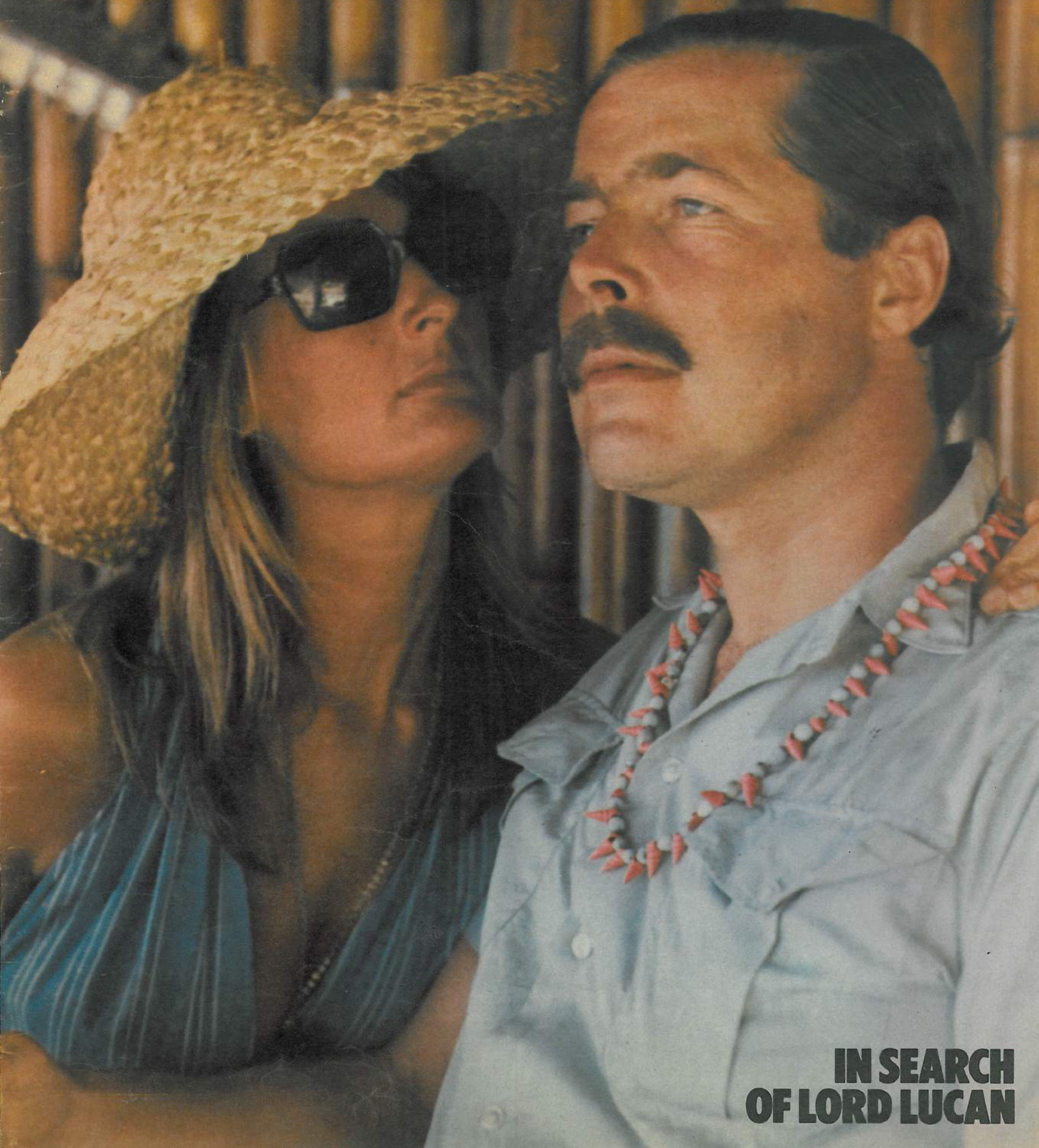


# THE SUNDAY TIMES *magazine*

JUNE 6, 1976



**IN SEARCH  
OF LORD LUCAN**



## THE LUCK OF THE LUCANS

It is now seven months since police began to investigate the most intriguing murder case of the decade. A peer of the realm – Richard John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan – has vanished. His wife – Veronica, Countess of Lucan – was savagely beaten up during the murderer's attack. The body of the victim – Sandra Rivett, nanny to the Lucan household in Lower Belgrave Street – was found packed into a canvas mailbag in the basement of the same house. Detectives assigned to the case immediately encountered a world united on foundations of class, privilege and wealth, whose traditions have always resisted the intrusions of a prying public. *James Fox* explores the attitudes and prejudices of the enclosed society in which the murder took place, and looks at the character of 'Lucky' Lucan himself, an aristocrat of another era, still sensitive about the great-great grandfather who sent the Light Brigade to extinction at Balaclava



