

The Training and Development Centre was opened in May 1991.

It was constructed at a cost of over £20 million and is comprehensively equipped with all the facilities required by modern teaching techniques.

The Centre sits unobtrusively in the sumptuous surroundings of a 147-acre estate of wooded parkland: the estate of King Edward's Place.

And at the heart of the estate today, as over one hundred years ago, is King Edward's House, once again restored to its former Victorian splendour.

This is the story of the King Edward's Place estate.

A house with a glamorous and sometimes mysterious past is more than just bricks and mortar... it is a living thing. Behind its closed doors it jealously guards the secrets of its inhabitants.



King Edward's House is an unassuming, red brick, Victorian building, but, it too, has its secrets... some better kept than others.



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Wanborough

The house stands in the charming village of Wanborough. Once an important Roman settlement, Wanborough is perched on the downlands about 5 miles from Swindon. It developed through the early centuries much like any other village. However by 1700, Wanborough had earned a reputation for its racing stables.

Early days

King Edward's Place was built by three Oxford undergraduates who shared a passion for the races and kept horses at the nearby Foxhill stables. The undergraduates were members of the Marlborough Club

and used the country house to host weekend parties, card games and shoots.

The discovery in the grounds of a 150 foot, disused well suggests the house was built in the 1800s, probably 1883. Records show the estate was turned into a stud farm around 1895. But the undergraduates' names do not appear on any local registers until 1915. Instead, William Robinson, the stud farm's horse trainer is listed as resident.

Early Ordnance Survey maps refer to the house as Foxhill Stud Farm and some locals remember it as Foxhill Manor. It wasn't until the turn of the century that the estate was named King Edward's Place.

Association with King Edward VII

King Edward VII, son of Queen Victoria, succeeded to the throne in 1901 at the age of 60. He was a frequent visitor to the house as King and earlier as Prince of Wales. By Victorian standards the house is small and of no architectural merit. There was no room for wives, but mistresses were more easily accommodated. Lillie Langtry's horses were kept at Foxhill stables and she is rumoured to have regularly accompanied the Prince of Wales on his jaunts to Wanborough.

The size and style of the house and the undergraduates' apparent reluctance to claim ownership indicate that King Edward's Place

was used as a discreet country retreat. It remains a mystery whether the King granted the change of name the royal seal of approval. It could just be a nickname that stuck. Records of ownership in the early 1900s are incomplete, but one of the undergraduates apparently stayed on at the house and built up the stud farm in the run-up to the First World War.



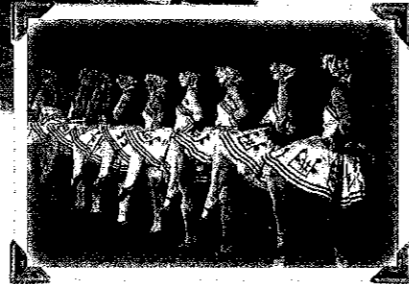
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The Jimmy White era

After the War, King Edward's Place was bought by Jimmy White, the flamboyant financier and entrepreneur. Jimmy White was born in Rochdale and by the time he was 19, he had left his job as a bricklayer and bought a circus for £100. From these humble beginnings, he went on to make his fortune. But he never lost his taste for the theatre.

As well as his many industrial interests, Mr White financed several London theatres and he is still remembered by the villagers of Wanborough for his wild, showgirl parties. But he is also remembered for his generosity and for his sponsorship of needy causes, like the local Aldbourne Band.

Mr White altered the house to suit his requirements and the fashions of the time. The most striking alteration is the addition of a stone entrance hall to the front of the house, far grander than a plain front door. He also remodelled the interior hallway by building a sweeping staircase and fitting a magnificent stained glass, domed laylight. Four new bathrooms, each sumptuously clad in marble, and a pretty conservatory add the finishing touches.

Nor did Mr White neglect the stud, which flourished under his ownership to become one of the village's largest employers. Martin Hartigan and Sir George Richards both worked in the stables before moving onto greater things.

The sad end of the era

But on 28 June 1927 Jimmy White's extravagant life came to an abrupt end. That evening he sent his staff to the theatre in Swindon and committed suicide in the master bedroom of King Edward's House.

