

West Dart Research Papers – No 3

A South Devon Eccentric

A short biography of Ronald ‘Ronnie’ Frederick Lucas (aka Baron Rothenthal)

Graham Hawkins

***with thanks to Richard Pitts for bringing
Ronald to my attention***



Ronald was the son of Frederick Henry Lucas (manufacturing jeweller in Birmingham specialising in diamond setting) and Helen Lucas his grandfather Charles was also jeweller. Frederick grew up at 46 Summer Lane just north of the Jewellery Quarter.

Ronald was born 13 October 1902 and baptised 30 November 1902 at All Saints, Small Heath, Birmingham with an address given as nearby 85 Waverley Road, presumably the family home of Frederick and Helen prior to moving to Acocks Green. Ronald had a brother, Harold John Lucas (1904-1995).

In the 1911 (census) and 1921 (census) the family lived at Shirley House, 88 Westley Road, Acocks Green. The house became *The Shirley House Hotel* in about 1950 and has since expanded and changed its name to *The Westley Hotel*.



Ronald is listed as an apprentice in the 1921 (census), probably in the jewellery industry, as his place of work was the same as his father at 155 Spencer Street, Birmingham, on the northern edge of the Jewellery Quarter (left).

In 1930 Ronald was registered on the electoral roll as still resident at 88 Westley Road. Shortly after this he moved to South Devon.

There is an image in the Totnes Image Bank with the caption:

Manor House Hotel, North Bovey. From (a) collection of photographs of Baron Rosenthal (sic) who owned another hotel in Torquay



The image on the left is also of the *Manor House Hotel*. There is no evidence that Lucas owned this hotel which was in the hands of the GWR (1929-1948) and British Rail (1948-1983). He may have worked there on his arrival in Devon. It is now the *Bovey Castle Hotel*. The other hotel referred to in the caption is probably the *Shirley Tower Hotel*, Torquay.

Resident Proprietor: Mr. R. F. Lucas

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During the 1930s-1950s Ronald owned the *Shirley Tower Hotel* on Vane Hill Road in Torquay, probably named after his family home. There is evidence that he was there in 1935, 1943, 1946 and 1950. The hotel was put up for sale in 1952 and demolished in 1962 to make way for part of the *Shirley Towers* apartment block complex, scathingly referred to as *The Three Ugly Sisters*.

In 1944 there were several newspaper references to Ronald as an amateur pianist performing at local events – assuming he is the Ronald Lucas mentioned. He is certainly quoted elsewhere as supportive of local music.

Ronald claimed that in 1945, in thanks for his rescue of two men from the Nazis during The Second World War, the second Baron von Rothenthal of Austria, had conferred his title upon him to be inherited upon his death which happened in 1980. Subsequently Ronald styled himself a Baron von Rothenthal or

Lucas de Rothenthal. In 1987 he sold the right to use the title for use after his own death.

HERO BARON SEEKS 'HEIR' TO HIS TITLE

A TORQUAY man who was bestowed with a baronetcy as a thank-you for saving men from the Nazis during the war is looking for an "heir" to carry on the title.

Mr Ronald Lucas, 65, is a Baron de Rothenthal and displays his coat of arms on his Daimler and his stationery.

But the former hotelier is a bachelor and is keen to find a suitable person to continue the Austrian title — for £12,000.

Today Mr Lucas said from his home in St Marks Road: "I am transferring the title. I am not doing it for money. My idea was that the best thing would be to transfer it to whoever I think is suitable. It would have to be a man."

Advertisements have brought some response and he said he was negotiating with a man in the London area who had a family.

"He is extremely interested," said Mr Lucas.

"I would have to choose who has it eventually."

He explained that the honour was conferred on him in 1945 by the second baron.

"I saved two men from the Nazis. The baron was very grateful and one of the men I saved — who was the son of the court jeweller in Vienna — lived at my hotel the Shirley Tower for the whole of the war."

The other man was a Czech, who Mr Lucas lost contact with. The one snag



in the way of anybody hoping to take the title is that a British citizen is not allowed to hold an overseas title.

Mr Lucas said: "I use it socially, but I can't use it legally. However mine is a legal document, it's got the

seal of the then public notary."

Mr Lucas said he is a British citizen but that did not stop him calling himself a baron and signing his cheques Lucas de Rothenthal.

From 1946-1950 he lived at Avenue Cottage, Ashprington (right), the former gardener's cottage on the Sharpham Estate.



In April 1954 Ronald became the proprietor of *Colehayes Park Hotel*, Bovey Tracey (left) and immediately came into conflict with the redoubtable Dartmoor landowner Sylvia Sayer over signage. The hotel was put up for sale in 1956, the same year he was fined for not paying National Insurance contributions for himself and his employees

There is evidence that in 1965 Ronald was running an at-home dining service called 'Lucas Catering' from *Bramhope* on Lower Warberry Road, Torquay. This was still operating in 1979.

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In 1973 Ronald opened the *Minadab Restaurant* (left) between Dawlish and Teignmouth. At this time, he was said to be living at *Mamhead Park*, which could refer to *The Orangery* on the estate.

By 1987 Ronald was living at St Marks Road, Torquay. He died in December 2001 in Torquay.