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## Dear George...

IN 1892 Mr. W. Horsfield, land agent of Cole Green, Hertford, received the following telegram: "Having been informed that Bocket is to let and that I might apply to you for particulars, may I ask you to send these to me at 25 St. James's Place..."

It was signed "Mount Stephen."

Brocket Hall had descended to Earl Cowper; his decision to let it attracted many applicants, but Lord Mount Stephen was prepared to take the house and the park too. The other applicants withdrew.

Sir Stafford Northcote tried to steer him in the direction of a grander house, Wimpole in Cambridgeshire (bought by Kipling's daughter), but Mount Stephen fell in love with Bocket and its situation. He took it on a seven years' lease. But with all the inborn caution of a Scot, with the option of giving it up at the end of a year. Mount Stephen was to remain at Bocket for the next thirty years.

George Stephen was born in Dufftown, North Britain (as Scotland was known in the early

dedication to Canadian interests constant, and the following year came the announcement of his peerage. He chose the title "Mount Stephen," the name given in his honour to the highest point in the Rocky Mountains through which his railroad ran. "The Boss," as he was affectionately known to his colleagues, was a striking presence: a fine head, moustached and bearded; twinkling eyes, and, notable in a man of action, beautiful hands. Above all, he was inspiringly enthusiastic. Riches had left him unchanged in manner. He embodied warmth, honesty, modesty and industry.

The leasing of a great house was not an easy matter. Bocket Hall had been let for the previous ten years to a Mrs. Villebois, who had died. The land was starved and the stables infested with rats. The Mount Stephens were "charmed" with Bocket and undeterred by the problems, settled down to English country life.

In the spring four years later, Lady Mount Stephen died, and was buried in the churchyard at

from a serious operation, and travelled down for a visit to Bocket. Among her suite was a spinster, plain, quiet and gauche, who wore dowdy suits and thick boots, dismissed by the gossips as an old maid. Romance, not for the first time, flowered at Bocket, and during this visit Lord Mount Stephen proposed to the spinster. Miss Gian Tuftell was the daughter of a naval officer and a great friend of the Duchess's daughter, four years her junior, the Princess May. The unexpected engagement caused a furore of jealous gossip and the delighted Princess sent "Dearest Gian" her "very warmest congratulations".

The second Lady Mount Stephen's childhood friend Princess May became the Princess of Wales and a most beloved Queen Mary, to whom Lord Mount Stephen was always "Dear George". There were frequent royal visits to Bocket.

The Queen and her friend were avid collectors of antiques and objets d'art; their favourite pastime was visiting the sale-

After a brilliant career in Canada, George, later Lord Mount Stephen, returned to England and to Bocket Hall, Welwyn, where he settled down to English country life.

liked to wear comfortable old clothes. She entertained occasionally with the old grandeur: for a boy bicycling over from his prep. school, a great silver tea-pot was brought out accompanied by a procession of scones, biscuits, cakes. The woods and park were tended, apart from what Queen Mary described as "a few old crocks" by well-behaved German prisoners-of-war driven over daily from nearby Panshanger. The old couple habitually spent the mornings sitting in the sunny Victorian vestibule which had been added to the house (since demolished).

There were occasional visits from the Queen with Prince

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by Margot Strickland

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years of the last century) 150 years ago in 1829. He had pursued a life of tremendous adventure. At the age of twenty-one, he left Scotland to seek his fortune across the ocean in the new world. His future lay in the undeveloped continent of Canada, where he conceived the brilliant idea of a railway crossing the vast tract of land from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast.

The romance of this extraordinary achievement has passed into Canadian and American history, but it is less well known to the British people. The enterprise was a successful one from the start. The railways and Stephen prospered amazingly. The Canadian Pacific Railway Company continued to expand, bringing wealth to all its investors. Prosperous mines and saw-mills had sprung up along the tracks. By the last decade of the 1800s Stephen was a millionaire knight.

In 1890 the Stephens came "home," their affection and

Lemsford. Lord Mount Stephen was distraught. His wife had been a tremendous support in all her husband's wide-ranging projects: he was alone. Her portrait remained on view in his study for the rest of his life.

Few widowers are inconsolable for long; there is nothing so animating to country society as a middle-aged man of substance bereaved of his wife. Hertfordshire widows and spinsters dusted off their caps to set at Lord Mount Stephen, now aged sixty-seven. Letters of condolence from ladies showered on him at Bocket, followed at a decent interval by innumerable invitations to luncheon.

