

# OBITUARIES

## Lord Lucan, officially declared dead

### Mysterious Briton has been wanted for murder for 42 years

BY SARAH KAPLAN  
THE WASHINGTON POST

No one had seen Richard John Bingham — aristocratic bon vivant, dashing army officer, high-rolling gambler, seventh Earl of Lucan and the prime suspect in a bloody and high profile murder — in more than four decades.

Or, at least, no one ever confirmed they'd seen him. Plenty of people thought they did: at a cattle station in the Australian Outback, on a hiking trail up Mount Etna, in an ex-Nazi colony in Paraguay, living out of a Land Rover in a country town in New Zealand. But those supposed sightings always turned out to be someone else — a boilermaker from Braintree, a folk singer from St. Helens, a different disgraced British politician who had tried to fake his own death.

Meanwhile, the mystery surrounding the real Lord Lucan, who vanished in 1974 after the body of his children's nanny was found, beaten and bloody, in the basement of his estranged wife's home, remained unsolved.

It still is. But a judge's ruling Wednesday did offer some degree of closure in the case that has captivated the British public and haunted the families involved: Whatever became of Lord Lucan since his disappearance, he is now legally considered dead.

"It has been a very long time coming," the earl's son, George Charles Bingham, told reporters outside a London courthouse Wednesday, according to the BBC.

Lord Lucan was named as the killer of Sandra Rivett, the nanny, after an inquest in 1975 — though he remained entitled to a jury trial if he ever reappeared. But he never did.

His son has long believed him dead, most likely of suicide. The earl was also declared dead for inheritance purposes by a British judge in 1999. But since there was no proof that Lord Lucan had died, there could be no death certificate — at least, until the "Presumption of Death Act" took effect in 2014. Wednesday's ruling will allow Bingham to inherit his father's title and offer a chance, he suggested, to "say farewell to a very dark past."

"I would be very grateful if we all moved on and found another Loch Ness monster out there," Bingham pleaded with reporters, according to the Guardian.

That may be wishful thinking. Since the night of Nov. 7, 1974, when Lady Lucan burst into a pub bleeding from head wounds and shouted "He's in the house! He's murdered the nanny," very little has been able to quell public interest in the case.

Before he was a murder suspect, Lord Lucan was a well-known aristocrat and man-about-town, a mustachioed man handsome enough to have been considered for the role of James Bond and skilled enough at bridge and backgammon to abandon his job at a London bank to pursue a career as a professional gambler. Though his friends in the upper crust "Clermont Set" called him "Lucky Lucan," according to a 1988 Washington Post piece, he seemed to lose more often than he won.

By 1974, the earl was separated from his wife, Veronica Duncan, had lost a court battle for custody of their children and was coping with mounting gambling debts. He moved out of their Georgian home in London's affluent Belgravia neighborhood and into an apartment nearby.

During the inquest in 1975, Duncan said that she was watching television at home when Rivett, her children's 29-year-old nanny, volunteered to make tea. When twenty minutes passed and Rivett still hadn't returned, Duncan went downstairs to investigate.

"Somebody lunged out and hit me on the head," she testified, the New York Times reported from the inquest in 1975. Duncan recognized her assailant from his voice: it was her husband, she said.

After a struggle that left her badly beaten, Duncan said that Lord Lucan fled from the house. Then she, too, ran out: dashing into a nearby pub, she called for someone to summon the police.

Authorities arrived at the

Belgravia home shortly after to find Rivett's battered body stuffed in a canvas sack in the basement. A blood-stained lead pipe lay on the floor.

Not long after, according to the BBC, a car Lord Lucan had borrowed was found abandoned and covered in blood stains in the port town of Newhaven. It's been reported that Lady Lucan believed her husband had jumped to his death from the ferry across the English Channel.

But for years after his disappearance, many suspected that the earl had fled the country with the help of his well-to-do friends. In 1981, a reporter for United Press International spoke to one of the detectives who initially led the case: the investigator firmly believed that Lord Lucan had adopted a new identity and was living abroad.

