

INTERVIEW WITH HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF SOMERSET, JOHN SEYMOUR



THE CORONATION, JUNE 1953

“My grandfather [Evelyn Seymour] died in 1954, and I think he must have been ill or too frail to go to the coronation. My father hadn't taken over, so it was unlikely there was a family member there. I don't remember hearing any stories about it. But in the past, several dukes have carried the orb or sceptre.”



WHAT ROLE HAVE THE DUKES OF SOMERSET PLAYED AT THE CORONATION?

At least 9 Dukes of Somerset have carried the coronation orb since the 17th century. Evelyn Seymour [grandfather to the current duke] carried the sceptre with the cross at the coronation of George VI in 1937. The orb and sceptre are symbols of sovereignty.

MOVING TO BRADLEY HOUSE

“I was born in Devizes, in 1952. My father [Percy Seymour] was in the army then, and we lived in Devizes and Warminster before moving into Bradley House, after my grandfather [Evelyn Seymour] died in 1954. My father had served in the Wiltshire Regiment, and he fought in the war, in India, and in Burma. He was in the Arakan campaign against the Japanese. He never took up his place in the House of Lords, he wasn't particularly interested in that side of things.”

DEATH DUTIES

“After my grandfather died, my father had to pay death taxes on the Estate. It was about 70% of the Estate's value and so he never had money to invest in the house or estate. That's why in 1954, a large part of the Estate was sold off to pay the taxes – that included land in Witham Friary, many houses in Maiden Bradley, and farms like Rodmead and Newmead. [See map of the sale]

Evelyn Seymour, 17th Duke of Somerset, with the Duchess, Edith and a page



Footmen at the coronation

GROWING UP AT BRADLEY HOUSE

“It was very cold! In the ‘50s, the house had open wood fires, and later there was some basic central heating. If you look at photos of the house in the 1920s to 1940s, all the windows were always wide open. I think they were used to being colder then... We were three children and we had a nanny, Nanny Till, who looked after us in a kindly manner. My mother was amazingly open and attentive to us all, which was quite unusual for that time. My father loved cricket and he encouraged me to play – I remember there was an annual cricket match.”



Percy Seymour, later 18th Duke of Somerset, and his wife, Jane – the current Duke's parents

When I was six years old, I had Perthes disease – it damages the top of the thigh bone. At the time, children were often affected for life, but my mother wouldn't rest until she found someone to treat me differently. She was quite determined. They put my left leg in a caliper, and then on the right, I had to wear a 6-inch shoe extension. It took two years, but I got better. My party trick was riding my bike with the leg in a caliper up on the handlebars, and my other foot working the pedal.”

“My parents had household staff, including a chauffeur called McLeod who lived in the lodge by the front gate. My great-grandparents had a Rolls Royce – driven by McLeod – now in a second life as a wedding car in Torquay, but my father had some Jaguars. My father loved motor-racing, and one of our neighbours, Rob Walker, in Sutton Veny had a Formula One team. My father used to go to the Grand Prix. That's how I became interested in motorsports. I remember Stirling Moss [Formula One Racing Driver] used to come to parties at the house.”

“I remember these house parties when I was a child. My father loved jazz and especially Duke Ellington and the African American jazz scene. He even went to the US and followed Ellington on tour. There was always music at the soirees – he had a gramophone. There was even a story about him managing to play a record with a quill at school!”