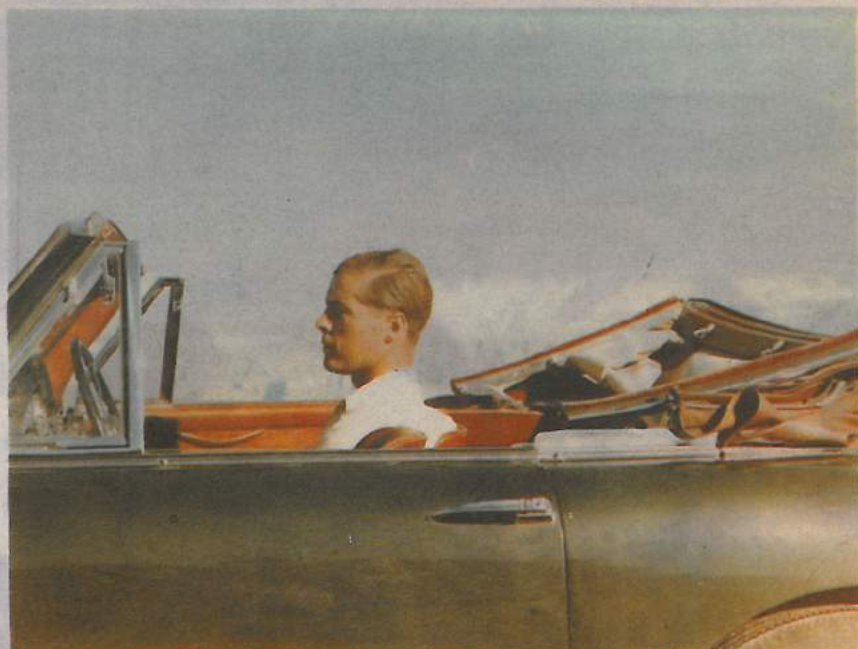
**The stag party** On the eve of his wedding in 1963, Lucan (right) celebrat



his last hours as a bachelor at the Stork Room with a friend, William Gibbs, and a somewhat uneasy-looking hostess

# The family circle

An album of pictures covering the Lucan years from 1952 when he left Eton, via the traditional



Lucan (then Lord Bingham) with his Aston Martin at the Grand Canyon



Lucan at 18, boating in the Mediterranean soon after leaving Eton



An introduction at the Cresta Ball



A round of golf on his USA tour



The Lucans at Osnabrück with Gustav and Paula von Fürstenberg



26 Otto, the Doberman pinscher, at lunch in the Lucans' drawing room



John Aspinall, doyen of London's gambling set, founder of the Clermont

pleasure grounds of Europe and America, to Lower Belgrave Street and his eventual disappearance



El Morocco club, New York, 1963; the Lucans (centre) with friends



Lucan driving Britain's bob at St Moritz; brakeman is Bill Shand-Kydd



Bill Shand-Kydd and wife Christina, Veronica's sister, with Lucan



Veronica Lucan photographed by her husband at Lower Belgrave Street



Happier days at Lower Belgrave Street. Above: the nursery. Centre: Christmas dinner. Right: a solo in the basement where Sandra Rivett died





**The Clermont scene** as reconstructed by the artist Dominick Elwes (himself photographed, top right, with Lucan), Charles Benson, the Earl of Suffolk, John Aspinall, Peter West. Standing: Nicholas Soames



From left to right: Lord Lucan, Stephen Raphael, Jimmy Goldsmith,



Lucan and friends at the Mexican resort of Acapulco in March, 1973, a few weeks after he and his wife had separated. Above: Dominick Elwes, a favourite subject for the gossip columns of the Fifties. Left: Peter West, jet-setter, Clermont habitué



Lucan's most successful friend was Jimmy Goldsmith (above) chairman of Cavenham Foods. Left: Annabel Birley, a friend and patroness of Annabel's discotheque (also with Lucan on our cover)

Just after 10.45p.m. on Thursday, November 7, last year, four dinner guests invited by Lord Lucan sat down in the Clermont Club, a gambling club in Berkeley Square, at the table which he had booked for them earlier in the evening. The party had been to the Mermaid Theatre to see a musical and Lord Lucan had said that he would meet them later at the club. He was not, however, there when they arrived.

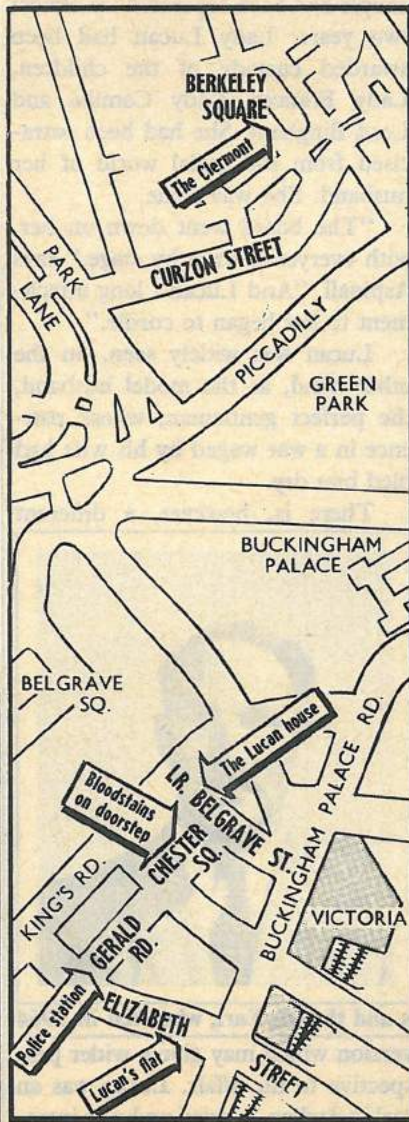
Lord Lucan had booked a table for only four people - one place too few. His guests started without him.