At the time of his death he was in the process of buying Wembley Stadium and the White City dog track, but his dealings with the oil industry were ruining him. His last few West End shows had also proved disastrous and his financial empire was in danger of collapse.

Jimmy White's body wasn't discovered until the next morning when the housekeeper and the butler found him lying face down on the bed with a sponge soaked in

chloroform in his hand. On the bedside cabinet was an empty bottle of sleeping draught and three suicide notes, one for his wife, one for a friend and one for the butler.

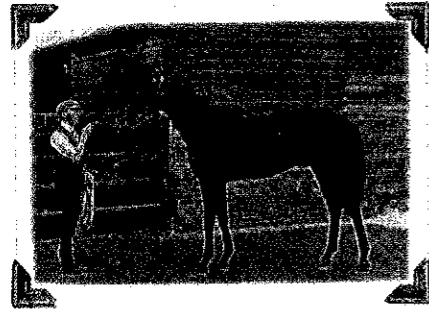
Many of the villagers still believe Mr White shot himself, although no evidence has ever been unearthed to support this theory. Mr White wanted to be buried in the ornamental garden underneath his bedroom window, or on the rolling chalk downs he could see from his window. Instead, he was buried in a quiet corner of Wanborough churchyard on 4 July in front of thousands of mourners. Mr White died intestate; the only things he had left to give away were eight racehorses, three farms and King Edward's Place.



Some say the house never recovered from the death of the much loved Jimmy White and claimed that his suicide marked the end of the heyday of King Edward's Place.

Uncertainties

The history of the house is chequered between 1927 and 1932 when it changed hands several times. Robert Graham Fothergill owned the estate for a short time and his famous racehorse, Panther, brought from Argentina, could often be glimpsed exercising in the paddocks.



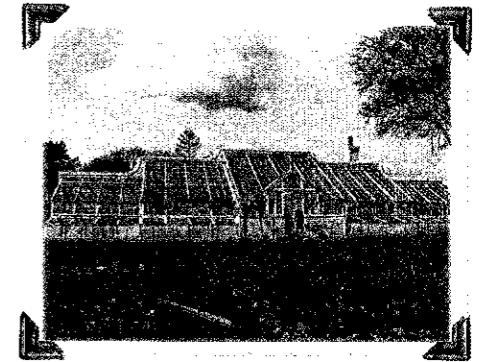
Enter Major and Mrs Barker

In 1932 King Edward's Place was rescued from a succession of short-term, unsuccessful owners by Major Edgar Prescott Barker and his wife. Mrs Barker was the step-daughter of Washington Singer, a member of the Singer sewing machine family and a racehorse fanatic. King Edward's Place was the ideal home for the 70 racehorses left to Mrs Barker after her step-father's death. "It's a divine place and I loved it dearly" says Mrs Barker as she talks of her days spent racing and hunting. And although it took one and a half hours every week to clean the bathroom fittings alone, the Barkers kept the house exactly as they had found it.

The Second World War and beyond

During the Second World War, food for the nation was deemed more important than the sport of kings and Mrs Barker was forced to plough up her paddocks in order to plant corn. "We had German prisoners of war to help us on the farm, so we didn't have to do everything ourselves", she remembers.

When the War was over King Edward's Place became a boarding stud. The Barkers 'arranged marriages' for racehorses and looked after the precious offspring. The business thrived, but by the 1960s Mr and Mrs Barker felt that the time had come to



place the weight of responsibility onto younger shoulders. In 1962 their son, Captain Fred Barker, took control of the house and the stud.

A younger hand at the tiller: Captain Barker

Captain Barker worked hard to maintain the stud and spent enormous amounts of money on stallions which he hoped would bring to King Edward's Place the recognition it deserved. But he was always unlucky. A King Edward's Place stallion never produced a Derby winner.

Twenty years later and Captain Barker needed to invest about half a million pounds to keep the stud going. He didn't have the money and, disillusioned with the horse racing business, made the painful decision to sell up.

King Edward's Place today

Captain Barker and his mother (Major Barker had died the year before) left the house in 1987 and the following year sold it to the current owners. "I was born in the house and it was very difficult to leave", says Captain Barker, "but I will always be proud that it will be used as a training centre. It has breathed new life into the place".



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