

An Eye For Detail

Few of us can look back and say, 'Prince Philip changed my life', but one man who can is Barrie Linklater. Thanks in part to the encouragement and patronage of the Duke of Edinburgh, Linklater has become one of this country's foremost contemporary equestrian artists. **Ian Lloyd recently** met up with him

BARRIE LINKLATER'S first brush with royalty came about through luck as well as his undoubted talent as a portrait painter. Speaking at his studio in rural Berkshire, he recalled: 'I was having an exhibition in London back in 1972, and I decided to include a painting of my brother dressed in his policeman's uniform. One day I noticed a very distinguished-looking gentleman scrutinizing the painting at great length before he came over to ask if I would accept a commission to paint him too.

'He turned out to be a lieutenant colonel in the Welsh Guards and I suppose the painting must have been to his liking because he asked if I would paint Prince Philip, who was to retire as Colonel of the Welsh Guards in 1975. The commission was for a portrait of the Duke in uniform against a background image of Harlech Castle.'

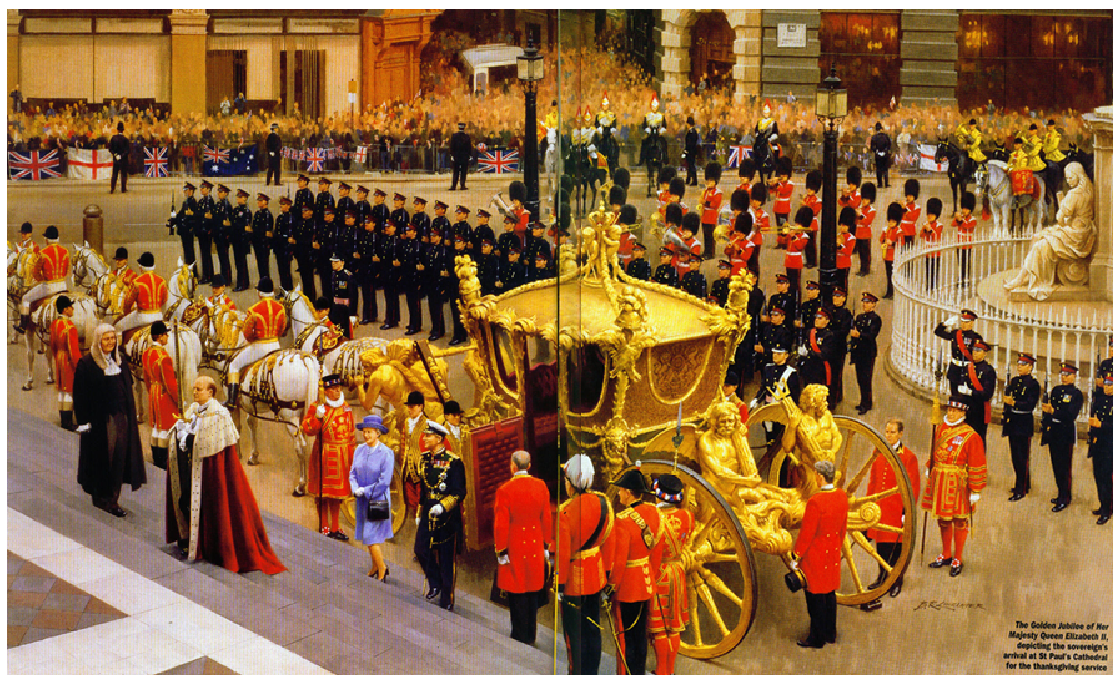
The Duke of Edinburgh agreed to several sittings at Buckingham Palace, during which the artist came to appreciate Philip's 'brilliant mind — he really does his homework and gives 100 per cent to anything he does,' says Linklater.

While many sitters would be content to pose quietly or chat about the weather, the Duke, no mean artist himself, typically chose to voice his opinions about the painting and its composition.

'Do you like painting horses?' he asked one day, completely out of the blue. When Linklater said that he did — because of their beauty and their historical context in art through the centuries — Philip said, 'Well, why not paint my ceremonial horse Bachelor in it?' Barrie was obliged to point out that the agreed commission was for the castle background, a problem Philip genially pointed out that he could deal with. 'Don't worry, I think I can use a bit of influence there,' said the Duke.

Out went Harlech Castle and in came Bachelor.

Philip was impressed with the end result and asked, 'How would you like to paint some of the Queen's horses — probably her mares and foals?'



