



**Captain Charles Radclyffe**

Without doubt Captain Charles Radclyffe was the most influential person in the village during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Being looked upon throughout my time as the Squire of Lew, it was obvious that his character would have sat well with the Feudal system, his whole demeanour commanded respect, from my point of view he earned it. I liked him very much. In over 70 years that I have had dealings with him we never fell out. We did have differences of opinions, having served on both the Parish Council and Church Council as well as being next door neighbours; these were always resolved in the end. Like the time that several of us, the younger fraternity, wanted to get rid of the Pews and convert the Church into a dual purpose village hall. We were left in no doubt that it was not going to happen in his day!

My first encounter with him was as an 8 year old choir boy singing in the St Mary's Church Choir in Bampton. The Captain, who had just returned from active service in the war, wanted to make the Harvest Festival at Lew something special that year and arranged for the Choir to perform in the church. Most members of the choir had access to transport to share for their trip to Lew. But how do you get 12 boisterous young choir boys from Bampton to Lew? "No problems" says the Captain "I will pick them up after they have sung at Bampton." So when we came out of St Mary's after singing at their Harvest Festival, there on the Church Green was the Captain with this big Horse Box, ramp lowered ready for us to be loaded up in the back. The ramp was raised and screwed up to the back of the lorry so that we could not escape: no seats or seat belts, no lights and nothing to hold on to as we trundled along the road to Lew. Once there the ramp was lowered in the middle of the road and we were unloaded and herded into the church like a flock of sheep. If we thought our trip was a bit antiquated and rough, what awaited us inside the church was even more quaint and ancient. There was no electricity

in the Church, the heating was by a 'pot belly' old coke stove. The lighting was by Oil Lamps and candles, and the organ was powered by 'pedal' power. To assist the organist to see the music there were a few extra candles placed on the shelf right next to her. Us boys being a bit peeved at the second class treatment we had received with the transport, decided to do what choir boys do best and play up a little, so we surreptitiously tried to blow the candles out. When the words 'when' and 'who' were in the Hymn book they were ideal for us to put plenty of puff into them to make the candles flicker and if successful, go out! If I remember rightly the Carol 'Ding Dong Merrily on high' was a good one as it finishes with the word 'Hosanna' and that's a good word for candle blowing.

My next encounter with him was when, as a fifteen year old my brother and I were sent out on contract work with, for that time 1952, a very modern Combine Harvester to harvest the captain's corn. This gave me a new insight to him. He didn't suffer fools gladly but at the same time, he wanted everything done quickly and cheaply getting us there before the corn was ripe! A long and hard discussion ensued; as I said earlier we soon talked it through with him and a compromise was reached – we returned two weeks later!

The Captain was always a strong supporter of Lew Church and there are several references in the Church Minute Book where he and a couple of the Parishioners put their hands in their pockets to avoid the Church going Bankrupt. He was always generous providing workmen to carry out maintenance and repairs on the church. He was Church Warden from 1959 until his death in 2017, defying all the new church rules that a Churchwarden can only do five years of duty. I have to admit though that in his later years he was not up to all the rigours of the job. The church management, out of their great respect for all the service that he had given to the church, bestowed upon him the role of an Honorary church Warden.

In 1959 when we came to live in Lew the Captain was well established as a Horse trainer of some repute having trained winners of both the Grand National and the Cheltenham Gold Cup. Yes he certainly put Lew 'on the map'!



Often on Boxing Day for the traditional 'Meet' of the Old Berkshire Hunt, The Captain would hold it at Lew House. This event was always well attended, bringing many people from far and wide to Lew to participate in the traditional drink from the Hunt Cup.

**Captain Radclyffe Showing Her Majesty the Queen and her mother around the Stables at Lew**

Many of the Famous Owners, Trainers and Jockeys were often seen visiting Lew, the most famous being Her Majesty the Queen who along with her mother had horses being prepared by the Captain. For this the Queen awarded him with the 'Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order' in 2002. This is third highest award in the country.

Often on these occasions the world renowned Chef Raymond Blanc would prepare the meal at Lew House. Horses owned by the Aga Khan were also trained at Lew which once led to a minor altercation between the Captain and me. I had bought an 'in foal' Shetland pony for my family; when the foal was born I put them both in my field next to the Captain's. After a few days I got a call from the Captain complaining about the standard of horses that I was keeping next to the field where the Aga Khan's horses were. Not knowing much about horses, the Captain spent quite some time explaining to me why this was not good for his business. So accepting the bribe of a large bottle of whiskey, I moved my ponies to another field.



### **Captain Radclyffe's inauguration celebrations was a great day of celebration for the village**

The Captain was appointed to being the Sherriff of Oxfordshire and arranged a great party for all his acquaintances; this was indeed a great day for the villagers who were also invited. This appointment opened many doors for him and gave him the power of attending all the local Magistrates' Courts in the area. He often amused me by saying how he took great delight in attending a hearing if there was something a bit

spicy on the go. He certainly had a good sense of humour. One day when a newcomer moved into our village, the Captain made a point of visiting him to welcome him and drove around to his place. The Captain got out of his car and went over to the newcomer, shook his hand as they introduced themselves. The newcomer gave his name and invited the Captain to call him by his Christian name, the Captain in his reply said that everyone called him Captain, to which the newcomer who was ex Army, with a dislike of the Ranks replied, "Look, I do not want to pull Rank over you so what shall I call you?" With that the Captain replied "Oh! Then call me Charles." With that they chatted for at least half an hour and got on extremely well. As the captain was getting back into his car the Captain turned to him and said "by the way ol' chap, what Rank were you?" "A Private" the newcomer replied. The Captain looked him straight in the eye, smiled and said "good one." From then on, great respect was enjoyed by them both.

