

animals that changed her life – and how her Yorkie Douro met a heartbreaking end



POLITICAL ANIMALS: Lady Powell with her dog Tony Blair, horse Sterlina and donkey Giuseppe and, inset, with Douro. Far left: With husband Charles at a function in London



HEAVENLY SPOT: Carla visiting Douro's grave with her dogs – 'They are mourning him, he was their leader,' she says. Above: Having fun with her Vietnamese pigs Lord Hesketh and Nicholas Soames



my hens, the olive oil from my groves and the fresh fruit and vegetables from my garden. It's a rather English way of life transplanted to the outskirts of Rome. My unromantic husband complains that this costs four times as much as buying the ingredients in a supermarket but so what, compared to the joy of eating what we produce ourselves?.

And of course I have my animals who are, if I am truthful, a very odd collection. They include what are indisputably the four ugliest sheep in the world. I also have a donkey called Giuseppe, whom I once nursed back to life after he had been viciously attacked and bitten by wild dogs.

Giuseppe has acquired a bride but takes no interest in her, preferring to have his wicked way with almost any other animal available – and usually right in front of the dining room

window when I am entertaining. I now have to sit the more sensitive guests with their backs to the window to spare them the awesome spectacle of Giuseppe indecently assaulting some passing quadruped.

Most of my animals are named after the writers, politicians and statesmen I have had the good fortune to meet. I was once able to tell a startled Tony Blair that Margaret Thatcher much enjoyed fondling his ears. The Tony Blair in question is a large alsatian-cross, much caressed by the great lady when staying with us. He now spends several hours each day beside Douro's grave.

I probably should not admit it publicly, but Lady Thatcher's namesake is an exceedingly bossy goose, famed in our household for assassinating a Gallic rooster called Giscard. I also admit rather guiltily to having a

large red rabbit whom I christened Gordon Brown when he failed to call an Election last year. Like his fellow rabbit, Paul Johnson, he is forever digging holes and tunnels to escape.

Then there are the Vietnamese pigs, each named after a distinguished trencherman. One is Lord Hesketh, another Nicholas Soames. However, I seem to have made some mistake in sexing the pigs, as Hesketh has made Soames pregnant.

Lastly there are the horses, Sterlina and Euro. Sterlina was triumphantly named in honour of Jimmy Goldsmith's Referendum Party. Euro is a gelding, which says it all.

It is as curious a bunch of misfits as you will find inhabiting 20 acres anywhere, but their unquestioning

love has brought me calm in my life, and understanding of what true loyalty means.

I am pleased to say that most of my guests – including Henry Kissinger – have been delighted to bestow their name upon an animal, and I feel it is quite an honour. I'm keen on David Cameron and he's been here to the farm, but I haven't yet found a suitable beast to take his name.

It took me a week to find Douro's body, crumpled and decomposing. The truth about his fate had been revealed to me by another worker.

Douro had been deliberately kicked to death by an itinerant labourer employed on my farm. Of course, the guilty man denied it, but I sacked him on the spot. I feel sure that Douro would have put up a brave fight but it defeats me how anyone could have gone out of his way

specifically to crush and put down such a wonderful creature and companion. We gave him a proper burial with a little coffin and a headstone with the epitaph 'Here lies Douro, a dog who possessed beauty without vanity, strength without insolence, courage without ferocity and all the virtues of man without his vices'.

My grief over the death of Douro may strike many as exaggerated and misplaced, but anyone who has loved and lost a companion such as him will know what I am missing and describing.

We are told that love is the one thing that lasts and that all else in time disappears. In that case, I am convinced that Douro's spirit lives on and should I be rewarded by reaching heaven I shall, as the wise nun told me, find him there. Heaven would not be complete without him.