

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 1. The Most Honourable Alfonso, 13th Marquess of Bilgewater



BILGEWATER HOUSE

Stagnation-on-the-Cess  
Derbyshire  
tel: Cess 69

22 March 1993

Mons.<sup>r</sup> M. Jean Tétreault  
Canadian Conservation Institute  
1030 Innes Road  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C8  
Canada

My Dear Mons.<sup>r</sup> Tétreault,

When my sister and I were asked to make a modest contribution to Recent Setbacks in Conservation we were delighted. We were also under the impression that the publication was devoted to foiling the attempts of organizations like Green Peace, and others of the lunatic fringe. Since we have extensive holdings in Brazil, among them the world's largest chemical fertilizer plant, we eagerly responded in the affirmative to your invitation.

Canada is a country for which we have always had a tender spot, as it were, since our dearly beloved uncle, Jocelyn, Lord Thanet of the Clyde, was briefly Governor General during those dark days of WW II. It is to dear Jocy, as he was known to the family, that the Bilgewaters owe their interests in Canada, among them Ye Olde Pig and Whistle Gin Co., Ltd., and the Calgary Reefer Tobacco, Co., Ltd., a subsidiary of Imperial Tobacco.

Therefore, when we discovered that your publication has to do with restoration and that sort of thing (GOD--speaking of the lunatic fringe) you can imagine, dear sir, our immense disappointment. However, due to our long-standing sentimental and commercial ties to your country, it was impossible for us to renege on our initial promise to supply you with something. I trust you will find the enclosed excerpt to your satisfaction.

With all best wishes, I am,

Sincerely,

Alfonso, 13th Marquess of Bilgewater,  
17th Earl of Cess, K.G., K.B., K.T.,  
Grand Regent of the Realm, Lord High  
Protector of the Monarch, Grand Admiral  
of the Atlantic, &c., &c., &c.

contd.

Excerpts from H.M. Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire's Court of Enquiry's Proceedings into the Disastrous Conflagration on the Morning of 25 December 1989 which Destroyed the Belzamine Wing of Bilgewater House, near Stagnation-on-the-Cess, Derbyshire, Seat of the Marquesses of Bilgewater.

Justice Ridley Laroon presiding for H.M. Lord Lieutenant, the Most Honourable Alfonso, 13th Marquess of Bilgewater.

Laroon: Please state your name and occupation.

Bilgewater: Really, sir, you know damned well who I am.

Laroon: Nonetheless, your Lordship, if you please, for the records.

Bilgewater: Alfonso Alexander Andrew Anthony Butts, Marquess of Bilgewater.

Laroon: Your profession?

Bilgewater: Profession?! Really!

Laroon: Yes, M'Lord.

Bilgewater: Grand Regent of the Realm, &c., &c., &c.

Laroon: Thank you, M'Lord.

Bilgewater: By the way, Laroon, I suggest you swear in the other witnesses so we can deal with this as informally as possible.

Laroon: That's highly unusual, M'Lord.

Bilgewater: Whose court is this anyway? Must I take the bench?

Laroon: That will not be necessary. [The following witnesses are sworn in: The Lady Alice of Wallow-by-the-Pond, Countess Shurebutt; Charles, 9th Marquis de Grouchy, Marechal de France; Lambastus, Burggraf von Zaltzt; Sir Richard and Lady Shade; Colonna Pier's-Sonne, Lord Bushtucker; Lord and Lady Playfair; Consuela Bergitta de Fel 'Accio; Ricardo, her companion; Chiquitta, Contessa di Snapperri di Nero; Franz Friederich Rupert Georg Thantraub Prinz Hohe und Lohe zu Sturm und Drang and his wife Imgard, nee Grafyn Sletsky; Mr. and Mrs. Kirk Binderfutz of Tusch, Wisconsin; Count Viktor Volinsky, Adjutant to Lord Bilgewater; Lord Stormley of Brom; Lord and Lady Dash; Lady Esher of Powderdown; Vincent, Lord Tinsley of Frigging; Dr. Clive Hember-Oydes.]

Laroon: And, now, M'Lord, could you perhaps tell the Court something about Bilgewater House by way of background information.

Bilgewater: Delighted to. Bilgewater House has been standing in one form or another at Stagnation-on-the-Cess from 1022. At that time the place was still swarming with Saxons and was, I believe, called "Stankurd." The first part of the house, still known as the Cour de Bunge--pronounced "Cawbun"--was erected by Gonnore the Red between 1018-1024 and was what is commonly referred to by castle devotees as the donjon. It must have been a terribly unsightly structure for the great aesthete of the family, Phillibert, 7th Marquess, once wrote of it, "All stones and mortar, cold as a witch's tit on All Hallow's Eve, grey and musty." Phillibert commissioned Antoine Lejeune, an amateur architect from Algiers, to design a rococo interior for the donjon and the Cour de Bunge became henceforth known as the Orangerie. Country Life informed the family some years ago that Bilgewater House is the only house in the realm with an orangerie without windows. Peregrine, 8th Marquess, was responsible for commissioning Robert Adam to design the Belzamine Wing which was put up in a great tempo between 1755-1756. The wing abutts the Delamarr and Cathay Wings and leads on to the Shurebutt Esplanade which opens onto Butts Bastion which is really the heart of the house rather than that dreadful Cour de Bunge. There are some 458 rooms in all in the house.