The answer of course was 'Yes', the result of which was an oil painting of some of the Queen's favourite horses at Wolferton Stud, on the Sandringham estate. The work, a personal gift from the Duke to the Queen to mark her Silver Jubilee, has to rank as a pretty impressive commission for an artist's first major equestrian work.

The painting obviously found royal favour because Linklater was later invited to stay with the Royal Family at Sandringham. Although he is respectfully vague about the visit he admits, 'They were very welcoming and it was a great family atmosphere. I recall sitting next to the Queen Mother on a settee and her telling me, "I do like your painting. We call it the family portrait, as it's of the different generations."' He also recalls being invited by the Queen to help her assemble one of the massive jigsaw puzzles she so loves.

Having also been a guest at Buckingham Palace luncheons, Barrie is full of praise for the Queen as a hostess. 'Everything is always in order, but very informal at the same time. She was clearly well briefed and obviously aware that I was working on a painting of one of her pages. The first thing she said to me was, 'I hear you're doing William Oswald. How's it going?'

Just as Prince Philip commissioned Linklater to paint a gift for the Queen, so the monarch returned the favour by commissioning him to sketch her husband for the Royal Library's collection of images of members of the Order of Merit.

While some of us might give photographs of members of our family with their animals as Christmas and birthday presents, it would appear that the Royal Family almost as readily hand each other vast oil portraits of their beloved horses, painted on their own, being fed, ridden or watched by their royal owners.

Linklater has created 13 such oil paintings for the Royal Collection, as well as more than 50 sketches and watercolours, many of

which line the walls of the private apartments at Sandringham or Windsor.

A typical royal commission is the painting of the Princess Royal in her racing colours astride her steeplechaser Cnoc-na-Cuille. The work was commissioned by Prince Philip and attests to the pride he has in his only daughter's success as a horsewoman.

Barrie recalls: 'I was disappointed with the initial result of the watercolour and painted it again in oil. I then retried it in watercolour and was much happier with the result, so I was able to give the Duke a choice. In the end he chose the oil painting for his daughter and kept the watercolour himself'

What makes the gift even more personal is that Cnoc, as the Princess affectionately called him, soon afterwards suddenly collapsed and died as she was riding him to the winners' enclosure after coming third in a race at Towcester.

A commission from the Corporation of London to mark the 40th anniversary of the Queen's accession provided Linklater with another opportunity to create a landmark royal painting, this time of Her Majesty's principal studs and stables. The Queen chose the theme herself, and the resulting painting is made up of a series of small vignettes around a central image of Her Majesty arriving at St Paul's Cathedral for the Silver Jubilee service, one of the key moments in her relationship with the City of London.

The painting took four-and-a-half months to complete, and Linklater was still working on it the day before it was due to be presented at a luncheon at Guildhall in November 1992. It proved to be the highlight of an otherwise disastrous week for the monarch, coming just days after the devastating fire at Windsor Castle, and the Queen, nursing a heavy cold, was steeling herself to make what became known as her *annus horribilis* speech, in which she referred obliquely to the family problems that had also overshadowed her anniversary year.

The Queen hadn't seen the painting, although she had posed for Linklater in Windsor Great Park sitting astride one of her mares, and was delighted with it. 'Not had for a chap who doesn't like painting horses!' observed Prince Philip dryly.

Linklater's most recent royal painting was a commission by the Honourable Artillery Company to paint the Queen — their Captain General — as she arrived at St Paul's Cathedral for the Golden Jubilee thanksgiving service.

'It was a bit of a challenge,' he says, with characteristic understatement. 'It took much longer than any of the others — about 170 days — since there is so much detail in it and it was important to be able to recognise the key figures.'

Linklater attended the rehearsals for the procession and on the day itself was positioned on a platform high above the steps leading up to the West Door, giving him a bird's-eye view of the monarch's arrival. 'I chose that moment because I wanted to focus on the Queen as well as the Gold State Coach. I wanted **it** to tell the story, if you like, with the Lord Mayor, the regiment, the crowd and the figure of the Queen in the centre. I'd been there since 7.30am and you could feel the atmosphere build up

hour by hour, with the crowd cheering every arrival at the cathedral. And then finally came the moment when the Gold Coach arrived and the Queen stepped out, to tremendous cheers.'

It is considered a privilege for any artist to paint a member of the Royal Family, but to paint for them as well — and on so many occasions — is even more notable. Barrie is very much aware of the honour 'I never thought I'd have so many royal commissions. I'm grateful for the opportunity and of course the luck that gave me the opportunity to leap forward along this path. I suppose I've always wanted to achieve the best I can.'

In doing so he has undoubtedly provided the Queen and her family with lasting mementoes of the pastimes they love best.
