

## Lord Camoys

The seventh Baron Camoys was a City banker who restored Stonor Park, advised the Vatican on its investments, and became the first Catholic Lord Chamberlain since the Reformation

CATHERINE PEPINSTER

**L**ORD CAMOYS, who has died at the age of 82, was one of the leading Catholic laymen of the past 50 years. A man who combined financial acumen, deep faith, intelligence, warmth towards people of all stripes, and great pride in the history of his recusant Catholic family, he had several careers. They included tutoring the Crown Prince of Nepal, rising to the top in banking and becoming the first Roman Catholic Lord Chamberlain since the Reformation.

His Catholic interests included acting as a consultant to the Vatican on financial matters and the chairmanship of The Tablet Trust, the parent body of The Tablet Publishing Company. But above all he will be remembered for saving and preserving Stonor Park, the Oxfordshire home of his family for generations and one of the most important centres of Roman Catholicism during the persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not least for the sanctuary it offered Catholic priests, including St Edmund Campion. Purchasing and restoring the house cost him a considerable part of the fortune he made through his successful banking career, after his father, facing bankruptcy, put it on the market and refused to sell it to his son. When he died in 1976, Stonor, now the seventh Lord Camoys, bought it from the executors, restored it and turned it into a major tourist attraction while maintaining it as the Stonor family home. He and his wife Elisabeth (Beth), whom he married in 1966, raised their family of three girls and a boy there.

**BORN IN** 1940, Ralph Thomas Campion George Sherman Stonor (known as Tom) was educated at Eton and then at Balliol, Oxford, where he read history. The son of the former Mary Jeanne Stourton (who died in 1987), and a hard-drinking father, Major Sherman Stonor, the sixth baron, who struggled to cope with the upkeep of Stonor Park, not far along the Thames from Henley.

Camoys became a highly successful banker. He first entered the world of finance when he joined the Rothschild merchant bank, becoming managing director of Rothschild International Bank at the age of 26. In 1977, he became chairman of Amex Bank, formed when Rothschild International was bought by American Express. A year later he was

appointed to run Barclays Merchant Bank and took it through the Big Bang of 1986, creating Barclays de Zoete Wedd (BZW). He continued at BZW and its successor Barclays Capital, paying special attention to compliance issues until he joined Sotheby's in 1993.

There were lasting consequences for Camoys' involvement and success in banking. It nearly cost him his health: he suffered a stroke aged 46. It brought him to the attention of the Vatican and he was appointed one of two consultants to the Administration of the

Patrimony of the Holy See (APSA) in the 1990s. Consultants are Catholics selected for their senior banking roles and Camoys advised the Holy See on a range of investments, including real estate in London. He recalled raising his eyebrows when he learned that the tenants of some Holy See properties in Paris were using them as brothels.

But the most significant impact of Camoys' financial career was that it enabled him to buy Stonor Park and fund its restoration.

While much of its land and its artefacts had been sold, Camoys' father had bequeathed its library, archives and several family portraits to his grandson William (who has succeeded to the barony), which was the starting point for Stonor's revival.

Tom Camoys later managed to purchase other historic items that had been sold off. After he took over Stonor Park, he continued to commute through the week to work in the City and then devoted his weekends to the house. He took immense pleasure in welcoming his personal guests and the public to Stonor, where they learned of its place in English Catholic history.

It was from Stonor that Edmund Campion had supervised the printing of his *Decem Rationes* (Ten Reasons for Being A Catholic) before he was caught, arrested and executed at Tyburn. Camoys would also proudly relate that he was descended from Sir Thomas de Camoys, who commanded the left wing of the English army at Agincourt.

While Camoys was steeped in the history of his family and of Catholicism, he was not a nostalgist and embraced the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. His involvement with *The Tablet* – he was chairman of The Tablet Trust from 2009 to 2017 – mirrored his desire to see an educated laity fully participate in the Church. He was an honorary fellow and great supporter of St Edmund's

College, Cambridge. He was never cowed by the hierarchy, due in part to the confidence his family's recusant history gave him. Ignatius Kusiak, the former publisher of *The Tablet*, recalls: "Lord Camoys had a passionate belief in *The Tablet's* independent voice, which should keep the bishops on their toes."

Camoys was both a devout Catholic and a keen ecumenist and became friends with two Archbishops of Canterbury, Robert Runcie and Rowan Williams. He was as loyal to the Crown as he was to the Catholic Church, and was appointed a Lord in Waiting to Queen Elizabeth in 1992, becoming her Lord Chamberlain in 1998, a role he had to step down from after just two years because of ill health. He remained a trusted ally and when Pope Benedict XVI met the Queen at the start of his state visit in 2010, she asked Camoys to ensure her Roman Catholic relatives were introduced to the Pope at Holyroodhouse. One of the last times that Camoys left Stonor was to attend the Queen's funeral.

Queen Elizabeth was not the only royal who held Lord Camoys in great regard. As a young man, between Eton and university, he was asked to act as tutor to Crown Prince Birendra of Nepal, helping to prepare him for entry to Eton. The prince, later King Birendra, remained a close friend until he was assassinated by his son Dipendra in 2001. The year Camoys spent in Nepal led to a life-long love of the country, which he visited many times. His family were comforted, as he lay dying at Stonor, to learn that several Buddhist monasteries in Nepal were chanting prayers for him.

*The seventh Baron Camoys, banker, Lord Chamberlain and chairman of The Tablet Trust, born 16 April 1940, died 4 January 2023.*

Catherine Pepinster is a former editor of *The Tablet*.



He saved Stonor Park, which had given sanctuary to St Edmund Campion

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