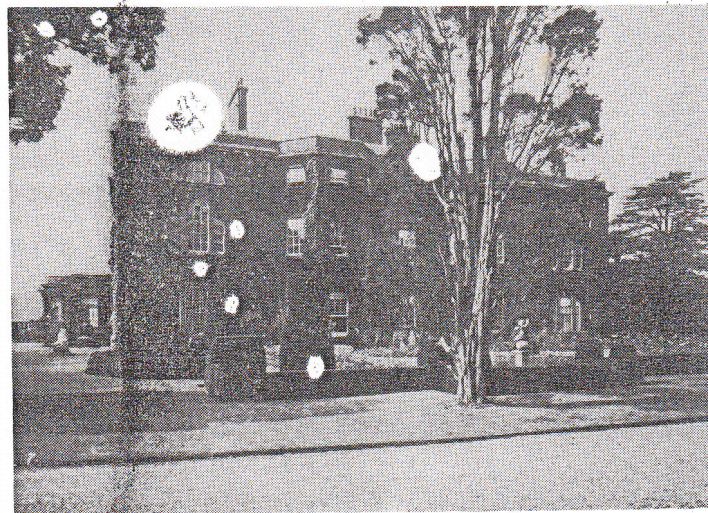
The authority on roses, Miss Ellen Willmott, was the favourite outside the county; Lady Somers, who was nearing seventy, was said to be making desperate efforts to catch the famous self-made peer.

About a year after the death of Lady Mount Stephen, the Duchess of Teck was recovering

rooms and picking up bargains. Lord Mount Stephen, munificently generous as a public benefactor, strongly disapproved of his wife's extravagant hobby; she bought what he called rubbish. It was the only source of discord in a triumphantly happy marriage. Lady Mount Stephen was driven to smuggling her bargains into Bocket and hiding them from her husband.

At the outbreak of World War One, Lord Mount Stephen was eighty-six, somewhat lame and increasingly deaf. Motoring was impossible and the couple were confined to Bocket. Lady Mount Stephen devoted herself to her husband and garden — bay trees in pots, square beds of massed verbenascenting the Lea Valley.

She too was now deaf and



**An unusual view of Bocket Hall in the time of Queen Victoria. It shows the vestibule in which Lord and Lady Mount Stephen liked to sit in the morning sunshine.**

George and Princess Mary. Always "Dear George" greeted them with the same unaffected warmth which so endeared him to them.

Early in the summer of 1917, after a particularly hot day, the Mount Stephens were seated in the drawing-room, Lord Mount Stephen playing patience, Lady Mount Stephen reading. A slight noise alerted them; Lady Stephen rang the bell.

The agitated butler announced to his astonished master and mistress that a bomb had

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# Canadian Trailblazer

Focus on George Stephen of Bocket Hall by Vivienne Smith



Bocket Hall, once home of Lord Mount Stephen, prime mover in the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway

**T**his year marks the 120th anniversary of the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. A one-time resident of Bocket Hall was the driving force behind the venture. It was the courage and determination of financier George Stephen which ultimately ensured the success of the undertaking.

Born at Dufftown in north-east Scotland on June 5th 1829, George was the eldest of eight children of carpenter William Stephen and his wife Elspet. The family were not exactly well off. George himself later recalled how, as a barefoot youngster, the promise of a shilling (5p) had been sufficient to induce him to run a dozen miles to deliver a letter for his father's laird. Leaving school at fourteen, he had worked as a stable lad at a local inn before being apprenticed to a draper in Aberdeen. Then at nineteen, he set off for London to make his fortune.

Having found work there in the cloth trade, the young man bumped into his cousin William Stephen, who was a draper in Montreal. As a result, at twenty-one he left for Canada to be a buyer for his

cousin's firm. Following marriage to his sweetheart Charlotte Annie, George Stephen became sole proprietor of the business on William's death in 1862. A shrewd businessman, he not only expanded into all areas of textile manufacturing with great success. His investments included shares in the Bank of Montreal, then the most important financial institution in Canada.

By 1876, Stephen was president of the bank, and respected as one of the sharpest financial minds in the country. Although outwardly reserved, he possessed a gambler's daring and was quite happy to invest in high-risk ventures which brought the bank much higher returns. Yet for all his wheeling and dealing, the businessman refused to own a telephone. He claimed the newfangled device was only used to spread gossip.