Looking back at that evening and at the 48 hours which preceded it, Lord Lucan's small oversight is not, for a gambler, of more than marginal significance. His schedule had involved his meeting a fair number of his regular acquaintances - people who were to become very familiar to the police over the next few weeks.

The previous day he had visited his old friend - and his piano teacher - Caroline Hill at Old Church Street, at about noon. In the afternoon he had gone to Heywood Hill's bookshop in Curzon Street, where he bought a book about the Greek shipping millionaires. That evening he attended a buffet supper given by Selim Zilkha, chairman of the Mothercare chain of shops, for some 40 guests. He played bridge with his friend John Aspinall, founder of the Clermont Club, Aspinall's wife Sarah and Charles Benson - "Scout" racing correspondent of the *Daily Express*. He went on to the Clermont to play backgammon, and met Andrina Colquhoun, a friend who had got to know him in recent months. He left late. He was drinking heavily, but he had been doing so for several weeks, a fact noted by another friend, Dominick Elwes, the painter.

On Thursday, the day of his disappearance, Lucan rose early - unusual perhaps, since he was an insomniac who tended to stay up late at the gaming tables until he felt he could sleep. He would then stay in bed until late in the morning. At 9.50a.m. he telephoned his lawyers. At 10.30 he was telephoned by Andy Colquhoun, who asked him about his dinner plans. She found them "rather a muddle". She looked for him at lunchtime and when she couldn't find him decided to drive down to the country instead.

Then there is a gap until 4p.m. when Lord Lucan called in at his chemists, asking them to identify a



**The West End world of Lord Lucan** pill belonging to his wife which he had brought with him. The chemist told him it was a tranquilliser.

Later that afternoon he visited Michael Hicks Beach, old Etonian and literary agent, for a drink in the flat in Elizabeth Street, Belgravia, where Lucan had lived since the separation almost two years previously from his wife Veronica. He and Hicks Beach discussed an article Lucan was writing on gambling for an Oxford magazine. At about 4p.m. he drove Hicks Beach home to his flat in Fulham in a Corsair GT he had borrowed two weeks before from another friend, Michael Stoop, old Rugbeian and a top-class backgammon player. He had a few more drinks, returned to his flat in Elizabeth Street, where he changed into a roll-neck sweater and a sleeveless brown pullover. He switched to his Mercedes and drove past the Clermont Club, and talked through the window to Billy, the doorman. He asked whether any of his friends had yet arrived. The answer was "No".

In the meantime the Clermont

had been getting into full swing. The backgammon had given way to dinner, and the bigger games, chemmy and blackjack, were starting upstairs. There could hardly be a more elegant setting in Europe in which to win or lose the fortunes which the high stakes provided for: the last William Kent house in London, designed in 1742, an architectural masterpiece in marble and gold.

The regulars, the people who took refuge there every night "because the other places are too vulgar", were settling in. By the time Lucan's guests had arrived the place was full. They included Greville Howard, old Etonian, one-time assistant to Enoch Powell, now an executive at Slater Walker, who lived in Lucan's mews house, and a friend, Sarah Smith-Ryland. It needed only their host to make up the party.

A mile-and-a-half away, in Belgravia, the house in Lower Belgrave Street where Lady Lucan lived with their three children and a nanny, was already teeming with policemen and forensic experts. They had been summoned after a distraught figure had burst into the nearby Plumbers Arms, blood pouring from large gashes in her head. It was Veronica, Countess of Lucan, screaming about an intruder. "He's in the house . . . The children are in the house . . . He's murdered the nanny." Then she collapsed.

At about the same time Lucan was on his way to Uckfield in Sussex, 44 miles away, driving Michael Stoop's Corsair, arriving at 11.30p.m. at the house of a friend, Susan Maxwell-Scott. (It was not until 48 hours after the murder that Mrs Maxwell-Scott let it be known that Lucan had visited her. "I had no reason to go to the police," she said.) On the way to Uckfield, Lucan made a telephone call to his mother in St John's Wood. The call came neither from a call box nor through an operator.

At Mrs Maxwell-Scott's he wrote three letters, whose contents give a confusing picture of his state of mind. Two were written to Bill Shand-Kydd, his brother-in-law, and one to Michael Stoop. He wrote that he had surprised an intruder in the house struggling with his wife. He had rushed inside but the man managed to escape, then ran off. "I have had a traumatic night of unbelievable coincidence," he wrote. Lucan thought the evidence looked bad against him for something he had not done, and

decided to "lie doggo for a while".

His handwriting appears shaky. Mrs Maxwell-Scott told the Press that Lucan had left the house at 1.30a.m., intending to return to London and to contact the police in the morning. But the car was found at Newhaven, 16 miles away. It was parked in Norman Road, near the harbour, some time between 5a.m. and 8a.m. on Friday morning. How it got there is not known, and here the trail goes cold.