THE ESTATE GARDENS

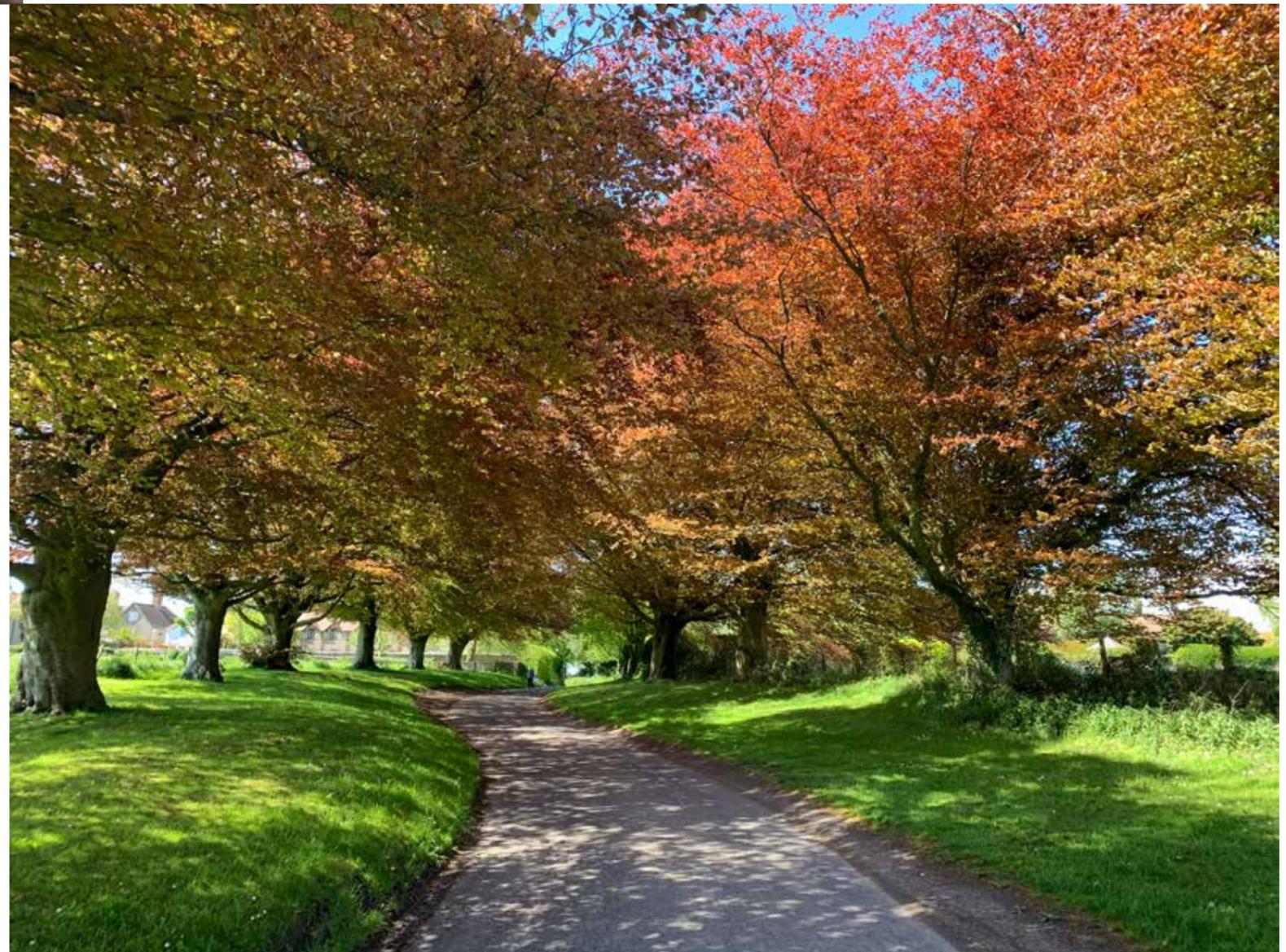
“My parents had a wonderful garden and especially the kitchen garden, which was managed by Mr. Cheverton. It was immaculate and it fed the house. It was where the Potting Shed spa is now. The large lawn was mown by Jack Seal, a groom on the Estate, initially taking hours to mow it with a horse and scythe, and then later he got a Dennis mower.”

“Today’s Community Garden was also part of the old Estate gardens, but it was derelict about 15 years ago. We liked the idea of it being a community garden rather than just individual allotments, bringing people together.”



