

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg

THE HON. PETER STRUTT MC - Managing Director and Chairman

July 2016

Peter Strutt (#10905 on the family tree) was at the helm of the Tolly Cobbold brewing business during troubled times. He had a full and remarkable life which we share with you by means of an abridged version of his obituary.

He won an MC with the Coldstream Guards in 1945 and subsequently had a successful career in the brewery business. The citation for his MC paid tribute to his inspirational leadership.

Peter Algernon Strutt, the fourth child of the 3rd Lord Belper, was born in London on June 18th 1924. He had three half-siblings by his father's first marriage to Eva Bruce (who subsequently married the 6th Earl of Rosebery). Michael, one of his half-brothers, died beside Prince George, Duke of Kent, in an air crash in 1942. Peter's mother, Angela, was the daughter of Douglas Tollemache, the founder of Tollemache Breweries in East Anglia.

The Strutts were Derbyshire spinners who traced their line back to Jedediah Strutt, born in 1726, and owed much of their fortune to their friendship with the Arkwrights, founders of the spinning frame that revolutionised the industry. The Belper title was created in 1856 for Jedediah's grandson, the Liberal politician Edward Strutt. The young Peter was brought up at the family seat, Kingston Hall, Northamptonshire. His elder brother Ronald, afterwards the 4th Lord Belper, and his sister Lavinia, later Duchess of Norfolk, were among the most noted equestrians of their generation, and as a boy Peter was an enthusiastic follower of the Quorn.

In 1937 he was to act as a page at the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, but an ear infection prevented him from attending. The King, hearing of his disappointment, exceptionally granted him a Coronation medal. Peter Strutt was educated at Eton before being commissioned into the Coldstream Guards in 1943. In October the following year he joined the 5th Battalion in Holland. Soon afterwards, while attending a briefing in a small house near the front line, a large enemy shell landed close by. Strutt, following his training regulations, dived under the nearest table. When he emerged a few moments later he found all the other, more experienced officers sitting calmly in their seats. "Dropped your pencil, Peter?" his CO asked sardonically.



Peter Strutt



The 1971 Tolly Cobbold Trophy for the July Newmarket Meeting, modelled on Tolly's 1920 trade mark

One night, after a hard-fought action in a small German town, he had billeted his platoon in a bank and saw a loaf of bread on the counter. He had a penchant for nibbling at any food left lying around, and tore off a corner and ate it. The fleeing Germans had laced it with rat poison and he was so ill that he had to have his stomach pumped out.

Strutt retired from the Army in 1947 and then moved to Suffolk, where he bought an estate and became a director of Tollemache Breweries. The company subsequently merged with Cobbold Breweries to become Tollemache and Cobbold Breweries. In Germany Strutt had adopted an Alsation puppy. He now acquired two giant Poodles, one of which occasionally performed on stage in amateur dramatics. These were followed by an African Green monkey called Zulu. The creature formed a close attachment to his master which could transform itself into a passionate jealousy of any other friends or visitors - particularly females. From its vantage point on top of a dresser it used to hurl plates at Strutt's girlfriends, and made no exception of his future wife.

Zulu's fate was finally sealed when he landed on the head of a colonel of the Coldstream Guards (later a major-general) and carried out a vicious attack. Thereafter the family confined itself to a more amenable menagerie consisting of ornamental pheasants, ducks, geese and a St Bernard.

In 1970 Strutt moved to Stutton Hall, with its fine Tudor house overlooking the Stour estuary, where he kept a pet fox in the Elizabethan walled garden. In 1977, when Tollemache & Cobbold Breweries was purchased by Ellerman Lines, the shipping company, he became the brewery's managing director. He later became its chairman and joined the board of Ellerman Lines. Strutt had a number of other business interests - he was also a director of the Britannia Building Society - and was involved in various charities and in local politics. He served as High Sheriff of Suffolk and was a Deputy Lieutenant of the county. He was a keen shot and skied until he was in his seventies.

His friends remember him as a great family man and a generous host, both at Stutton Hall and at the estate that for many years he rented in Ross-shire.

Abridged by Anthony Cobbold from the Daily Telegraph of November 17th 2007.

Note: Members of Sir Richard Arkwright's family appear elsewhere in the family tree; see #799.