The detectives assigned to the case, Roy Ranson and David Gerring, are both policemen with long experience. Ranson, a former Flying Squad officer in charge of the area that covers Whitehall, Buckingham Palace and Westminster, had recently been working on the Princess Anne shooting case. He was, and still is, investigating Harold Wilson's missing tax papers. Gerring, 40, had been a divisional officer for 20 years and had worked among other things on the misdeeds of the Richardson gang.

Squad cars from Gerald Road police station arrived at the house in Lower Belgrave Street within a few minutes of the commotion at the Plumbers Arms. Graham Forsythe, a detective sergeant who was to become Veronica Lucan's permanent bodyguard - and almost her only companion for several months, until it was felt that the danger had passed - had the initial task of keeping the children out of sight in the general confusion. Lucan's mother, the Dowager Countess Lucan, socialist peeress, arrived soon afterwards. They found, at the bottom of the stairs leading to the basement, the teacups that Sandra Rivett had dropped when her attacker struck. They found the light bulb, removed, lying on a chair. And they found the body of Sandra Rivett in a U.S. mail bag, hideously beaten. They also found the murder weapon - a piece of lead piping carefully wrapped in Elastoplast. A welded iron banister had been prised away by Lady Lucan as she had struggled, successfully, with the attacker. There was blood everywhere.

Three days later Ranson and Gerring were granted a warrant for the arrest of Lucan on a charge of murder and attempted murder. They pressed ahead with their investigations, building up a dossier which includes the names of no fewer than 93 witnesses useful to the prosecution. They launched a massive



search for the person, or the body, of Lord Lucan who had vanished into the night.

Ranson and Gerring pieced together the events of the night. Lucan had visited the house in Lower Belgrave Street, but, as his letter confirms, had left in a hurry. He had telephoned a friend in Chester Square, whose children went to school with his own. She remembered very little of the call except that she was certain that it was Lucan. A few minutes before the telephone call she heard a prolonged ringing on her doorbell but was too terrified to go down. (She did not tell the police about this until the Monday. "It's the police's problem, actually," she explained. "They're obviously trained to discern these things.") Later she was to find blood on her doorstep. After the police had made their forensic tests, it proved remarkably difficult to obliterate; the painter Dominick Elwes found himself trying to scrub the stains from the Portland stone.

Lucan's address books provided Ranson and Gerring with an enormous task of investigation. As they dug into the upper crust in alphabetical order, jokes about the antics of "the nob squad" became social currency, and in return the class feeling in Gerald Road police station built up as they came up against what they saw as a condescending, almost patronising attitude.

One witness described how she had been telephoned early next morning and instructed by a friend to say nothing, not to answer the telephone, to get a briefing before talking to the police.

On that same day, Friday, John Aspinall held a lunch for the Lucan inner circle to discuss what might have happened to him. It included Stephen Raphael, 62-year-old stockbroker, who managed whatever stocks Lucan had; William Shand-Kydd, millionaire and amateur jockey, married to Christina, the sister of Veronica Lucan; Daniel Meinhertzhausen, son of a merchant banker, a gambler since leaving Eton; Charles Benson, who had been in Lucan's house at Eton; Jimmy Goldsmith, old Etonian, chairman of Cavenham Foods, 7 per cent. holder in the Rothschild bank in France, and Dominick Elwes, portrait painter, old Etonian.

"People were worried," says John Aspinall, "about what to do if he

[Lucan] turned up. He might have turned up at Howletts [Aspinall's country house and zoo], he might have telephoned from Brazil, so every contingency was looked at." "Some of the ideas at the meeting," said Charles Benson, "were more melodramatic and ludicrous than others."

At the same time Lady Lucan was lying in hospital with wounds which looked almost as bad as those which had killed Sandra Rivett. She was clearly in need of sympathy. Yet her only visitors were her sister, Christina, her brother-in-law, Hugh Bingham, and Dominick Elwes. They had got to her bedside with some difficulty, to



Lucan's parents: the Dowager Countess and the 6th Earl, who died in 1964

hear her first-hand account of events.

Lucan's marriage had become something of a war of attrition between man and wife. "I went to their marriage with a certain foreboding," said Aspinall. "To be blunt, she had no money, she wasn't particularly pretty, and she had a shrewish temperament."

As the murder story broke, rumours about Lady Lucan began to spring up in quarters where the truth could not conceivably have been known. None had any basis in fact, but their style suggested a morbid imagination. There was a common assumption that she was, to put it mildly, a 'difficult woman' and that therefore Lucan was a man to be sympathised with. 'Lucky' Lucan, as he was sometimes known, became indeed a popular hero - even to those who had only read about him. His wife, according to one married woman who frequents the Clermont, "was the most disliked woman in London". The married woman in question had, in fact, never met her. She added: "You know how it is - when you hear that someone is so disliked, you think she must be awful."

By the time of the murder, the

couple had been separated for almost two years. Lady Lucan had been awarded custody of the children, Lady Frances, Lady Camilla and Lord Bingham. She had been ostracised from the social world of her husband. She was alone.

"The board went down on her, with everyone, stage by stage," says Aspinall. "And Lucan's long attachment to her began to curdle."