BACK LANE AND THE COPPER BEECHES

“I think the Back Lane copper beeches were planted in conjunction with the Longleat Estate as you can find the same trees around Horningsham, of a similar age, and there has always been close cooperation between the two Estates. The copper beeches used to be inside the field fence, where they were prone to damage by the cows grazing, so I moved the fence to protect them. I also pulled out the straggly, ponticum rhododendrons and we now mow the grass banks, so it looks quite different today – and is now a very special place for all the village.”



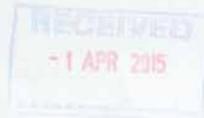
Elizabeth the Second by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories Queen Head of the Commonwealth Defender of the Faith To Our right trusty and right entirely beloved Cousin **John Michael Edward Duke of Somerset** Greeting WHEREAS by the advice and assent of Our Council for certain arduous and urgent affairs concerning Us the state and defence of Our United Kingdom and the Church We have ordered a certain Parliament to be holden at Our City of Westminster on the eighteenth day of May next ensuing and there to treat and have conference with the Prelates Great Men Great Women and Peers of Our Realm We strictly enjoining COMMAND you upon the faith and allegiance by which you are bound to Us that the weightiness of the said affairs and imminent perils considered (waiving all excuses) you be at the said day and place personally present with Us and with the said Prelates Great Men Great Women and Peers to treat and give your counsel upon the affairs aforesaid And this as you regard Us and Our honour and the safety and defence of the said Kingdom and Church and dispatch of the said affairs in nowise do you omit WITNESS Ourselves at Westminster the thirtieth day of March in the sixty-fourth year of Our Reign

BRENNAN

To **JOHN MICHAEL EDWARD DUKE OF SOMERSET**

A Writ of Summons to Parliament

BRENNAN



Recent summons to attend the opening of Parliament

HMS SOMERSET

In the '90s, the Royal Navy commissioned a set of frigates, which are all named after Dukes, and so they are called the Duke Class. There is one called HMS Somerset. One day I had an unexpected call from the First Seaford inviting me to the launch on the Clyde, in Scotland. I've greatly enjoyed the naval connection, and I've visited the frigate regularly over the years."

