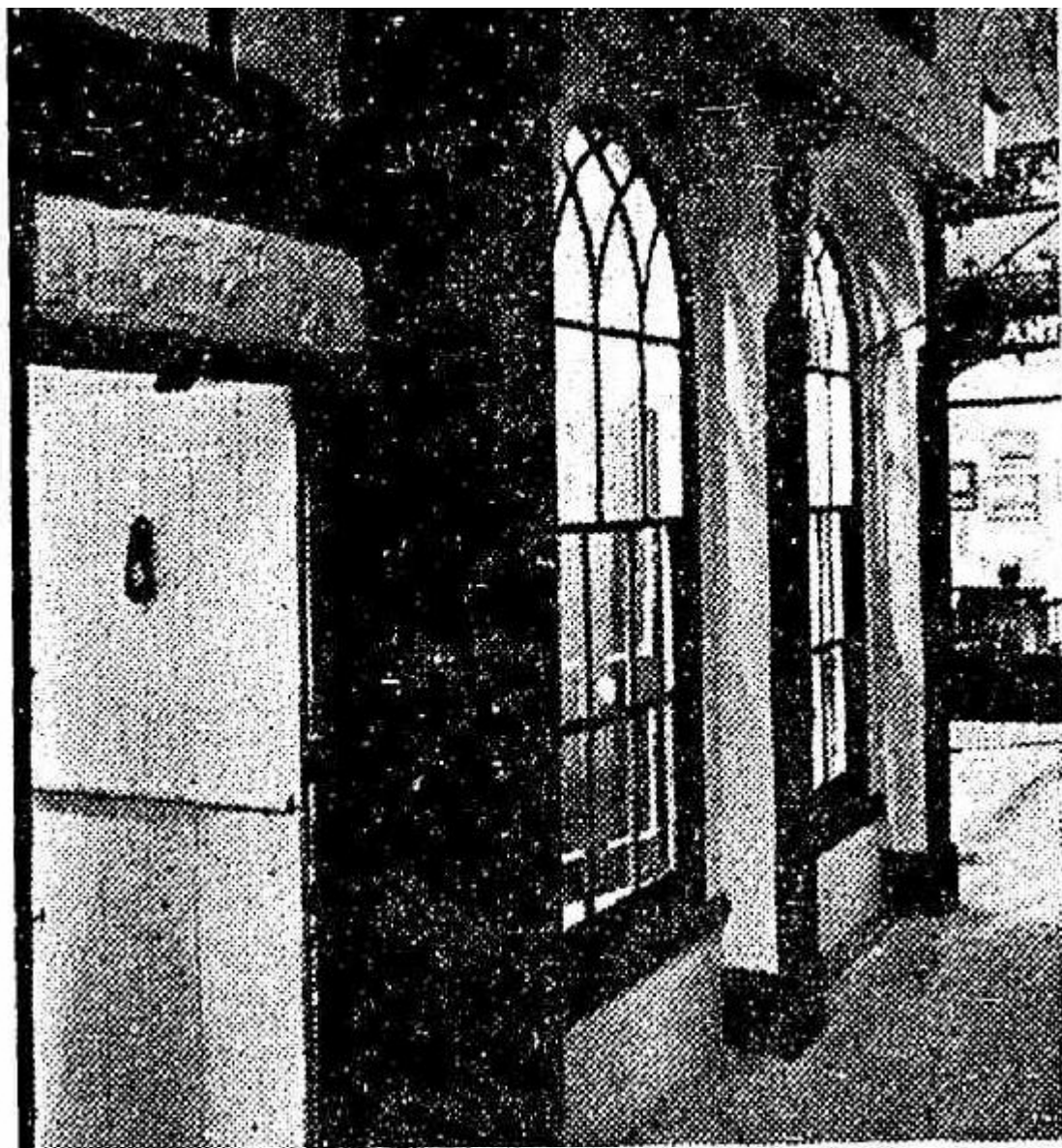


THREE PAGES FOR WOMEN



The Duke and Duchess of Bedford in their private dining room at Woburn Abbey. The painting, one of 21 Canalettos in the room, is of the Bucintoro, the state-boat of the Doge of Venice.





The second floor of the antique market set up in old stables at Woburn Abbey and decorated to resemble streets of period shops.

Spectaculars at Woburn Abbey

WOUBURN ABBEY

From Anne-Marie Rendell, in London

WHEN you go to Woburn Abbey to talk with the Duke and Duchess of Bedford, you are ushered into the sumptuous library which the Bedfords use as a private sitting room and open to the public only three days a year.