Such theories only fueled the relentless rumors and reported sightings that swirled around the Lucan case — which already had all the makings of a good Agatha Christie novel. As the Times wrote in 1975, "From the beginning the story has been the kind that interests the British: Crime, a missing lord . . . hints of interesting happenings upstairs and downstairs. But beyond that, it has provided a glimpse of a narrow world, highly civilized and stylized but almost wholly disconnected from the political and cultural life of the country."

Britain in the mid-1970s, like much of the world, was mired in disappointing politics and economic malaise. And although the lurid mystery surrounding Lord Lucan drew endless fascination, the earl got very little sympathy.

"I couldn't care less if Lord Lucan is alive or dead," William Thomas, the foreman of the inquest jury, told the Times in 1975.

Four decades later, it's still not clear why Lord Lucan might have slain his children's nanny, if he in fact did (a common theory suggests he mistook Rivett for his wife). It's not known if he did "fall on his own sword," as a friend suggested to the Sunday Times of London in 1975, or if he es-

caped the country. He could be alive right now — he would be 81 — or he may have died long ago.

Speaking to the press on Wednesday, the earl's son, Bingham, said he hoped to move past those questions.

But for the other child made parent-less by this incident, Rivett's son Neil Berriman, that is not a possibility.

Like Bingham, Berriman was just about 7 or 8 years old when Rivett was slain 42 years ago. But he was unaware of the killing, because he had been adopted at birth and only learned about his connection to Rivett when his adoptive mother died.

"The last five years has been a roller-coaster ride of depression and stress," Berriman, said outside the courthouse Wednesday. Berriman had previously petitioned to prevent the judge from issuing a death certificate for Lord Lucan, but withdrew his objection after reaching the decision that he and Bingham had "a great deal in common."

"[I] would sooner try to work with the family as against them," Berriman said. He went on to congratulate Bingham on the ruling: "I can understand that he wants to move on with his life, but for me this is something, at this moment, cannot happen."

Berriman told the Guardian that he wanted police to continue to investigate his biological mother's death, citing concerns that evidence had been withheld or contaminated.

"Maybe the police know more about this than they have ever let on," he said, adding that he hoped to see a conclusion to the mystery in the next 12 to 14 months.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday, Bingham said he is also troubled by the lack of information about Rivett's death and his father's disappearance. But he seemed more willing to live with uncertainty.

"Our family has no idea how our own father, my father, met his own end and whether he did so at his own hand or the hand of others on that fateful evening," he said. "It is a mystery, and it may well remain that way forever."



DAVID B. PURINTON

NEWPORT - David B. Purinton, Newport, Maine, went home to be with his Lord and Savior on Friday, January 29, 2016. David was born in Lewiston, Maine on July 30, 1934, the son of Francis K. and Vida B. Purinton. David attended New York Ranger School and the University of Maine Orono where he earned a degree in Forestry. He was a veteran of the Korean War where he served as a medic in the Air Force. David worked for Georgia Pacific until he moved to Lee with his family to head the forestry program at Lee Academy. While at Lee Academy he coached the ski team and cross country, a sport he excelled at when he attended high school in New York. He went on to teach at Region III in Lincoln, Washington County Vocational Technical Institute in Calais and then worked as a forester for International Paper.

David was an avid golfer and, in his younger days, a fly fisherman. He will be remembered for his quick wit and wonderful smile. David was liked by all who met him.

David leaves behind his beloved companion Debbie Berce, his loving daughters Deborah Pingree of Etna, Cynthia Cain and her husband John of Hillsborough, NC, and Christine Mallett and her husband Andrew of Lee. He also leaves his grandchildren, Ashley Pingree, Amanda Pingree, Carrie Doane and her husband Kent, Isaac Mallett, and Samuel Mallett, and his special great grandson Colby.

At David's request there will be no funeral services.



MARGARET E. O'BRIEN

HERMON - Margaret E. O'Brien, 59, wife of the late Thomas J. O'Brien, died February 3, 2016 at her home in Hermon after a long illness. She was born July 23, 1956 in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, the daughter of Stephen B. and Ellen T. (Geary) Sullivan. Margaret worked in the health care field for many years and enjoyed caring for people. She was a communicant of St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Bangor. Margaret was a nature enthusiast, avid reader, enjoyed Irish history, Russian authors, art, music and had deep love of animals.

