

Curiosities, Grotesqueries, Follies, & Strange Customs

Lord Berners (1883 - 1950)

Lord Berners (Gerald Tyrwhitt), a product of Eton, is a truly great example of the English eccentric. He was a distinguished diplomat, writer and composer, and also indulged in unorthodox collecting. In this particular case it was other people's calling or visiting cards. The reason for this was as unusual as the collection itself. When he loaned his house in Rome to friends, he would select from his collection the cards of the most notorious bores in London society. His butler in Rome was then instructed to deliver one or two of the cards each day. By this means the guests would spend much of their holiday diving for cover every time they heard someone at the door!



Faringdon House, Oxfordshire

At Faringdon House he kept whippets, which were decorated with diamond collars, and his doves were dyed in various pastel shades – harmless vegetable dyes actually provided in 1937 by Vera Sudeikina, later to become the wife of Stravinsky - a tradition I am pleased to say, repeated each Easter by the National Trust.



The Faringdon doves. The notice on the door reads, 'It is requested that all hats be removed'.

Notices around the Faringdon estate read:

Dogs will be shot: cats will be whipped –

although of course they weren't.

In 1935 he constructed the Faringdon Folly, a 140-foot tower of his own design in the parkland surrounding his home. When asked what purpose it served he explained: 'The great point of the tower is that it will be entirely useless'. To discourage anyone who thought of one obvious use for it, he put up a notice reading:

Members of the public committing suicide from this tower do so at their own risk.

From Petticoat Monthly