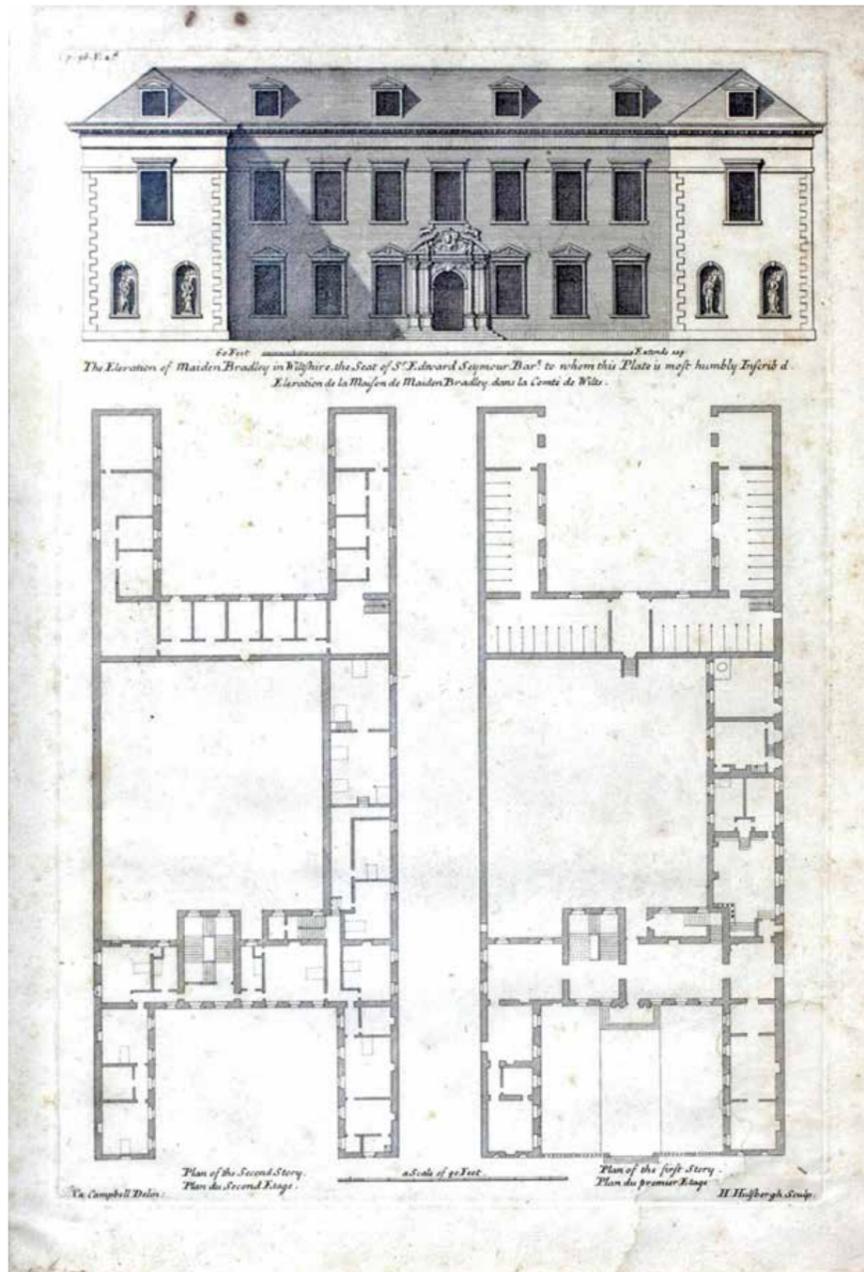
HMS Somerset is a Type 23 frigate. It was launched in 1994, is 130m long and travels at a speed of 28+ knots. It is one of 13 Type 23 frigates in the Duke Class, designed originally to tackle Soviet submarines in the cold war. It is currently based in Plymouth where it has just finished a major refit and is back at sea to test her fresh upgrades.

FUTURE OF FARMING

"Farming and food security is going to be far more important, and it will be all about the balance between food and the environment. The rural economy and food security and policy are some of my interests."

The Duke of Somerset has sat as a Crossbencher in the House of Lords since 2014.





Bradley House in the 18th century

WHAT IS THE SAME?