Laroon: Why were the other witnesses at the house?

Bilgewater: Damned silly question, Laroon. You know as well as I do that we entertain a small party of friends every year during the holiday season and 1989 was no different from all other years.

Laroon: Yes M'Lord, it's for the record. Could you relate the circumstances under which the fire occurred?

Bilgewater: After a gloriously over-indulgent dinner we retired early on the morning of the 25th December, the birthday of our Lord if I am not mistaken. Poor Lord Playfair has for years suffered from.... You really ought to ask Lord Playfair--it's his condition you know.

Laroon: Yes, quite. Lord Playfair?

Playfair: Suffered from it for years. Fonsy always lays on a good spread, y'know, and that evening I overate.

Lady Playfair: As usual.

Laroon: Thank you, M'Lady. M'Lord?

Playfair: Glorious Lady Curzon soup--had four bowls of it, and one or two plovers too many, and then the claret--Chateau Lussche 1948--exquisite, but it's dynamite it is, all together like that.

Laroon: Perhaps the doctor would like to clarify for us?

Hember-Oydes: Yes, Lord Playfair's problem is a chronic gastroenteric condition commonly referred to as galloping flatulence. The only real relief is to let rip as it were.

Mrs. Binderfutz: Really, sir, in America we don't use such language.

Laroon: Yes, madam, but we're not in America now, are we? Thank you, doctor. But, what does all of this have to do with the fire?

Playfair: Everything, sir, I am afraid, or so I have been told. If I may continue?

Laroon: By all means.

Playfair: Well, at about ten minutes to one in the morning I retired to my bedroom.

Lady Playfair: We've had separate bedrooms for years, thank the merciful God.

Playfair: Yes, poor dear, blew her out of bed once in Palm Beach and she broke both her wrists. Anyway, I had a monstrous bout of wind and dashed up to my room.

Bushtucker: Dash is putting it mildly. When you passed me you had already been around the corridor twice.

Playfair: A little run before retiring--good for the heart. Anyway, when I got to my room the pressure suddenly subsided so I lighted one of my Cuban cigars. Most unwise too. Tobacco encourages the condition and there you are. I fled to the water closet having put down my cigar on the corner of the night table. Evidently, I must have blasted it onto the bed.

De Grouchy: I can confirm the blast since my bedroom abutted Lord Playfair's. Knocked my toupee askance.

Consuela: Yes, Ricardo and I were terrified that the chandelier above us was going to come crashing down on top of us. Our room was under Lord Playfair's.

Bilgewater: I wish it had. How dare you bring such an Italo-Phalo to Bilgewater House, and at Christmas!

[A large portion of the ensuing testimony has been dropped from this excerpt in the interests of propriety and brevity, including certain material which was sent to this journal by way of an addendum.]

Bilgewater: The fire brigade did an excellent job. Put up a ladder and saved Lord Playfair by the skin of his whatever, but the Belzamine Wing was a goner.

Laroon: Are you going to re-build the wing?

Bilgewater: Of course. Had some of those meddling National Trust and English Heritage people up here not long ago. They gave us free advice about everything we had done wrong, were doing wrong, and would undoubtedly keep on doing wrong. We had no respect whatsoever for the historical surroundings in which we were so privileged to live and of which we are the humble caretakers who would soon be passing on, and our greatest responsibility was not to ourselves but to posterity. It was scandalous that we were sitting on--you don't sit on those chairs do you?--you still eat off that Sevres service?--God, those Venetian curtains are about to go--you shouldn't pull them closed like that--and on it went until I reminded them that the House was still private, not open to the public, thank God, and that I'd do with it as I liked. Damned restoration people always think they own your things. Ever noticed that?

Lady Alice: Certainly have. Had some of those snooty university picture people up here not too long ago to look at some of our Claudes--we have 40 or so--and they were going on about gentle surface cleaning this and a touch of reintegration there, and a bit of balance there with the lights and darks, and we must be careful of "our" pictures. Gave the job to Mr. Mort over at Napier. A good cleaning was what they needed and a good cleaning was what they got.

Bilgewater: Exactly. And I told those blasted Trust Heritage people I'd shoot the first one ever came back. We're having a group of Eastern European blokes in to do the restoration and they've promised us everything will be like it was in about a year's time. Rather cheap too. Damned conservation types--can't even make a good fertilizer anymore let alone fix up your house a bit.

[End of transcript]

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 2. To the Editors

I will sue Mr. McCluskey, and his children's children, and the demon seed of all editors (re: *Why, Oh Why, Do paintings Crack?*) Any idiot can understand my drivel, and many have. Tree bark cracks, mud cracks, and Jimmy cracks. Eggs crack, you crack, we all crack some more. Need I say more? I think not. I rest my case. I drop my load. I wipe the floor with you.

Yours in hell, etc.

Baggins Bilbo, Bag End, The Shire, N.Y.