I looked up at the handsome ornate ceiling, the richly carved and gilded 18th century chandelier, then admired the dozen or so portraits hung high on the walls — all self-portraits by Rembrandt, Hals, Reynolds, Murillo, Hobbart, Tintoretto and others.

Where the walls were not covered by paintings, they were lined with leather - bound books in rare editions. The furniture was magnificent, huge sofas and gilded upright chairs upholstered in a grey brocade and fringed with braid.

In came the Duke of Bedford to speak enthusiastically about Australia and the visit — brief

and the visit — brief though it is — that they will make in October and timed to coincide with a fund-raising effort by the Children's Medical Research Foundation. "We can only stay for a week and then must hurry to the United States to carry out a lecture tour", the Duke said. "We will be attending a gala ball and other functions aimed at raising funds for the foundation."

"I adore Sydney. We have a lot of good friends there. Although I do not yet own any property in Australia, I have in mind to purchase some. I feel the country has a very great potential investment value and it would give me a good excuse to go out and see what is happening there more often".

THE Duchess of Bedford then joined us and, as we sipped port, she told me of her fondness for Australia and Australians. "When I see those houses overlooking the harbour I just want to live in Sydney".

in Sydney.

This will be the third visit to Australia. In 1962, the Bedfords took a collection of art treasures from Woburn Abbey to Adelaide Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. And in 1964 they paid a visit at the invitation of the World Wildlife Fund. The Duke is an ardent supporter of the organisation and was interested in efforts being made to preserve wildlife in Australia and New Zealand.

The Duke had described his French-born wife to me as "a wonderful organiser and without her life would be quite impossible. She is extremely capable and so full of energy and drive. Before she married me she was in the movie business and made 800 films for American television. Her skill as a producer of television films won her several awards".

Radiating energy, the Duchess told me that she and her husband like to be at the Abbey from April to September each year. In between those months, they ski, fit in as many visits to London theatres as they can and travel a lot, giving lectures and collecting antiques.

She is responsible for setting up the Antique Market at Woburn Abbey. This

is housed in the old stables and the two levels are lined with period shops from which 50 dealers from all over Europe sell antiques.

LIVING in one of the stately homes of England can be a most difficult thing, according to the Duke. "There is always so much going on it is like living over a factory".

Besides the tours of the Abbey, the Duke and Duchess make up a programme of events to entertain visitors. Staged weekly during the season they include sky-diving displays by the Army, a water-ski spectacular, an Alfa-Romeo Rally (14 other car rallies are held during the year), a fly-in of helicopters, a tug-of-war, a Boy Scout camp and a national unidentified flying objects convention.

Visitors can admire art treasures worth more than \$10 million or they can wander through the 3,000 acres of countryside (protected by 14 miles of stone walls) and look at the

walls) and look at the 2,000 animals which inhabit the area. The animals include the American bison, 10 species of Pere David and the almost extinct Soay sheep.

For visitors wishing to actually stay at the Abbey, the Duke and Duchess of Bedford have a special plan, they take in paying guests. But they are rather special ones for the guests pay 55 guineas (\$A115-50) for the privilege of an overnight stay.

The Duke told me, "We have had quite a lot of people willing to pay this sum. Of course, we get bankers and personal references and much correspondence is exchanged before the actual visit takes place".

The expensive overnight stay includes dinner with the Duke and Duchess in their private dining room. I was shown over this Canaletto Room, named because of the 21 Canalettos which adorn the walls. Gold plate is used at table and giant heirloom candlesticks cast gentle lights over the beautiful apartment.

THE Duchess goes to great lengths to ensure the absolute comfort of her guests. Each one arrives

the absolute comfort of her guests. Each one arrives to find a selection of favourite books, flowers and even a room decorated in a special colour. Naturally a valet or maid is assigned to each guest during the stay.

Woburn Abbey has many dinner guests as well as the overnight ones.

The Duke explained: "Organisations in England who wish to entertain overseas clients in a rather different and special way choose Woburn Abbey. For these occasions all of the rooms are candlelit, 18th century music is played and guests are given a conducted tour of the Abbey, also by candlelight. We have a tremendous number of very nice people. Some have even returned to stay with us again and send us presents".

The Duchess does not use cut flowers to decorate the rooms at Woburn Abbey. Instead she uses what she calls "living flowers" — plants to which she adds pieces of driftwood and tiny stuffed animals and birds. She enjoys creating different effects in this way.

And when the pace has been unusually brisk, the Bedfords take refuge in a

Bedfords take refuge in a little cottage at Merribel in the French Alps.

The Duke smiled as he told me. "It is a place where my wife does the cooking and I do the wash.

ing up. We love to go there and get some real peace away from the pressure of things here at the Abbey".