When the opportunity arose in 1878 to invest in the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, Stephen jumped at the chance. He was undeterred by the fact that failure of the project would mean certain ruin. As head of a group of financiers, he travelled to the Netherlands and talked the owners into

selling at a giveaway price. Consequently when the railway was completed, he and his fellow investors made a fortune.

Fresh from this success, Stephen next became involved in the undertaking that would make his name. The idea was to construct a railway line right across Canada, from Montreal in the east to Vancouver on the Pacific coast. The government, having struggled to complete the first seven hundred miles, had decided to hand over the project to private enterprise. In 1880, Stephen and his group of financiers duly agreed to complete the remaining one thousand nine hundred miles of track within ten years.

As the first president of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the businessman faced an ongoing battle to finance the venture. He was repeatedly compelled to plead for aid from the reluctant Canadian government, and often made use of his own personal funds. General manager William Van Horne, who was in charge of the line's construction, later commented. "My part was easy. I had only to spend the money, but Stephen had to find it when nobody in the world believed (in the Canadian Pacific Railway) but ourselves."

In fact, the building of the railway had problems of its own. The easiest section was across the prairies. On one particular day, more than six miles of track were laid, a record never surpassed by manual labour. However, the Rockies were a very different matter. Construction of the line over steep gradients such as Kicking Horse Pass near Banff was a colossal engineering achievement. And in honour of their boss, the railway surveyors dubbed one of the mountain peaks in the vicinity Mount Stephen.

However, by the end of 1884 the company was on the edge of bankruptcy and Stephen was close to despair. With debts running into millions of dollars, it seemed like the end of the line. But then at the eleventh hour, the Canadian government finally agreed to help, after the railway proved its worth by transporting troops to Saskatchewan to put down a rebellion. Just four short years after the work had begun, the last spike was driven into the



track at Craigellachie, British Columbia, on November 7th 1885.

Worn down by years of struggle and anxiety, Stephen resigned as president in 1888. A year later, he was made Baron Mount Stephen in appreciation of his great achievement. Returning to England in 1892, the sixty-three year old businessman settled at Bocket Hall in Lemsford, which remained his home for thirty years. He was soon rubbing shoulders with royalty. Following the death of his wife in 1896, he married Gian Tufnell, a member of the Duchess of Teck's entourage. His new spouse was a close friend of the Duchess's daughter Princess May (later Queen Mary), who subsequently paid several visits to Bocket.

Stephen spent his retirement donating to charity more than £1 million of the fortune he had made in Canada. Amongst the lucky recipients were hospitals in London, Aberdeen and Montreal. The people of Lemsford also benefited from his generosity. He not only presented the local community with a reading room well-stocked with books, but also built Gosmore House in the village as a district nurse clinic.

Lord Mount Stephen was ninety-two when he died at Bocket Hall on November 29th 1921. He was buried in Lemsford churchyard beside his first wife. Breaking the news to Queen Mary in a letter, his widow wrote: *'He died as he had lived... just simply... his own Canadian wagon carried him to church, his own horses and coachmen drove it and his own men carried him to his grave.'*

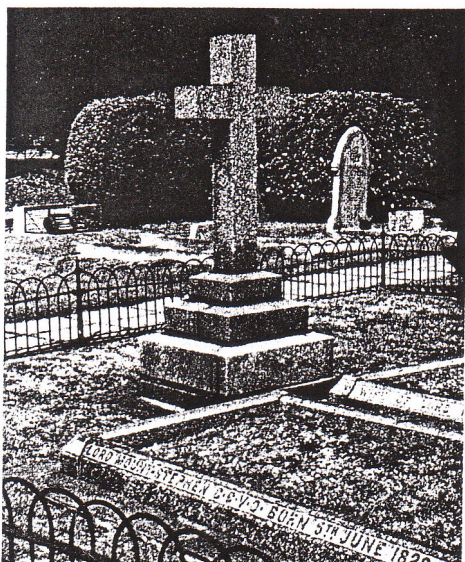
Thanks to the sterling efforts of George Stephen, Canada was united for the very first time from coast to coast. Yet a simple granite cross marks his final resting place in Lemsford. However, the most enduring monument to this celebrated resident of Bocket Hall is the magnificent railway he helped to build.



The village of Lemsford which benefited from the generosity of the wealthy businessman



Lemsford Church, where Lord Mount Stephen was buried in 1921



Left: the granite cross in Lemsford churchyard marks the final resting place of the man behind Canada's great transcontinental railway

Above: Gosmore House, opposite Lemsford Church, built by Stephen as a district nurse clinic