

Memories of a country house hotel

The Cotswold stone walls of the Dormy House Hotel house a fair few memories. To celebrate the launch of the four-star hotel's new Archive Room, Tracy Watkins talks to five members of staff who between them have clocked up 94 years' service

The maintenance man ensuring good vibrations



Most good stories come from the back-room boys and maintenance man Neville Butler, on the staff for 31 years, does not disappoint. Making small talk with Michael Parkinson and watching Noel Edmunds arrive on the premises via hot air balloon – Neville has seen it all. From the use of the banquetting suite at Dormy for numerous car launches, where cars such as the Volkswagen Passat were craned in, to the Land Rover Discoveries actually being driven down the steps into the great room for the press conference. Says Neville: "Both of these launches were memorable, the VW launch because on the night the cars were delivered it snowed and when the press woke up the next morning all you could see of the cars outside were their roofs peeping through the snow. The Discovery launch was amazing because the cars had been secretly brought into the hotel. The local dignitaries and press were being entertained in a different part of the suite. Then the lights dimmed, the room filled with dry ice, the partitions were drawn back and there were the cars for all to see."

In fact 20 years ago, Dormy's sound and light systems were enviably state-of-the-art due to the influence of owner Jørgen Philip-Sørensen's interests at the nearby Group 4 head office. Rated in the top 10 in

the country for technical expertise at the time, Dormy also played host to the record company EMI's parties for two years running. Neville recalls, "The one year there was a sound check guy nicknamed Jesus who turned the volume up so high in the conference suite that the silver was jumping off the tables. The second year, we needed so much electricity to run the additional venue of a marquee on the lawn that we had to use an emergency generator to make up the shortfall." Needless to say, complaints were received by the police from three miles away in Chipping Campden.

The manager with stars in his eyes



General manager David Field has been with the Dormy House for 26 years, so not surprisingly he's had some amazing times along the way. Bringing in the Millennium was memorable: "but more for the fact I had my hand stuck down the ladies' toilet trying to unblock it at the stroke of midnight!"

He has also seen his fair share of celebrity guests – footballer Andy Gray of Aston Villa, TV star Noel Edmunds and Irish boxer Barry McGuigan to name but a few. Pictures of these and others such as Cliff Richard sitting on the sofa with owner Jørgen Philip-Sørensen adorn the walls of the newly-refurbished alcove in the Barn Owl restaurant.

And then there are those celebrities such as Kenny Everett and Jimmy Tarbuck who are memorable for their antics casting them into the bracket of celebrity men behaving badly. Jimmy Tarbuck succeeded in getting the Dormy House on the front page of *The Sun* back in 1989 with a headline grabbing 'Tarby's Night with Blonde'.

When Kenny Everett stayed it was not always in the best possible taste either. "Mr Everett was in the dining room and was his usual over-exuberant self so I had to keep going over to him and asking him to tone things down so as not to upset the other guests," Mr Field recalls. "It ended up with me chasing him round the restaurant in true *Tom and Jerry*, cat and mouse fashion."

But Mr Field's favourite memory has to be watching the footie with commentator John Motson. Dormy House remains one of Mr Motson's favourite retreats and as he told *The Sunday Review Travel* in 1997 his ideal day would include 'racing at Cheltenham and early evening at the Dormy House, Broadway, simply the best hotel in the world for me. I like the accent on good old fashioned service. Nothing is too much for the staff'.

A case in hand for Mr Field when Mr Motson arrived one evening with a dilemma on where he was going to watch the Arsenal game. "It was before the days of Sky TV in bedrooms so I organised for John and I to watch the game at the hotel's conference centre. Sitting there watching the game with a professional commentator and a Scotch will take some beating," he sighs.



The sales manager with friends in high places



Staff at Dormy often find themselves becoming friends with guests who they've built a relationship up with over the years. David Field is often paid the ultimate compliment of being invited back to guests' houses for dinner and sales admin manager Christine Anderson, who has been there for 15 years, had the shock of her life when well-meaning guests turned the tables on her.



The former head receptionist at the Dormy, Christine was used to greeting many people to the hotel and not least, four American friends who regularly used the Dormy as a place to meet up. She let slip she was off to Boston for a skiing trip in America with her family. She recalls: "When we walked through into the arrivals lounge in Boston, there were George Kennedy and Tom Colbert with a bunch of flowers waiting to greet us. It was a wonderful surprise."

The deputy manager doing more than his duty

Assistant general manager David Bryan's

SENSATIONAL SEVENTIES FARE

Right: Dormy's 1970s menu.



Puddings from the 1970s at 1970s prices are going back on the menu for a week to celebrate the launch of the Dormy House Hotel's tribute to the archive material now adorning the walls of the alcove in the Barn Owl Restaurant. Rum Punch Ice and Pineapple, Gooseberry Fool, Lemon Meringue Pie and Chocolate and Orange Mousse were all on the menu in the late 70s and their revival will be celebrated when the Lemon Meringue Pie and the Chocolate and Orange Mousse return to the menu for a week at a historic 25p price tag! The offer runs from Monday, Feb 16 until Friday, February 20.

Menus adorning the walls of the room will also feature Sirloin Steak at £1.45 and vintage Bolinger at just £4.50 a bottle ... though sadly not at these prices on the menus on the tables!

The archive room is the idea of general manager David Field, who has been with the Dormy House Hotel for 26 years. Mr Field says: "There have been so many happy memories – why not share them with a wider audience."



abiding memory of his 10 years at Dormy was as a duty manager overseeing guest Martin Dencham's 40th birthday party in a particularly cold December in the late '80s. "The whole hotel had been booked for the party and things were in full swing in the restaurant when at four in the morning it started to snow big time," he recalls. "By the time morning came we were cut-off to all living souls with David and his 80 guests and a skeleton staff of six stuck at the hotel." It took three days for the ►