Surviving are a brother, Stephen E. Sullivan of Swanville; three sisters, Trisha M. Devlin and her husband, Mark of Louisville, CO, Mary E. Sullivan of Longmont, CO and Joan DiBello and her husband, George of Hackettstown, NJ; two brothers-in-law, Owen O'Brien and his wife, Mary Lou of Granville, NY and Denis O'Brien and his wife, Linda of Scotia, NY; and several nieces and nephews.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated 11AM Monday, February 8, 2016 at St. Paul the Apostle Parish, St. John's Catholic Church, York St., Bangor. Burial will be beside her husband at St. Patrick's Cemetery, West Granville, NY. For those who wish, memorial contributions may be made to Food for the Poor, 6401 Lyons Road, Coconut Creek, Florida 33073 USA or at foodforthepeople.org.

Arrangements by Kiley & Foley Funeral Service, 299 Union St., Bangor. Memories and messages may be shared with her family at kileyandfoley.com.

## Oscar Mejia Victores, Guatemalan military ruler, dies at 85

BY HARRISON SMITH  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Oscar Mejia Victores, a Guatemalan brigadier general who presided over some of the bloodiest years of his country's civil war before seizing power in a 1983 coup and ultimately returning the country to democratic rule, died Feb. 1. He was 85.

His death was announced by Moises Galindo, a lawyer for several former military officials accused of human rights abuses during the Guatemalan civil war. Further details were not released.

Shortly before leaving office in 1986, Mejia Victores issued a decree granting amnesty to all those accused of political crimes — and, effectively, human rights violations — committed during his and his predecessor's rule. The law was repealed a decade later at the close of the civil war.

In 2011, Mejia Victores was prosecuted in Guatemala on charges of crimes against humanity for the killings of thousands of indigenous Guatemalans by soldiers under his command. He was ruled unfit to stand trial because of a stroke.

The general was one in a long line of Guatemalan military dictators. A 1954 coup, funded and organized partly by the United States, plunged the country into turmoil. From 1960 to 1996, more than 200,000 civilians were killed during a civil war between government forces and leftist guerrillas, according to a human rights report sponsored by the United Nations. More than 80 percent of the victims were Mayan Indians, who make up about half of Guatemala's population.

Almost all of the war's human rights violations were committed by the Guatemalan government, according to the U.N.-sponsored report, and nearly half occurred in 1982, when Brig.

Gen. Efraim Rios Montt seized power and installed Mejia Victores as his defense minister.

Seventeen months later, Mejia Victores came to power on his own. In what was "more a palace revolt than a government upheaval," as one anonymous Western diplomat told the New York Times, Mejia Victores ousted Rios Montt amid discontent in the military over the president's assertive leadership style and outspoken brand of evangelical Christianity.

The new regime, Mejia Victores said, would return Guatemala to democratic rule and end abuses by "religious fanatics."

When it was revealed that Mejia Victores had met with officials of the U.S. military's Southern Command the day before the coup, speculation swirled that the United States had sponsored the coup in some way. The State Department denied any involvement or advance notice.

President Ronald Reagan's administration, which thought Rios Montt a "well-intentioned but eccentric leader," according to a Times dispatch, was optimistic that Mejia Victores would follow through on his promises as well as eliminate the secret tribunals that had executed and "disappeared" the regime's political opponents.

In that regard, the portly general was little different from his predecessor, who was known to critics as the "born-again butcher" for the remorseless killing of civilians and political targets. Under Mejia Victores, political killings continued at a rate of 90 to 100 per month, according to a Times account in 1984.

The government, under pressure from the United States and other nations, did move to reform the political system, in large part to reopen the spigot of foreign aid that had been reduced to a trickle by Congress because of human rights concerns.

## Thornton Dial, who turned scrap metal, animal bones into museum art, dies at 87

BY EMILY LANGER  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Thornton Dial, a sharecropper's son who for decades spent his spare time soldering scrap metal, animal bones and other found objects into representations of black life in America — creations that were eventually recognized as artwork worthy of inclusion in the most prestigious museums of the United States, died Jan. 25 at his home in McCalla, Alabama. He was 87.

