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PEOPLE

A money-mad marquess

... in the news this week

WHEN it comes to making money and getting publicity Henry Frederick Thynne, 6th Marquess of Bath (family motto 'I have good reason'), is in a class of his own.

In the interests of preserving his beautiful ancestral home in the heart of the Wiltshire countryside, the 60-year-old Marquess has donned a Beatle wig and strummed a guitar, offered part of his home to a tribe of wandering Arabs and a prizefighter and has hotly debated on television the merits of Hitler.

Now his latest attraction, aimed at boosting attendances at his 15th-century Longleat house has brought the biggest-ever roar of protest from villagers at nearby Warminster, who have suffered in the past from some of the Marquess's ideas.

For the Marquess plans to let 50 fully grown lions roam freely within 100 acres of woodland on his estate. Strong chain fencing will surround this miniature game reserve and two miles of concrete roads will enable sight-seers to drive among the lions.

"I will do anything for money," he said at his home this week, "and these lions are a purely commercial proposition.

"Some have already arrived and we shall bring others from Europe and Ethiopia.

"People will be able to drive around and observe the lions at close quarters. They are not man-eaters and, provided people are sensible and obey the rules, there should be no accidents."

But Warminster was not assured. Having recently

Rock stars, Arabs and now LIONS!

been the village where an "unidentified object" was seen in the sky by several witnesses, they were not in the mood to welcome lions.

"We've already had screaming pop fans at Longleat," said Councillor Albert Bull. "Now we are to get roaring lions."

The Reverend Edgar Tiller said: "It is inevitable that there will be escapes. The time to protest is now, before this dangerous project is established, and not when some of the beasts have escaped to terrorise the village."

"The lions will not escape," said the Marquess. "The fence will be 12 feet high and although I don't know much about lions I am told that as long as they are well fed they are not interested in attacking anyone."

The Marquess of Bath inherited Longleat on the death of his father, the fifth Earl, in 1946. With it went over £6-million in death duties.

As a stately home Long-

leat was first opened to the public in 1947 and the Marquess of Bath claims credit for having started the stately homes business that has become a money-spinner for people like the Duke of Bedford, Lord Montagu and the Duke of Marlborough.

Lord Bath's house, which was built in 1500 by Sir John Thynne, is one of the most beautiful of Britain's stately homes and is well up in the "top ten" stately homes.

But the Marquess does not, like his competitors in the field, keep attendance figures. "Comparison of figures is odious. Most of the people come to see the house and some to meet and talk with me. Others come for the other attractions."

The Marquess himself attracts much of the publicity that brings people to Longleat. Last year it was the rock concerts that he staged on the lawns. The Rolling Stones were his ~~and~~ guests and 20,000 teenagers turned up to see them perform and to hear the Marquess' own rendition of "Stranger in Paradise."

● Chaos, but plenty cash

That particular concert resulted in 200 faintings and chaos between police and spectators, but the cash returns pleased the Marquess.

Seldom out of the headlines for long the Marquess offered part of his home last year to a tribe of wandering Arabs who had come to Britain on a visit.

He told them they could pitch their tents anywhere on his estate.

The house was built originally at a cost of £8016 and is valued today at over £5 million.

An average of 140,000 visitors come each year and the Marquess is proud of his priceless collection of rare books — "I have the first book ever printed in English here," he said, "and the first four folios of the works of Shakespeare."

The Marquess is also building up a collection of Churchilliana — "we have things written by Churchill, letters and speeches," he said, "as well as busts and recordings. It may not be the most valuable collection concerning him but it will certainly be the most unique."

His excursion into the animal world is not new.

Last year he imported a pair of Australian wallabies which escaped soon afterwards.

One jumped through the window of a baker's



THE MARQUESS OF BATH... "I will do anything."

van and the other frightened a local woman when she bumped into it in a country lane.

On television he expounded his views on such subjects as Hitler — "a great man," on union shop stewards — "they should all be

locked up," and democracy — "it doesn't exist in this country."

But rebel though he sounds the Marquess himself leads a quiet life away from the crowds who pack Longleat every weekend.

He gave the house to his son and heir, Viscount Weymouth, some years ago in an effort to avoid the crippling death duties that beset his own father. Now the Marquess, his second wife and their six-year-old daughter Silvy live in a 17th-century mill house at Warminster.

The Marquess visits Longleat regularly and he values it as "absolutely priceless," although a Mexican once offered him £1 million for it.

—Brian Gibson