

Gastronomes. I am very sorry not to be able to be with you this evening as you remember some of those we have lost in the past couple of years. One of those no longer with us is our dear old Mr George and our President has asked me to put down a few memories of this truly wonderful hotelier.

I first met George over 31 years ago at my final interview for the position as Restaurant Manager at his hotel. My overriding memory was of an immaculately dressed, enviably slim gentleman with impeccable manners. He wore a three piece Savile Row pin-striped suit with a brightly coloured tie knotted beneath his signature starched stiff collar - he continued to wear starched collars his whole working life. By the end of his career there was only one laundry in London who could still launder them!

Whilst the look was always immaculate and rather formal George himself was not really formal at all. He was such fun and behind closed doors he could often be irreverent at times. Luncheon was rarely taken as George wanted to keep his weight firmly under control as his greatest love, after the hotel, was riding. He was a very keen amateur jockey in his younger days and continued to ride for most of his life. He went on to become Joint Master of his Drag-Hunt and the leading light of his Team Chase Team - The Boring Gorings. Every morning his day would start with exercising the horses down at his Kent home before jumping on his train to Victoria to The Goring.

When George Goring's grandfather, one of the founding Gastronomes, opened the hotel in 1910 all the great hotels had the owner's name above the door. When George took over the reigns his was the only hotel still owned and run by a descendant of its founding family. He never forgot this and on my first day back in December 1990 he told me that we all have to work that much harder when the family name is above the door. You would often see George carrying a guest's suitcase across the hall. Hospitality ran through his veins.

Mr G never took himself too seriously and was a source of great joy to his family and staff alike. He was a strong christian and believed in leading his life with a strong moral compass - as well as a strong Dry Martini. He also was partial to a glass of Ruinart which he preferred served in a wine glass and would remove the bubbles with his antique silver twisel-stick. But most of all he loved his 'chicken shit bread' (pumpnickel bread to the rest of us) which he took everywhere with him and handed to the waiter as he sat down to a meal. There was never any shortage of roughage in George's world.

Above all George was delightfully eccentric and as he never failed to remind us he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Once when he had a minor accident down in Cornwall he rang me to say he needed a new Range Rover the next day and it had to be delivered to his house in Cornwall. After speaking to the showroom here in London I had full details of the four cars they had available for immediate delivery and the varying costs. Before I could run through the particular specifications Mr G asked me what colour they each were and asked me to buy the green one! It was delivered the next day! Another time George was moaning at the ghastly dull February weather we were enduring at the time in London. The next morning he was on Concord on his way to Barbados to stay at the Coral Reef hotel owned and run by his great friends the O'Haras. That was George!

Sadly George's wife Penny died later in the same year back in 2020 so it was a double loss for the Goring. George had retired 15 years earlier and Jeremy had returned to become the fourth Goring at the helm. His father was utterly delighted when Jeremy and the team were awarded the coveted Forbes Five Star Rating and the Michelin Star to add to all the other awards that the hotel had gathered through the decades.

However, it was George who really won the best awards including Hotelier of the Year, The AA Lifetime Achievement Award and his OBE (other buggers' efforts as he constantly reminded his team!). George was chair of The London Tourist Board, Chairman of Pride of Britain then Life President of Pride of Britain and of course one of our most beloved Presidents here at The Gastronomes. He was certainly one of a kind and the world is a poorer place for his passing.