915 list a 'Miss Thornton' as living at Studio 5, The Pheasantry.

13. Classical nude: Eleanor struck in bronze by Sykes' statuette of Bacchante: 14, 15 and 16. Town and country residences: The Pheasantry, 152 King's Road, Chelsea, as it was in the early 1900's (above) and as it is today (left), may have been Eleanor's week-day home while Garden Cottage could have served as a week-end retreat.

residence of Sir Ralph Winwood, James I's ambassador to Paris. It was rebuilt three times and was eventually acquired by the Buccleuch family. The 5th Duke of Buccleuch gave the house and estate to his second son, Henry John Douglas-Scott-Montagu, who became the 1st Lord Montagu when Queen Victoria created the title.

AN ARMY OF SERVANTS The 2nd Lord Montagu and his wife Lady Cecil Victoria Constance lived at Ditton Park from time to time but evidently they were not entirely happy there. Their daughter, Mrs Elizabeth Varley, says: "It was an unmanageable house, even in those days. It had about 60 bedrooms and was so vast it needed

an army of servants". As early as 1897 the Montagus put the house up for sale, without success. Whether it stayed on the market for the next 18 years is not known but it was not until 1915 that the house was sold, in circumstances that led, indirectly, to Eleanor's death.

For the first two months of the First World War, Montagu was Director of Organization of the Special Constabulary. In addition to these responsibilities he was trying to sell *The Car Illustrated* as a going concern and in late 1914 he must have been a very busy and worried man.

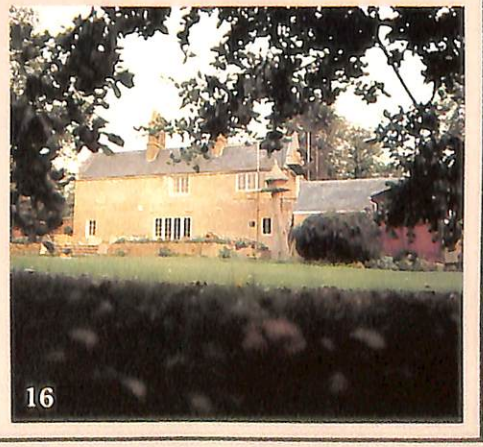
In November 1914 he was given command of the 2nd/7th Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment and a month later he embarked for India with his troops, arriving in Bombay in January 1915. A few months later he was appointed Inspector of Mechanical Transport in India and given the job of assessing the country's needs for vehicles and other equipment.

In November 1915 he returned urgently to England. One reason for his journey was to enable him to present India's needs personally to government departments in Whitehall. Another reason was that, under the Defence of the Realm Act, the Admiralty had placed a compulsory purchase order on Ditton Park in order to make it the headquarters for its Compass Observatory.

Montagu was given only three weeks to remove the contents of the house and he managed to do so only by hurriedly selling some of its furniture and works of art and donating the rest to museums.

Garden Cottage was not part of the sale agreement Montagu negotiated with the Admiralty. On 20 December 1915 he leased the property and its three quarters of an acre of grounds to Rose for £15 a year. By 1915 Eleanor and Rose may have been sharing the cottage, either as their weekend or permanent home, for some time, but it is not known why they were not made joint leaseholders.

Rose continued to live at Garden Cottage after the First World War, when she married and became Mrs Hayter. Her husband bought the freehold when she died. The cottage was extended and modernised in 1939 and now barely resembles the place where the Thornton sisters lived.



PERSIA'S LAST VOYAGE
 When he had completed his tasks in England, Montagu prepared to return to India and booked passages for himself and Eleanor on the *SS Persia*. The plan was that Eleanor would accompany him as far as Port Said in order to help him complete and correct a report on mechanical transport for the Indian government.

The prospect of a long passage in seas known to be patrolled by German U-boats was a daunting one. Only six months earlier the *Lusitania* had been torpedoed in the Atlantic, with the loss of 1,198 lives. There had been other atrocities elsewhere on the high seas and the shipping lanes of the Mediterranean were a hunting ground for enemy submarines.