Lucan was widely seen, on the other hand, as the model husband, the perfect gentleman, whose patience in a war waged by his wife had bled him dry.

There is, however, a different



version which may give a wider perspective to the affair. Lucan was an earl in decline, buoyed up by an introverted, almost exclusively male world of smart professional gamblers. His fortunes, and his marriage, were crumbling. Many of his Eton friends had sought refuge in what one of them referred to as "the boys' clubs", to lead what Dominick Elwes calls, "a hypercivilised patrician kind of life". But it was out of tune with the times. Lucan himself seemed almost a throwback, with his strange Crimean face, and views which appeared to be degenerating, under pressure, from paternalistic feudalism to the extreme Right wing - views echoed by many of his friends.

"Lucan," says Aspinall, "was my fifth, sixth or seventh best friend. I had known him for 20 years. I saw him as a figure like myself - born out of his own time. His qualities were the old-fashioned ones - loyalty, honesty, reliability. He had the *dignitas* of an aristocrat without the impertinence that go with a great name or possessions. Lucan was really a leader of men. In fact he wasn't - but in more rigorous times he would have found a better role in life. In other words, in a state of war Lucan

would have been a valuable acquisition to a country. He wouldn't have had any difficulty in getting loyalty from his men. He was a warrior, a Roman. He was quite capable of falling on his sword, as it were."

Under the heavy, emotionless face, which one person who played backgammon with him described as "not so much control as blankness", Lucan's warrior blood would occasionally burst forth. A close friend says: "Very occasionally one did see a flash of temper, and then it was quite unpleasant. He would get very tensed up and shake - the classic bellicose effect. He would get angry with golf caddies who wouldn't listen, and so on." Lucan was also proud of the great strength of his Doberman pinscher which would sleep on his bed and chew enormous bones on the Wilton carpet in the drawing room at Lower Belgrave Street. Otto, as it was called, would, however, brutalise Alsations in the park, and had to be sent away.

In his flat in Elizabeth Street, Lucan had a collection of Hitler's recorded speeches, many books on psychiatric illness and countless detective novels. His wardrobe contained rows of identical pin-striped suits. He also had a grand piano, had taught himself to play Bach and latterly Scott Joplin rags. "This was one of the things that he disguised from the world," says Dominick Elwes, "because people would have thought it soppy." Elwes describes his almost fastidious politeness, his "*gentilhomme*".

But he was a very different character from his father, who was a Socialist and had been Labour Whip in the Lords. Lucan minded this political aberration and especially the fact that this father had taken no steps to avoid death duties. His mother was also a Socialist, and is still active with the Labour Party. For some of Lucan's extreme Right-wing friends this amounted in their terms to Communism. Lucan was embarrassed when she went to Eton in a Land-Rover, dressed in baggy tweeds. Once a contemporary of Lucan's at his private school, Jonathan Miller, said: "She was always wielding Labour Party pamphlets. She did look a sight in a rather impressive way that would probably have shocked only the *parvenus*. It would probably have been more shocking at Radley than at Eton. Her hair was a wonderful mess, ➡➡➡

as if someone had stabbed a sofa. With Lucan himself I could never equate the photograph of him as a thickened, sullen, moustachioed figure, rather flushed and waterlogged, with the rather wiry and mischievous boy I used to play with."

At Eton, Lucan, according to Charles Benson, was "an unremarkable character, slightly above average intelligence, played games not terribly well". He became an officer in the Coldstream Guards, was chosen for the Army bobsleigh team, raced powerboats - hardly the sort of socialist career his mother would have advocated.

He joined a merchant bank as a management trainee in 1960, earning £500 a year. A contemporary says of him: "His intelligence may not have been too bad, but as far as education was concerned he was a very limited fellow. Even in those days his horizons stopped at Jules Bar. I always felt that he believed that through eugenics he must be a success, but in fact he was rather a failure. He had, of course, no economic training, but in those days there was some pretty low-grade thinking in the City."

"Though intelligent," says Aspinall, "Lucan hadn't got the application and powers of concentration to be a successful businessman. The truth is that Anglo-Saxons of his class and background make poor businessmen."

After a spectacular win of £20,000 at *chemin de fer*, Lucan took up serious gambling in about 1960. Aspinall says: "He used to be a wild and reckless gambler. But Stephen Raphael taught him that if he wanted to go on gambling he would have to learn to survive. Lucan became a shrewd gambler intending to stay around as long as possible."

A Clermont veteran said: "He was an average backgammon player, a good poker player, an average bridge player. He was a good money manager. Unfortunately he tried latterly to win back a few of the pounds he'd spent on the custody case."

Lucan also became what is known in the Clermont as "the good furniture". His good looks and his title were useful in attracting the big money, and Aspinall would himself double his stakes when they became too high for Lucan. After March 1972, when Aspinall sold the Clermont to Hugh Hefner and the Playboy empire, Lucan no longer had this protection. Like many of his friends,

he resented the fact that any member of the Playboy could now come to the Clermont and dilute the exclusivity. One of them, describing the vastly increased new membership, said: "They're hideous; they don't gamble, they're noisy and they're skint. They just take up space and are unpleasant for people to sit with." More recently the 'Free List' - of gamblers who didn't have to pay for lunch - was abolished, a sign of worsening times.

