

# Blowing for home

The retiring Beaufort master on hounds, hunting and a changing landscape

HUNTING is a very serious business—as long as it's taken lightly! This Surtees-esque sentiment has done Ian Farquhar well over 45 years hunting hounds, an art he suggests is dying. Other mantras are his own 'love your hounds and look after your farmers' and that of the late, legendary American MFH Benjamin Hardaway: 'It's a love affair, not a dictatorship.'

Capt Farquhar's last season as joint-master of the Duke of Beaufort's Hunt ends an era in which he has, as an articulate, empathetic countryman with a sense of fun and perspective, epitomised the best of the tradition. (He would self-deprecatingly demur.)

He and his wife, Pammie-Jane, a beautiful and charming horsewoman, plus two graceful lurchers, live in a farmhouse on The Prince of Wales's Highgrove estate. It's stuffed with black-and-white photographs, paintings and artefacts that mourn hunting's carefree years. The Farquhars plan a move to the West Country, next year.

Capt Farquhar, 72, gave up riding a few seasons back and admits that it's hard to look on. 'I missed it like fury. I still enjoy going out, but for someone who's hunted hounds for a long time, it's a different ballgame, a totally different sport. Although it was a relief to stop, as it was hurting too much. It's a young man's game, anyway—silly old fools should get out. One can't agree with everything that goes on.'

His career took the then traditional route of cavalry officer (the Queen's Own Hussars)—'now, they're going straight into hunting hounds virtually from school'—serving in Aden and Malaya, point-to-pointing and playing polo and acting as equerry to the Queen Mother. 'Everything you have ever heard about what fun she was is true. She was adored. Every engagement over-ran.'

On his wedding day, someone asked him what he was going to

do and suggested he might have a pack of hounds. Twelve seasons with the Bicester followed: 'Probably the best hunting I ever had. We had amazingly long hunts, but then, in 1973, the country [around Oxfordshire] was pretty wild—70% grass, with a lot of dairy and sheep. With the wheat bonanza of the 1970s and early 1980s, it became the other way round.'

He was milking 200 cows, but was 'crucified' by quotas. 'It's sad to see what's happening in the countryside. The damage the EC wheat prices did was horrific, with farms going under the plough and the burning of hedgerows. One farm became a 150-acre wheat-field—birds and insects all gone.'

'Shooting has been a big change, too,' he adds. 'Once there were 10–12 shoots in the [Beaufort] country; now, there's about 60 and the number of birds put down can be obscene.'

In 1985, Capt Farquhar arrived at the Duke of Beaufort's, perhaps the most iconic pack of hounds in the world, a year after the death of its most famous proprietor, 'Master', the 10th Duke of Beaufort. The captain's father, Sir Peter Farquhar, whose 30-year hunting career culminated at the Portman in Dorset, was a cousin of the 10th Duke and a trustee of his Badminton estate and Capt Farquhar

had known the 11th Duke, who died last year, since boyhood.

'I miss him. We never had a cross word. He was a very capable, interesting man. He never appeared to be taking much notice, but if you mentioned something to him, he already knew it. He was a wonderful joint-master: never jealous, never interfered, always gave good advice.'

**'I couldn't believe bigotry could win over common sense'**

Another reason Capt Farquhar was welcome at the Beaufort was for his reputation as a natural huntsman and hound breeder. 'The thing is to be a hound man first; trust between hound and huntsman is key. A pack of hounds should know what you're thinking before you've thought it.'

He was a passionate advocate for the improving qualities of the rough-coated, sonorous-voiced Welsh hound, a shaggier cousin of the traditional English foxhound. He brought with him some Vale of Clettwr bloodlines and, notably, descendants of Medyg '69, the legendary sire bred by

New Forest MFH Sir Newton Rycroft, a Wyckhamist renowned for his intellectual approach.

Foxhunting purists raised their eyebrows. 'Master had used Medyg on my father's advice, but he also liked winning at Peterborough [the Royal Foxhound Show] and put it like this—you didn't do any good there [with Welsh hounds];' he says wryly. 'And we found it harder to get the woolly puppies walked at first, although they increasingly became accepted. But showing isn't the be-all and end-all—it's what they do in the hunting field that matters. If a hound has good conformation, it will run effortlessly and do its job more easily,' he explains.

'Foxhunters began to realise these hounds were more accurate and persevering and, in my view, the hunting improved.'

In November 2004, the unthinkable happened. The day after the Government voted to ban hunting, Capt Farquhar stood on a dray with the Duke to rally a disconsolate field, trying to mask his own shock and sadness. 'We said that whatever happened, there would still be hounds at Badminton and we *would* go hunting.'

He still can't believe what happened. 'Towards the end of the 1980s, when the [pro-hunting] campaigning and marches began, the pressure was more intense and it could be quite unpleasant, with the antis saying things like "we know where your children go to school", but I will admit I never thought it would lead to a ban. The evidence was so stacked in favour of hunting, I didn't believe a government could be so stupid.'

'It was all bigotry, of course—nothing to do with animal welfare—but I couldn't believe that bigotry could win over common sense. I still feel a trace of bitterness. Thousands of foxes are still being shot and snared, so what was the point? Really, we were quite nice to them!'

Kate Green

## On the record

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**Where is your favourite place in Britain?** The top of Mount Clebrig in Sutherland, where we went as children

**What is your favourite building?** The doghouse—I spend a lot of time in it

**Book?** It was when I read *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Alan Paton) at Eton that the injustice of apartheid hit home. I also love *Seabiscuit* (Laura Hillenbrand)

**Music?** Classical—I listened to Mussorgsky in the Far East

**Food?** Fish

**Holiday?** The sun

**Dinner guests?** Sir Newton Rycroft, Ben Hardaway and the American-born hound breeder Ikey Bell