Just before Christmas 1915 Montagu left Palace House, on his estate at Beaulieu in Hampshire, on the first stage of his journey back to India. Eleanor either accompanied him from Beaulieu or joined him in London. There he had a fortuitous meeting with his cousin, Admiral Mark Kerr, who offered him some advice that later saved his life. At the Admiral's suggestion and under his supervision, Montagu purchased a Gieve waistcoat. This was a new safety device that could be worn as an ordinary waistcoat on board ship but inflated to become more buoyant than a cork lifebelt.

The *Persia*, 7,900 tons gross, was built by Caird and Company at Greenock, Clydeside, in 1900 and was one of the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company's last single-screw passenger liners.

On what was to be her last voyage she sailed from London on 18 December 1915 but to avoid the long passage across the Bay of Biscay and through the Straits of Gibraltar, Montagu and Eleanor travelled overland from London joining the *Persia* when she sailed from Marseilles on 26 December.

The first few days of the *Persia's* voyage were deceptively uneventful, although Montagu was apprehensive. "You seem depressed", remarked a fellow passenger, Colonel The Hon. E. St Aubyn. "I am afraid I shall be until we get to Port Said", replied Montagu.

THE U-BOAT FLEET

Port Said was at that time nearly 1,000 miles distant and Montagu, with his military experience, was more aware than most passengers of the vulnerability of the *Persia* to the 21 inch torpedoes of the U-boat fleet.

The *Persia* was carrying 501 people, a large cargo of Royal Mail but no war material. About 11,000 mail bags were offloaded at Malta but about 30,000 remained on board, intended for delivery to Egypt and India.

Thursday 30 December was a fine day, the sea was moderate and at lunchtime the *Persia* was 71 miles SE by S off Cape Martello, a promontory on the south eastern coast of Crete. In the distance, unseen by the liner's crew, submarine U-38 com-

manded by Max Valentiner had the *Persia* in sharp focus in its periscope. The order "fire" was given to the torpedo room and moments later, from the deck of the *Persia*, second Officer Wood noticed a torpedo track four points on the port bow.

One second later, at 1.05 p.m., whilst soup was being served in the dining saloon, there was a violent explosion below the waterline on the port side of the *Persia*, abaft No. 3 hatch. The deck was split open and from the pungent odour of guncotton and TNT seeping through the shattered timber, Montagu realized that the liner had been torpedoed. One of the boilers exploded, causing still more damage.

There had been a lifeboat drill the previous day and this was probably why the passengers reacted calmly, dispersing to their cabins to put on their lifebelts before going to their lifeboat stations.

There are two different accounts of Montagu's and Eleanor's experiences in the moments just before and immediately after the torpedo struck. According to one account they were on deck when the ship was hit. Montagu escorted her to a lifeboat and in keeping with the tradition of 'women and children first', resigned himself to going down with the ship.

If this account is correct then Eleanor's subsequent fate is a mystery. She may have fallen overboard from her lifeboat, or perhaps it capsized or sank. Whatever happened, she was never seen again. Montagu survived, as will be related later.

HAND-IN-HAND

The other account of the incident contends that they were in the saloon when the torpedo exploded. Unable to reach a lifeboat they went down with the *Persia* hand-in-hand. They were then parted by the turbulence. Montagu was blown to the surface by a vortex but Eleanor was drowned.

In their book on Montagu, Lady Troubridge and Archibald Marshall included a graphic description of his experiences during and immediately after the shipwreck. We must presume that they obtained their information from reliable sources or even at first-hand. Their story does not once mention Eleanor in the vital passages describing the sinking of the ship but it does state that Montagu was in the saloon when the torpedo exploded.

So what really happened? No one will ever be certain but in order to advance a plausible theory, we have pieced together the following recon-