Lucan, said a friend, was not pleased that Hefner didn't lower the flags on the Playboy Club at night, and thus didn't know how to behave. Nor would he talk to people who did not have "proper shoelaces". He was dismayed at younger members of the upper class. He couldn't understand why they had to speak in "red brick university accents". A friend said: "He didn't really like women, or sex. I think he saw women as an inferior race. He was often embarrassed in their company. If anything, I would say that he would perform only the occasional *boff de politesse*." 'Boffing', in Lucan circles, is the latest euphemism for sex. The police indeed got nowhere when they asked whether 'Lucky' Lucan was a "crumpet man".

His politics were inclined to be rigid. His friend Michael Stoop says: "We used to have long heart-to-hearts about the dreadful political situation. His remedies were fairly drastic. Liberal solutions were no good any more. It was a question of a night of at least a thousand long knives - not just one or two martyrs. He felt we were on the edge of an abyss." Stoop himself agreed with these views and volunteered for Colonel Stirling's private army.

A close friend said: "He was very Right wing and never compromised in front of people. He would talk about hanging and flogging and foreigners and niggers - equally to shock and to get a reaction."

Lucan never directly involved himself in politics, but this, according to Aspinall, was not due to lack of interest. "It mattered to him a lot more than it would you and me probably. Don't forget that the old land-owning classes still have the genetic concern. They have been endowed and bred to be concerned. It's peoples' complacency that he minded about. They see the ship sinking and they're still more worried about getting their share of cornflakes.

"Lucan was very worried about

the country. I think he was about to make a speech in the House of Lords about immigration. He felt very strongly about that. You see, Lucan came from a family who in their origins were the old clan leaders of the Anglo-Saxons and I think he felt a great worry for what he saw as the hybridisation and miscegenation of the island race. A lot of people in a bus queue in Nuneaton might feel the same, but then it's not their responsibility."

His attitude was put more succinctly by another acquaintance: "His basic attitude was that wogs begin at Calais. He hated 'abroad'."



Det Chief Supt Roy Ranson: the man in charge of the murder investigation

From the vantage point of the St James's Club or the Clermont, where Lucan would start up with a vodka martini around midday, the outlook was bleak. Complacency had gripped the land. Stern measures were required. He had for years been disturbed by the possibility of a Russian-style class revolution. He had bought jewellery because, as a friend says, "he used to say it was portable. He knew how he was going to leave the country when the revolution came."

In fact, Lucan's own social world was narrow. It had no real links with power, or with the political or cultural life of London. He was what is known as a man's man, a cause institutionalised in some of London's finest buildings where he could always insulate himself.

His routine was almost unvaried. After the midday drinks he would lunch at the Clermont. Lucan always ordered the same meal - smoked salmon and lamb cutlets in the winter; smoked salmon and lamb cutlets *en gelée* in the summer. "In the decent days", as one member describes pre-

Hefner Clermont, there was a regular backgammon game after lunch. Sometimes he would come home to bath and change around six, then back to the Clermont after dinner. Later on, he might go down to Annabel's for a drink and then, depending on the state of his insomnia, he would be home at two or three in the morning. There were some fixtures. On Mondays and Thursdays he would play bridge in the evening at the Portland Club and on Fridays he would invariably dine at the Mirabelle.

He had been hit, like many others, by the stock market crash. He had run up debts of £35,000 before he disappeared. In September he had borrowed £3000 at an interest rate of 48 per cent. from a friend. He was deteriorating physically. His home life was non-existent. He had developed an obsession about his children, and was at loggerheads with his wife following their separation.

Veronica Lucan had become like a lady under siege, desperate to hold on to her children, isolated from her family, especially her sister, and without friends. At the time of the murder she weighed six stone, and looked painfully thin. She had had an unhappy, disturbed past. Her father, an army major, died in a motor accident in 1939 before she knew him. She had a more popular younger sister, Christina, who married a millionaire, Bill Shand-Kydd. Veronica was pretty but small (she was sometimes told that this was a sign of inferiority). Christina was praised for her tallness, told that she wore clothes well, that people liked her. Veronica, however, was suffering from emotional disorders at the age of eight. Their stepfather, who died eight years ago, managed the Wheat-sheaf Hotel, North Waltham, near Basingstoke, on the main road to Winchester. Someone in the Clermont described this as "a pub on the way back from Ascot".

When the girls came to London, they lived together in a flat in Melbury Road. Christina was the star. After Christina's marriage to Bill Shand-Kydd, Veronica became the spare girl who came for weekends. She met Lucan, as she told the *Daily Express*, after a golf match. "You know the sort of thing - the men are out all day on the course and the women are hauled along for some light relief later in the day".

That was a hint of Veronica Lucan's astringency, for which she

became disliked by both men and women. Their engagement was a surprise. At a celebration dinner at the Mirabelle, Stephen Raphael asked her if she minded her husband gambling. She replied that he could do whatever he liked.