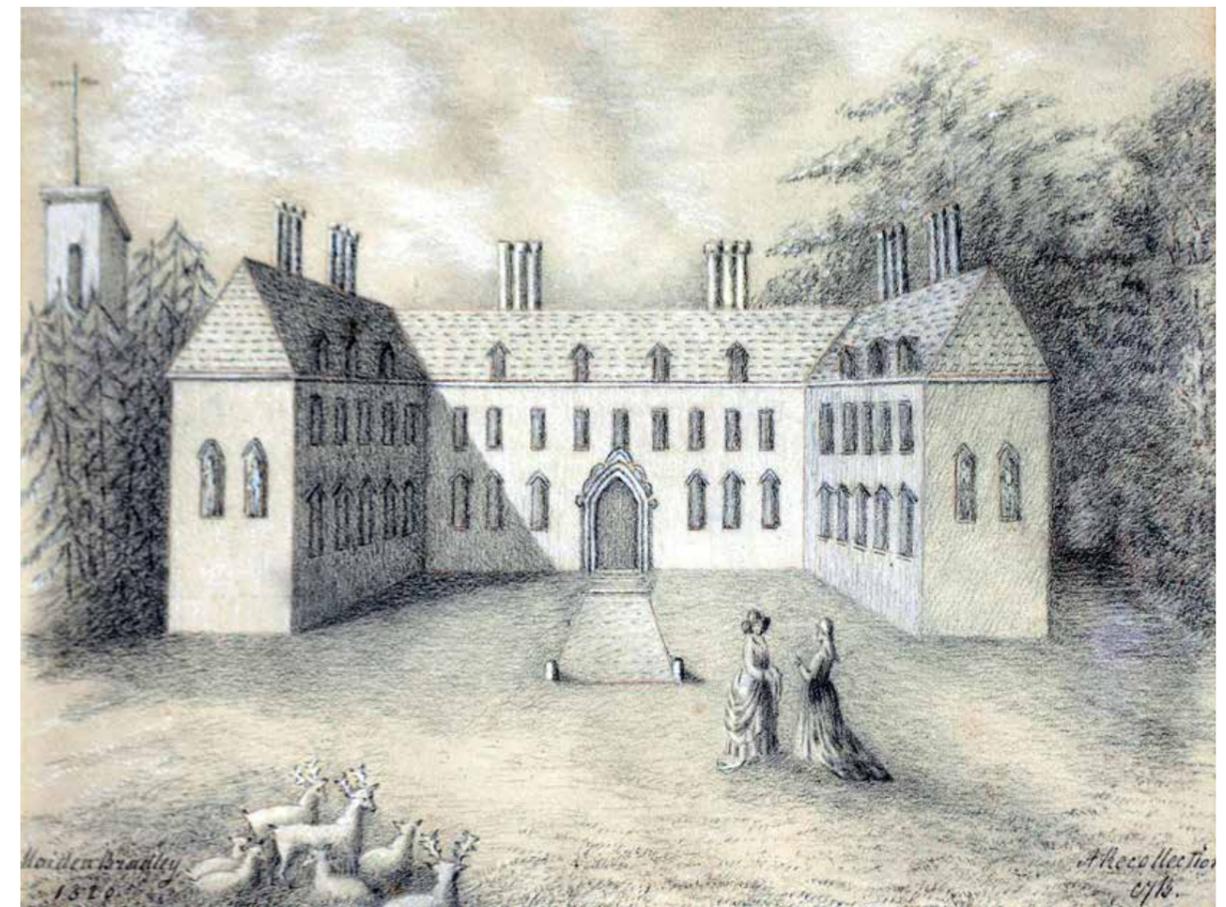
“The primary core of the house remains the same. Maybe if the 15th duke [Algernon St. Maur, 1846-1923] came back – he made a lot of changes to the house - he'd recognise things. He's buried up on Brimble Hill Clump.”

“The orientation of Bradley House was changed in 1822 when at least two thirds of the house was pulled down. Around this time Kingston Lane existed south of the church passing between the house and the church.”

“We lost a lot of our archives in fires, always a risk in these houses. There was a fire in the drawing room about 20 years ago. It was August and the sun was shining on a concave silver bowl which deflected the light onto a sofa. Luckily Dave Barnett was nearby, and he heard the alarm going and called the fire brigade. He saved the house.”

WHO WAS THE FIRST DUKE OF SOMERSET?

The first duke of Somerset was Edward Seymour, who received the title in 1547. He was the brother of Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII, who died after giving birth to the future Edward VI. Jane is the only wife of Henry VIII to be buried beside him in St George's Chapel, Windsor.