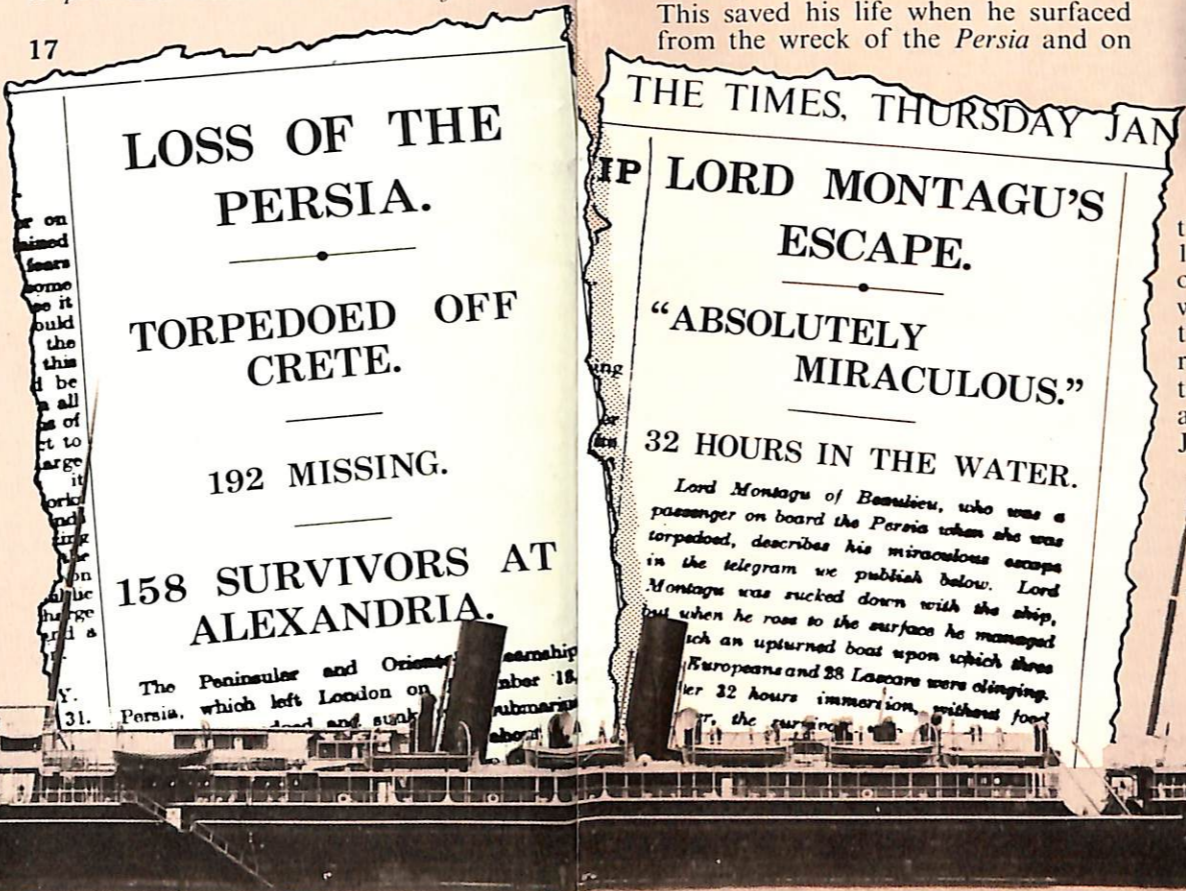
struction of the event, largely derived from the Troubridge/Marshall book.

The torpedo's point of impact was abaft the dining saloon, below and only a short distance behind the table at which Montagu and Eleanor were sitting. They went to their cabins to don their lifebelts (in Montagu's case, his Gieve waistcoat) in accordance with the previous day's drill and then set off for the lifeboat

There was no panic. The behaviour of the passengers at this stage of the emergency was exemplary.

Events then began to move too quickly to reward the passengers for their level-headedness. The ship listed alarmingly to port and within two minutes of the

17



explosion she was at such an angle that it was impossible to stand on the deck. Realizing that the list would prevent the port lifeboats being launched, Montagu and Eleanor clambered up the inclined deck to the starboard rail.

Just as they reached the rail the Persia began to sink rapidly, stern first. A wall of water engulfed them and, hand-in-hand, they went down with the ship. Many feet below the surface they were parted by the violent vortex created by the sinking vessel. Moments later Montagu was blown to the surface.

The incident had lasted only five minutes but during that time 335 passengers and members of the crew were lost. Among them was Eleanor Velasco Thornton. Her body was never found.

"MIRACULOUS ESCAPE"

The news of the sinking of the *Persia* reached England on 3rd January 1916 and for several days *The Times* carried reports of the attack and the experi-

ences of the survivors. Lord Northcliffe personally wrote Lord Montagu's obituary. But three days later, after surviving for 32 hours in an overcrowded and half-submerged boat, Montagu was rescued and was able to cable his own account of the incident to *The Times*.