I had no problems with calling him Captain as working on the farm in the early 1950s I was exempt from National Service so I avoided having to salute and honour people from a higher rank. To me, calling him Captain was more of a nickname and in a way hinted of familiarity that we were both quite comfortable with.

He had a wonderful way with persuasion. If ever he wanted to borrow any of my equipment, he would phone me and begin the conversation with incredible praise for the way he had seen my dogs working the cows. Then when he got me feeling rather smug, he would drop in his request. "I say old chap, would you have a four wheel trailer I could borrow to get my hay in?" Though a story that I never let on to him about was in my first year at University Farm, all the cows had their individual standings in the sheds for milking. On one foggy October morning I sent my dog out across the fields as was normal to get the cows in for milking whilst I prepared the milking equipment. When the dog had got them in, I noticed there were four standings empty, so these cows were obviously missing. So I started the milking as I sent the dog off to find the missing cows, after an hour or so I had finished the milking with no sign of my dog or the four missing cows, so I set out to look for them. As I got over the brow of the hill I could see a cloud of steam coming my way and in there were my four cows along with about forty of the captain's sheep followed by the dog. So I quickly got them all in, milked the cows, and with the dog took the sheep back to where he had found them with my four cows that had got into the Captain's field without the captain knowing.

At his peak the Captain employed many workers, what with the Farm and the Horses. There was a well-run Dairy herd in those days as well as a flock of Sheep along with a large Arable section. At peak times he would employ members of the RAF who not only wanted to earn an extra 'bob or two' handling bales of hay and straw but to experience life in the countryside.

There were a lot of young stable lads involved with the horses who 'lived in' and the Captain decided to get some Gym equipment for them to train with. There were a couple of his lads



who had joined the Bampton weightlifting Club that I ran at the old school room in Lew, so they probably inspired him. This led to an interesting meeting for him and proved what a small world we live in.

**Dave Prowse**

**Darth Vader – Green Cross code man Performing in Bampton W.I. Hall 1965**

In the Captains words. "Donald, I've just been up to London to get some training equipment for my Stable Lads, so I went into Harrods Sports section (no surprises there then) and I met this enormous man, nearly seven feet tall, he gave me tremendous advice on what I should have. So I paid him and gave him the address as to where to deliver it all. When I said Lew, he looked at me and said, 'oh I know it, do you know Don Rouse? And I said indeed I do, he's my neighbour!" It was quite a surprise for the Captain as the salesman was none other than the famous actor Dave Prowse, better known as Darth Vader in the Star Wars Films as well many other films. He was also famous for being the Green Cross Code man, a government promotion Road Safety film. He was also once Britain's Strongest man as well as the British Heavy weight weightlifting champion representing Great Britain in the Olympic Games. He had been to Lew and competed against Bampton on several occasions.

The Captain had an aura about him that always commanded respect throughout his life which at the time we all accepted. But of course the times were changing and people born in the 1960s were of a different ilk, with many teenagers not accepting the respect that was naturally shown for people like the captain. A confrontation with a teenage JCB Digger driver shocked him so much that he came into our kitchen to sit down with a cup of tea and talk about it to recuperate. He was shaking, more in anger I think as he couldn't put the teenager on a charge for insubordination!

You see the County Highways department decided to widen the main road through Lew. If you look at the Barn doors on the road side of University Farm you will notice that if they were to open today they would impede the traffic using the road, yet before the road widening there was no problem. To widen the road they excavated some six feet of the grass verge, put in hardcore and applied the Tarmac. What this teenage Digger driver couldn't get used to was that the main telephone cable linking Lew to the exchange in Bampton ran along the side of the road. Every day without fail he would dig through the cable cutting off our telephones; this was in the days before mobile phones. So you can understand the frustration that we all felt. For the captain trying to run such a high powered business it must have been unbearable. He tolerated it for a couple of days and then his anger got the better of him and he went to the digger driver and told him in no uncertain terms what he thought of him. To which the digger driver with complete disrespect for the captain, replied "F\*\*\* Off." As the captain said when being consoled with the cup of tea, "Never, ever, have I been spoken to like that." He was really shaken by the change that was happening in society.

Many famous trainers and jockeys have passed through the Captain's hands and gone on to great things in the world of Horse Racing. I would like to think they enjoyed their time in our village. Nick Gaselee, the famous trainer who trained the 1992 Grand National winner and whose daughter was a Bridesmaid to Lady Diana Spencer was working for the captain the night his big barn caught fire and set to with the villagers to help limit the damage.



### **Young Dutch disabled riders**

Captain and Mrs Radclyffe host a group of Dutch Handicapped riders and their carers from Oxford's Twin City. Leiden.

Showing them the Stables and Horse training facilities.



### **Lew Stables**

**Still in safe hands with Patrick and Marcus at the helm, but under new ownership.**

Running the stables now are two of the Captains prodigies, Patrick Foley and his son Marcus. In the horse world Patrick has built up a name for himself with his ability at 'Breaking in' young horses whilst Marcus has ridden winners for her Majesty the Queen and is now establishing himself as trainer in his own right on the farm where he was born!

It is great to see horses back again at the Stables of Lew House, though I am sure the commuting motorists now using the main road through Lew hope that things will not return to the 1980s, when the Captain exercised his horses along the main road first thing in the morning, often at the same time as those from Bosley's stables at Lower Hadden Farm. It really caused chaos and a lot of aggro between trainers and the motorists, to say nothing about the credibility of the farming community.



### **Captain Charles Radclyffe**

**A fantastic character**

**Alert and full of mischief even in his nineties**