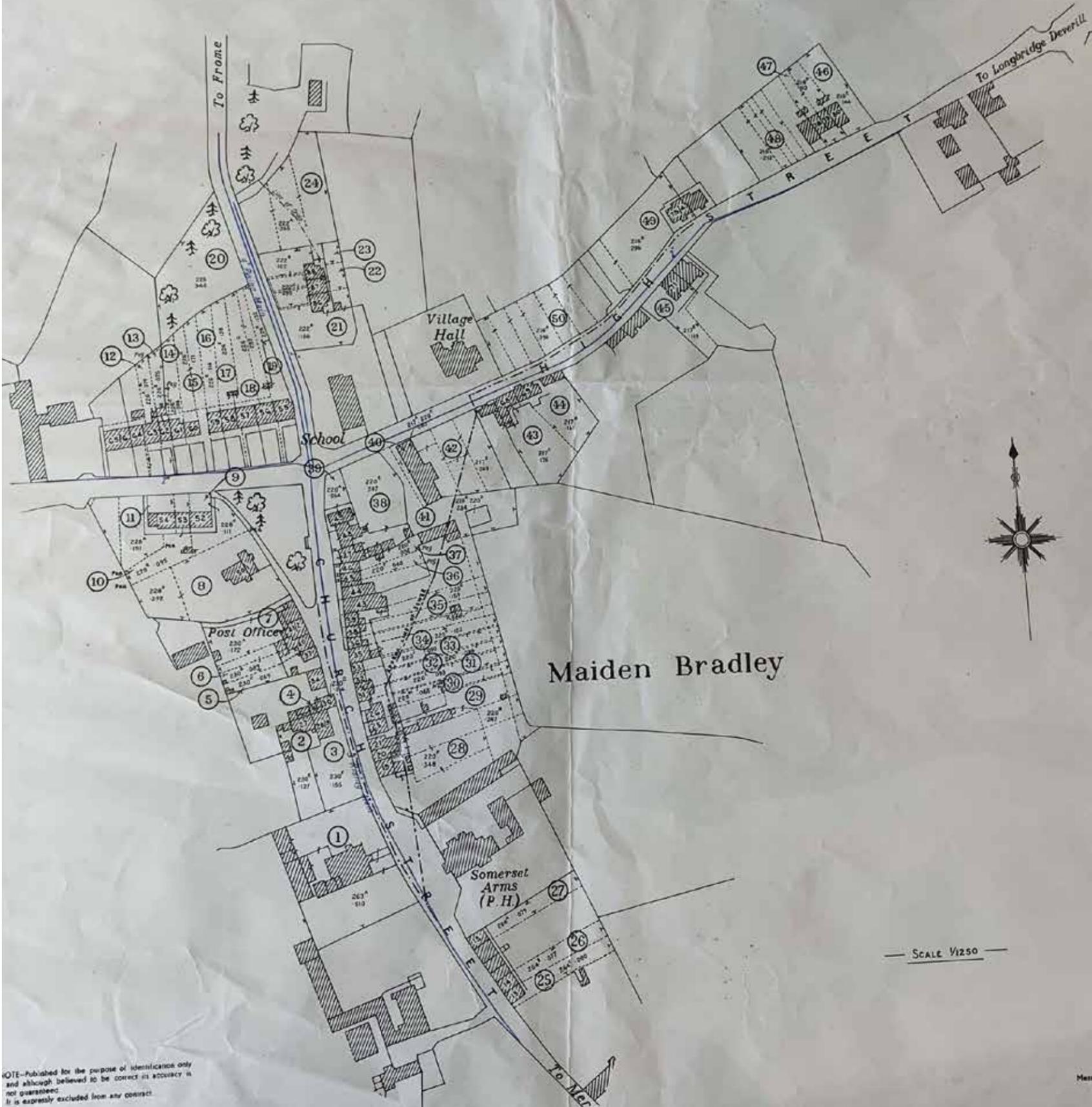


MEETING THE QUEEN

I've met the Queen at various events, and had lunch once at Windsor Castle, sitting between Her Majesty and her sister, Princess Margaret. I also travelled with both the Queen and Prince Philip in their carriage. Prince Philip was very approachable and down to earth. I think the Queen has been a great stabilising influence for the country, she's a rock, inspiring the country, through all the rapid change going on around her.”

A portion of the
MAIDEN BRADLEY ESTATE
WILTSHIRE

FOR SALE BY AUCTION BY
Messrs. RAWLENCE & SQUAREY
1953



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MAP OF THE SALE OF PART OF THE BRADLEY ESTATE 1953