Montagu's story occupied more than half a column on page three of *The Times* on 6 January. The next day the newspaper published the names of the passengers who had drowned. Among the names was Thornton, Miss E. V.

Today one of the exhibits among Montagu's memorabilia at Palace House, Beaulieu is his Gieve waistcoat. This saved his life when he surfaced from the wreck of the *Persia* and on

A LOVE AFFAIR
 The memorials in Beaulieu church honour two extraordinary people and the close relationship that endured between them for 13 years. For Lord Montagu and Eleanor Thornton had a love affair that blossomed when she left the Automobile Club in 1902 and ended only when they were parted so tragically during the destruction of the *Persia*.



Soon after their love affair began they had a daughter, born on 5 April 1903. Eleanor saw her daughter only once, and that was on the day she was born, but Montagu provided for the child for the rest of his life, saw her regularly and established a trust fund to ensure her wellbeing until she reached adulthood. She knew him as 'Uncle John' but realized from an early age

17, 18 and 19. Tragic loss: For several days, *The Times* carried reports of the sinking of the *Persia* and the miraculous escape of Lord Montagu (pictured above with Eleanor at the helm of a motor boat). However, the body of Eleanor was never found.

that he was her father.

In October 1916 Montagu wrote a letter to his daughter. It remained sealed for 13 years, until he died. In the letter he explained his relationship with Eleanor in these terms:

If you ever have to open this letter it will probably be because I am no longer in the world to tell you. In the ordinary work of life I was a pioneer of motoring and she was secretary to Mr Claude Johnson. She began to like me and realized my feelings as well. Finally in 1902, in February, she became my secretary and together we started the "Car". Before long we discovered that we loved each other intensely and our mutual scruples vanished before our great love.

We were introduced to the daughter of John Montagu and Eleanor Thornton whilst researching this article. She was living a quiet and contented life with her husband, a retired naval officer, in a tiny village deep in the English

countryside. She had never before discussed her parents with anyone outside her own family and the Montagu family and asked not to be identified; so we will call her Sarah Eleanor (although 'Sarah' was not her real name).

Fifty years after the death of her father, she remembered him with deep affection. She also had a high regard for her mother, even though she never met her. She showed us many photographs, letters and other mementoes of the Thornton family, without which this story could not have been written.

On 'Sarah' Eleanor's sideboard stood tiny framed portraits of Frederick and Sarah Anne Thornton, beside the clock presented to Frederick Thornton in 1882. We also examined the testimonial that accompanied it—still carefully preserved and in almost mint condition. On her mantelpiece stood two sculptures by Sykes, a bronze head and a statuette, for which she believed her mother had been the model. Jo Phillips was able to confirm this and that the head was "an absolute portrait" of Eleanor. Above the mantelpiece was the pastel of Martha and on a bookshelf nearby was Eleanor's hymn book, the Divinity prize she won as a girl of nine.

On 18 June 1979 the first draft of this article was completed and posted to 'Sarah' Eleanor so that she could be the first to read the many details of her mother's life she had helped us discover. A few days later she replied, saying that she had read the article with great interest and correcting one or two details. By then we had solved three important mysteries that had puzzled 'Sarah' Eleanor all her life: where and when her mother was born and where she had completed her education.

An hour after we received 'Sarah' Eleanor's reply, Edward Montagu telephoned to tell us that she had died on 23 June. Sadly, we were never able to show her this final and more complete text. But without her help it would not have been possible at last to place on record the story of Eleanor Velasco Thornton, the lady who helped create a legend.



19
 We thank the following for their help during the production of this article:
 Cdr A. E. Fanning (Admiralty Compass Observatory)
 The General Register Office
 The Grey Coat Hospital
 The Institution of Electrical Engineers
 Leamington Spa Reference Library
 Mr William Lister (Muirhead Group)
 Lloyd's of London
 Mrs Nesta Macdonald
 Lord Montagu of Beaulieu
 The National Motor Museum
 Mrs Jo Phillips
 P & O
 The Registrars of Births at Lambeth, Leamington Spa and Wandsworth
 Mrs Elizabeth Varley
 Wandsworth Reference Library