A son, Richard Dial, confirmed the death and said he did not know the cause.

Dial was untrained as an artist but by the end of his life saw his sculptures and paintings housed at institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian's American Art Museum in Washington, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.

He would have struggled to read the critical reviews favorably comparing his work to the artistry of Jackson Pollock and Anselm Kiefer. Dial's formal education ended in early elementary school, and he was largely illiterate.

He rarely strayed from his home in Alabama, where he lived for decades under Jim Crow segregation, earning a livelihood at the Pullman Standard boxcar company, pouring concrete, laying bricks and raising livestock.

He never visited a museum before the 1980s, when William Arnett, a patron of

African American artists and collector of "outsider art," happened upon the assemblages stored in Dial's garage.

Dial had buried other pieces in the ground, partly in shame of his unusual creations.

With materials consisting of spray paint, rebar, barbed wire, tree branches, rags and other discards of life, Dial created hundreds of works recognized for their stunning originality.

"I mostly pick up stuff," he told the New York Times in 2011. "I start on a picture when I get a whole lot of stuff together. And then I look at the piece and think about life."

In "High and Wide (Carrying the Rats to the Man)" (2002), a 6-by-11-foot construction made from materials including goat hides, carpet, found metal and spray paint, he chained a Mickey Mouse toy, its eyes blank and face darkened, to a ship in an unsparing representation of the exploitation of slavery.

"The allusion to the transatlantic slave trade is clear," Crystal Am Nelson, a scholar of African American art, wrote in the online journal Art Practical, "but by using Mickey Mouse in place of an African American figure, Dial exposes the absurd fiction that justified the New World slave trade."

"Graveyard Traveler/Selma Bridge" (1992), a canvas-on-wood creation made with carpet, burlap, paint can lids, pinecones, a plastic hose and other supplies, depicted the 1965 civil rights march in Selma, Alabama, where state troopers and

vigilantes set upon protesters with tear gas and billy clubs.

Dial often used the figure of a tiger to portray the African American struggle. In one work, he assembled discarded clothing, branches and a pair of boots to create what he said was a representation of President Obama crossing a jungle unscathed.

Dial might have remained undiscovered if not for an encounter with another Alabama artist, Lonnie Holley, in the 1980s. Holley introduced Dial to Arnett, who was impressed by Dial's life-size metal sculpture of a turkey.

When Arnett asked to purchase the piece, Dial proposed a price of \$20. They agreed on \$200, Dial's first sale.

Arnett became Dial's patron, providing him with a regular stipend and supplies in exchange for the right to purchase his artwork. Their partnership was scrutinized in a 1993 CBS "60 Minutes" report by Morley Safer questioning the relationship between "black, uneducated, poor and talented" artists and dealers who were "white, sophisticated and well off."

Dial defended Arnett, telling the Times that they had "traveled together" since their first meeting. "I had no dealings with any other white man before I met him," Dial said.

In an interview with The Washington Post on Wednesday, Dial's son expressed his appreciation for Arnett, who he said had "opened the doors to the art world" for

his father, a moment Dial "had been looking for all his life."

Promoted by Arnett, Dial's works eventually fetched tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars at auction, their value stemming in part from his creativity.

Thornton Dial was born to a large family in Emelle, Alabama, on Sept. 10, 1928. He did not know his father, and his mother was a sharecropper. He was raised by a great-grandmother and other women in his family.

From a young age, he worked with his hands to create things of utility and beauty. He made dolls from cornstalks and said he practiced drawing not with crayons, but with wires in the sand.

He found work, although not gainful employment, at the boxcar company. After his retirement, he built garden furniture while making his art. He lived to see his works featured in solo exhibitions at galleries in New York and at museums around the country.

Dial said that he knew some people considered him "too ignorant for art."

"Seem like some people always going to value the Negro that way," he told Arnett in an interview once cited by the New Yorker magazine. "I believe I have proved that my art is about ideas, and about life, and the experience of the world. ... I ain't never been much good at talking about stuff. I always just done the stuff I had a mind to do. My art do my talking."