

Lord Lexden

Conservative peer and historian

The previously untold story of a Victorian scandal, Peter Jordaan regales the reader with some splendid anecdotes and salacious detail

A Secret Between Gentlemen

Lord Battersea's Hidden Scandal and the Lives It Changed Forever

By **Peter Jordaan**
 Publisher **Alchemie Books**

Shortly after Edward VII's coronation in August 1902, an immensely rich Liberal politician and aesthete found himself on the brink of total ruin.

Cyril Flower inherited substantial wealth and added to it massively through marriage to a Rothschild heiress and through his own work as a property developer in Battersea, to which middle- and working-class families flocked in the second half of the 19th century.

It was as Lord Battersea that he joined the red benches in 1892 after an inglorious spell in the Commons, where he was briefly a junior whip. Normally at that time such a record would have been thought wholly insufficient to warrant a peerage. But Flower had contributed most generously to Liberal party funds. It was in the 1890s that peerages began, on a small scale initially, to be given in exchange for handsome party-political donations. Flower was one of the first to buy a title.

William Gladstone wanted to make him a whip in the

Lords, where there were then only some two dozen Liberal peers. He would have had frequent contact with Queen Victoria. She would not hear of it. "He ought never to have been proposed to her," she said. She was repelled by his effeminacy.

At the end of October 1902 Battersea was arrested for homosexual offences. Firm evidence against him had emerged during the investigation of charges involving teenage boys against two charming, handsome young men from landed families. One was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment with hard labour, the other to five, at the end of their trial in Norwich.

They were part of a network of around 30 upper-class gay men, some of them well-known figures.

Battersea was seriously unwell when the police came to call. Short, guarded press reports predicted that he would be allowed to flee abroad. But nothing more happened. The press fell silent.

Arthur Balfour's Tory government, which was then in power, backed by Edward VII, had intervened to stop the case proceed-

"Battersea was seriously unwell when the police came to call"

ing, saving Battersea and others from exposure and ruin.

This is the hidden scandal, hitherto totally unknown to historians, which Peter Jordaan reveals in this big book of nearly 800 pages (and there are two large companion volumes). Now living in Australia, he has travelled the world, seeking out documents, meeting descendants of Battersea's gay group, and piecing together the stories of the two young men at the centre of it who alone paid the price – an outrage, as he rightly says – when all the others got off scot-free.

Though the evidence

currently available provides no definite proof, the group probably included Edward's brother-in-law, the Duke of Argyll.

Jordaan roams far beyond the hidden scandal, giving us many other salacious details he has uncovered. The frailties of various Anglican cler-



1872 Lord Battersea