And that is exactly what Lucan did. Veronica Lucan may have been starry-eyed about her "elevation" as she called it. "I think she saw it," said a friend of Lucan, "as dancing the night away at great balls with important people." It was not to be.

Veronica Lucan fitted uneasily into her husband's routine. For a time she was occupied with the problems of the Belgravia young marrieds. She did the house up in satin drapes. She had herself photographed by Lenare at each child's christening. She stuck the usual photographs in the albums, dinner at El Morocco, weekends with the Fürstenbergs, the Cresta Run - even one with Lucan's face, flushed and roaring at his stag party with a nervous-looking hostess by his side. At first Veronica Lucan imagined giving dinner parties, having a circle of friends. This soon seemed a pointless ambition and the dining table became a storage area. Nor did she take part in the usual activities of charity balls and committees - which she considered merely "occupational therapy" for wives.

She realised that the only way she could see her husband, and take part in his social life was to go herself to the Clermont. She would get dressed and arrive there around 9 o'clock to meet him for dinner. There would always be a large table, and she would sit, mostly in silence, while the men held forth. Usually her husband ignored her, as he ignored most women. Most people in that society found her company dull. Her intelligence was a little too sharp for them. Nor was the male world of the Clermont geared to wives. One regular said: "Most of the men there were either unhappily married or not married at all." But Michael Stoop commented: "She was clever, astute and subtle - but aggressive and unbalanced. It made her an extremely dangerous type of woman."

Lady Lucan became increasingly tense, her mood brittle, and she sat there night after night, occasionally dabbling in blackjack. Through the endless descriptions of her anti-social behaviour there is a tacit admission that such an existence put a certain amount of pressure on her. Her mis-

take was to have come at all, to have invaded her husband's world.

John Aspinall said: "She would sit down on the banquet night after night and hardly speak to anyone. And she had a rotten life in that sense. But she had no business to come there."

Michael Stoop also concedes that the situation "was very difficult for her with John forming up at the Clermont night after night and having dinner with bores like myself". And Stephen Raphael also thought it would have been wise for her to stay at home. "I think she made two mistakes," he said. "First, she used to



Det Chief Inspector David Gerring: Ranson's assistant in the hunt

come gambling to see that he didn't get off with other girls, and secondly, she didn't create a life of her own."

The often cited climax to Lady Lucan's career as a Clermont wife came when she threw a wine glass at another girl, over-reacting in a discussion about sex discrimination.

Lucan's friends now say that she turned her verbal guns on him, that she humiliated him, made wounding remarks, contradicted him. "Lucan was eaten away," said a close friend, "by a long bleeding attrition. But he was very long suffering. She did him extra damage, you see, because Lucan was an interesting young man and if he had had a half-way presentable wife, he would have been asked out more."

It is small wonder that Lady Lucan today resents those of her close relations - the vast majority - who sided with Lord Lucan and against her over the children.

On her own Lady Lucan can appear highly-strung, which is hardly surprising. She is articulate, intense, witty, quick to react. She sees herself under attack, and is quick to reply.

But, off the subject of the social milieu in which she found herself, when her talk is interspersed with words like "vulgar" and "common", she is a woman who was obviously a great deal more intelligent and perceptive than her husband. Lucan may have sensed this. He used to tell her: "One captain on the bridge." He would say he was "very displeased with her". The overriding suspicion is that nobody, at least no male, ever tried to conduct a sensible conversation with her, and never tried to see beneath her anger and defensiveness.

Lady Lucan sees her title as something of supreme importance, viewed with jealousy from all sides. She knows *Debrett* intimately, and in her "elevation" is as sensitive to social precedence as the declining aristocrats of Proust. But in fact she is a more complex character. Her qualities were never weighed in that marginal socialite world of smart gambling where appearance counts a little too much and from which she was impatiently dismissed. She felt she was branded as a social embarrassment, but once remarked that it was her husband and his friends who were the real social embarrassment - "that is why they had to stay at the Clermont Club all the time". She survived as a Clermont gambler's wife for nine years, which must be almost a record. The problem was that from the moment of her alienation, her detractors had the monopoly on the gossip, which intensified after the disappearance of Lucan. Even her close family provided little support. She barricaded herself into Lower Belgrave Street.

"A lot of people have this type of wife," said John Aspinall. "I love my women. I love my wife and I love my mother. If they start behaving grotesquely badly I don't say that they're rotten or evil. Most husbands can't admit that they have made the wrong choice. They put it down to insanity."

As their relationship deteriorated, so at the same time did Lady Lucan's health and Lord Lucan's behaviour. She began to get depressed. Lucan said that she was going mad, according to his friends. In 1967, after the birth of George, heir to the earldom, Lady Lucan was told by her husband that they were going for a drive. They ended up at The Priory, a private psychiatric nursing home in Roehampton. Lucan had already contacted the doctors. Lady Lucan

refused to be admitted. Her husband took her back home. She was subsequently prescribed injections of Moditen, a powerful drug with unpleasant side effects, given for anxiety and depression. Then there began for Lady Lucan a round of doctors, psychiatrists, and drugs that was no doubt something of an ordeal - but one that, characteristically, she survived. (Lucan had had his own emotional disorders. At an early age his parents even considered the possibility of psychotherapy, and from childhood he suffered from persistent headaches for which he took large doses of aspirin.)

