

## THE ADEANE FAMILY



The Adeane family occupy an unusual position in recent British history. Michael Edward Adeane (1910-84) was Private Secretary to the Queen from 1953 to 1972, having previously been Assistant Private Secretary to her father George VI. His son, Edward (1939-2015), was Private Secretary to the Prince of Wales from 1979 to 1985. Michael's maternal grandfather (Sir Arthur Bigge, later Lord Stamfordham) had been the august Private Secretary to Queen Victoria from 1895 to 1901, then to the future George V until his own death in 1931.

It is perhaps difficult for those distant from the royal family to appreciate the importance of the role of Private Secretary. He (it is always a he, at least so far) is the principal link between the head of state and the government, notwithstanding the monarch's weekly discussion with the prime minister.

He must advise both and seek solutions to differences of opinion. He must guard his employer to an infinite degree, ensuring that nothing embarrassing or controversial enters the public domain. This was a particular problem for Edward Adeane, the last of the three in this article, who had to deal with, among other things, the runaway publicity of a royal separation where one party was anxious to have public support and the other was more closely bound by traditional discretion.

The local connection is through Sedlescombe. As always the records are not wholly complete, but it is clear that in about 1880 Michael's paternal grandfather (Admiral Edward Stanley Adeane CMG DL JP FRGS, 1836-1902, descendant of an East Anglian landowning family) retired to Jacob's Farm at Sedlescombe. This is just off Brede Lane, to the north-west of the village and near the site of the Powdermill reservoir that was to be opened between the wars.<sup>1</sup>



*Jacob's Farm, 2018 (from Batcheller Monkhouse)*

It is an old house, much changed over the last 800 years or so, though some mediaeval parts remain.

In 1875 the Admiral had married Lady Edith Isabella Dalzell, daughter of the Earl of Carnwath. After the Admiral's death in October 1902 his widow sold the property and returned to their London address at Eaton Place where she died in 1909. During their time in Sussex they had played the full part expected of their social position, supporting good causes and being noticed at events.



Their son Henry (born in 1882) spent much of his youth at Jacob's Farm. On leaving Winchester College he joined the Coldstream Guards, being gazetted in 1901 and promoted Captain in 1910. He is recorded in the 1911 census at the Guards Club in Pall Mall; he lived with his wife of one year, Victoria Eugenie Bigge (about 1882-1969) and his six-month old son Michael at 1 Dean Trench Street. He retired from the army in May 1913 but rejoined on the outbreak of

*from De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour*

war, when he resumed his rank of Captain, in the 4th Battalion. He was attached to the 1st Battalion when he went into action for the last time.

The Sedlescombe war memorial commemorates his death on 2 November 1914, in the first battle of Ypres. He has no known grave and his name is listed on the Menin Gate. This part of the battle was not well-managed, though the German attacks were finally repelled. On 28 October the Guards had been at Gheluvelde expecting an assault from the southern side of the Menin Road but it came from the north, in foggy weather.<sup>2</sup> The battalion was very severely mauled (which explains Adeane's attachment); by the end of 1 November only 120 men were left fit for fighting. Adeane was posted to the 1st Battalion on the next day and, as was so common, there was confusion between different parts of the army. This left an opening for the Germans, who took it. Only one officer was taken prisoner; nearly half the battalion was captured or killed, among them Adeane.<sup>3</sup> That the family was not short of money was shown by his will, just under £40,000.



In due course Henry's son Michael went to Eton and Magdalen College, Cambridge, and reached the rank of Lt Col in the Second World War. In 1953 he joined the royal household. In due course he was awarded the GCB and GCVO and on his retirement in 1972 became a life peer. He was awarded the GCB and the GCVO and was made a member of the Privy Council.

*Michael Edward Adeane, 1953* (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

Michael's son Edward followed the same royal road, beginning with being a page at the Queen's coronation in 1953. Educated at Eton and Magdalene College, Cambridge, he became a barrister, specialising in libel suits but ceasing practice when appointed to the Prince of Wales in 1979. An obituary reports:

Adeane was in the Prince's service when he became engaged to Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. This led to an amusing misunderstanding in the forecourt of Albany, where Adeane had a set. In the late spring of that year, Adeane informed the porters that he was expecting "Lady Diana" to lunch with him. There was instant panic, and valuable cars were moved to safer parking places, in fear of the arrival of the 88-year-old Lady Diana Cooper in her brown Mini. She was a regular visitor to friends in Albany and her erratic driving and heterodox method of parking had caused them grief on many occasions in the past. The porters laboured in vain, since it was Lady Diana Spencer who drove up, parking her Mini Metro neatly.

This lunch did not lay the foundations for a felicitous relationship between the Prince's bride and his private secretary. Adeane soon found himself one of several figures who were sidelined by the nervous and suspicious Princess as she disposed in quick succession of a number of the Prince's long-serving and loyal staff. Nevertheless he was additionally appointed private secretary to the Princess in 1984, following the resignation of Oliver Everett.

In 1985 Adeane resigned after a number of disagreements, including accusations that he had made plans without consulting the Prince and that his style was too much of the old school. On the other hand, Adeane found that the Prince almost invariably did the opposite of what he advised. A point at issue was the lack of time that he spent in the Principality of Wales, something Adeane tried in vain to alter.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beryl Lucey: *Twenty centuries in Sedlescombe*

<sup>2</sup> <https://coldstreamguards.org.uk/pages/history>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.winchestercollegeatwar.com/archive/henry-robert-adeane/>

<sup>4</sup> The Daily Telegraph, 21 May 2015.