In 1971, Lucan drove her to another psychiatric hospital, Greenways in Hampstead. This time she knew where she was going. Around this time she had persuaded Lucan to come home for dinner. Before he left again at around ten, he would give her four sleeping pills. The effects of this, in her run-down state, was to induce hallucinations and fears, as she overcame the sleeping effect of the drug. She agreed to a nursing home.

But when they got to Greenways, Lady Lucan felt she couldn't face it. She ran out, once again, jumped on a bus, then took a taxi to Regent's Park, where she walked around for a while before going home to Lower Belgrave Street.

Lucan, say his friends, became obsessed about the bringing up of his children, and complained in public that his wife was unfit to look after them. One day in January 1973, he walked out, and then began a battle for the custody of the children, which Lucan lost - and which, his friends say, broke his spirit. Had Lady Lucan lost it, it no doubt would have broken hers.

Lucan had been sure that he would be able to keep the children. "He pinned all his hopes on the deterioration of her condition," said a close friend. "He was also watching for any signs of unhappiness in his children which he could use."

At the end of 1972, he bought a small tape recorder that fitted into his breast pocket and began to record conversations with his wife - which inevitably turned into arguments. He also recorded his friends, the nannies who he asked round to his apartment in Elizabeth Street, and even his children as he drove them about in his Mercedes.

The police now have ➤➤➤ 39

several hours of tape under seal at Gerald Road police station. Lucan used sometimes to play them back to his friends. He would pick on small incidents; with the tape running the argument would be built up; Lucan would be cool and apparently rational. Lady Lucan would eventually lose her temper and insult him violently.

At the same time Lady Lucan also received several anonymous, threatening or nuisance telephone calls. These came through on an ex-directory telephone which was linked to the safe as a burglar alarm in Lower Belgrave Street; only Lucan would have known the number.

For good measure, Lucan had the house surveyed by private detectives, who stood outside the house all day and followed Lady Lucan down the street on the rare occasions when she went out. At one stage this operation was costing Lucan £400 a week.

Then in March 1973, armed with a High Court order, Lucan and two men snatched two of the children and the nanny from Green Park, and took them to his flat in Elizabeth Street. For a few weeks up until the custody case, Lucan looked after them. Lady Lucan spent a week in

The Priory under observation.

But after he had lost the case, in June 1973, which had cost him £40,000, and the children were returned to their mother, Lucan's behaviour changed. One of his friends said that he saw in his children his hope for the future of the family - "after the tragedies of the Light Brigade, his socialist parents, and whatever misfortunes had befallen him".

But even before the case had been lost, Lucan's behaviour had begun to deteriorate. "There is nothing worse for a gambler," says Aspinall, "than an unstable situation on his home ground. All this wrecked his capacity to survive as a gambler. He lost a bit of his nerve and ability."

He behaved irrationally, said his friends, as if he was trying to inflict punishment on himself. Sometimes his self-control would snap. "He was fairly autocratic in those moods," said Charles Benson, "he didn't brook arguments or slowness." Lucan had become a chain smoker, drank a great deal of vodka. He talked on and on about his children until his friends found it tiresome, and two of his friends confirm that he was developing an exaggerated interest in the

latest bugging devices. Dominick Elwes says: "It was the dark side of the moon. It wasn't the 'Lucky' I knew. It was perhaps a classic case of paranoia."

At Lower Belgrave Street, the nannies came and went. Hazel Drobins stayed four days. Mrs Murphy, who was incapacitated by sun-downers at 9p.m., and has since died, stayed two months. Two Spanish girls, Tina and Teresa, stayed from August until November 1973.

Then came Christobel Martin. "When I first went there," she said, "Lady Lucan looked terrible. She looked a completely beaten person. She was terribly thin, very nervous." Money was short. Lucan had cancelled her Harrods account. "Her only personal expense was cigarettes. When I got there the milk bill had been stopped at £48." At that time she had on average one personal telephone call a week.

Christobel Martin left - she had been a temporary - Mrs Murphy returned. Then came Pierette Goletto, and then Nadia Broome, a teacher, and then, for the four last weeks of her life, Sandra Rivett. She had been looking after an old couple in Paddington. She and her husband had

parted a year before. On the night she was murdered she had stayed in with a cold. It should have been her night out.

David Gerring spent 11 days at Newhaven, following the discovery of Michael Stoop's Corsair, but found nothing. So where is Lucan if he is still alive? At the Clermont . . . Spain . . . or Portugal . . . ? These are hinted at, and at one time the police searched a villa in Ibiza. Meanwhile another curiosity: Lucan's medical file is missing from the regimental records office.

Lucan would not have found it difficult to get out of the country, and tip-offs are still coming in to Scotland Yard - and being followed up. "He would have had money," says Aspinall. "Several people rang and offered to help him out - but, of course, I didn't know where he was. As a gambler I would give even money on whether he is alive or dead."

And Sandra Rivett? "Of course, out of politeness one says it's very tough on the nanny," said Aspinall, "though I don't feel a sense of personal loss, of course." Apart from those of her family, the only other floral wreath on her grave was put there by the police.

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