

# Lady Anne Blunt

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**Above:** Lady Anne Blunt riding Yashmak.

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*Lady Anne Blunt lived most of her life in the shadow of her infamous husband, Wilfrid Blunt. Her courage carried her through many challenges during her life, she earned great respect, and her horses and books, albeit often altered by her husband or daughter, Judith, have been her legacy, as she dearly hoped.*

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**H**er grandfather was the poet Byron who was of a similar disposition but a superior poet to Wilfrid. Lady Anne's mother Ada, Countess of Lovelace was Byron's only legitimate offspring, and she was a brilliant mathematician who was an invaluable assistant to Charles Babbage, and the whole world, in her work on his 'difference machine', an early computer. Ada also possessed a love of animals and was an accomplished horsewoman and musician. Not so helpfully she employed her mathematical brain in trying to fathom a way to win when gambling.

Lady Anne was born on 22 September 1837 at 10 St James' Square in London and inherited from Ada a mind that was exceptional with both words and numbers. Anne was only 15 years old

when her mother died and the rest of her upbringing was largely at the hands of Lady Byron. In her early years she travelled a great deal in Europe and was described as 'quiet, distinguished, a good musician and an even better painter'. She was also wealthy. Wilfrid was a cousin of a friend, four years her junior, and had already developed a reputation for being a philanderer. He needed a wealthy loyal wife with intelligence – Anne was very suitable and they were married on 8 June 1869. She was 31 years old and had high hopes for a happy life with her very handsome husband. Together they co-designed and rebuilt the house at Crabbet Park, which the Blunt family had owned since the 18th Century.

The early years of their marriage were very hard on them both as Lady

Anne suffered endless miscarriages and premature births. A son, born prematurely, died after a few days, which hit Wilfrid especially hard as he yearned for a boy. Twin girls also died after a premature birth, and Judith, born a month early was their only child to survive. Wilfrid taught Judith all the sports at that time reserved for boys, such as shooting and fishing, and he expected her to do all these things with bravado. There were other problems – the womanising had continued, Wilfrid hated Lady Anne playing her violin, and he spent very little time with her. Neither she nor Wilfrid were good parents but at least she admitted as much.

Their travels to the East drew them together; they shared a fascination for Arabia, home to the purest and most entrancing of horses. Their first trip and

equine purchase was in Turkey – the horse was called Turkeycock. The next trip was to Algiers in 1874 where Lady Anne suffered a miscarriage while they were riding across the desert on mules – another son. Lady Anne’s brother, Ralph appeared and added to Wilfrid’s misery by playing scales on the violin at nightfall.

The realisation of the position of her marriage now dawned on Lady Anne ‘I am like one who has suddenly lost everything – or rather it is worse than that, I have discovered that I never had anything to lose – I who thought myself rich. Henceforth I will care for stones and sands – birds and beasts, the stars – anything in the universe but no human being except with a sorrowful heart.’

In 1877 they set off for Arabia, meeting first with James Henry Skene, the British Consul in Aleppo. He not only told them about Arab horses and desert etiquette but was instrumental in the purchase of Kars, who Lady Anne thought the most beautiful horse she had ever seen. Kars had been twice hit by a bullet but carried on until exhausted. His tack was removed and he was left behind, but he got up again and followed his master.

It was actually Skene who first had the idea of forming a stud in England to safeguard the future of the purebred Arabian, which was under threat in the desert. He would have liked to have been a partner in the stud but he did not have the necessary finance. He purchased several horses for the Blunts but they were not all approved of and Lady Anne requested that more emphasis should be put on quality rather than quantity. There were too many being acquired that were of poor quality, unsound or with leg faults. These bad purchases were weeded out from the stud, but Skene did assist in the purchase of some very important horses such as Queen of Sheba and Pharoah, the ‘stars of the stud’ according to Lady Anne. Jane Digby reported from Damascus that the purchase of these horses had caused a sensation in the desert.

Lady Anne was now fully motivated and in the year following this first trip to Arabia she learned Arabic. Ralph joined with the Blunts as a partner in the Crabbet Arabian Stud.

Their second trip to Arabia was a more dangerous affair, crossing parts not previously recorded as having been ventured into by a European woman, and beset with warring tribes. The party came under attack from members of the Rualla tribe, until the raiders realised who their prey were, and of even greater surprise to them, they found that one dressed



**Above:** Kars. ‘Splendid head with fine jowl, small muzzle, lips like a camel’s, nostrils large; magnificent shoulder, high wither, rather flat sided, quarter very powerful and somewhat drooping but tail well set and carried well galloping, legs hocks and knees perfect, pasterns long and strong, feet good. Mark like a dent in the neck on the near side, called “the prophet’s seal”. His temper is perfect.’



**Above:** Pharoah. ‘Handsome head, good jowl, very beautiful ears, eyes like the human eye oval and shewing the white, slope of shoulder good and length sufficient but fore legs placed about an inch too far back, he stands back too a little at the knee especially with the near foreleg; good depth, splendid barrel well ribbed up, magnificent carriage of tail walking trotting or galloping; there is never a moment of forgetfulness – Pharoah is ever ready to be seen. He is celebrated among the Anazeh as the handsomest colt bred by the Sebaa for twenty years.’

in Arabic clothes was a woman. In the desert it was a question of strangers being enemies until proven otherwise. Once they discovered the Blunts were friends of Bin Shalaan they handed back what they had taken and gathered in a circle on the sand, eating dates and passing round a pipe. Lady Anne noted in her diary 'in spite of their rough behaviour, we could see that they were gentlemen.'

The Blunts went as far as Hail as they were keen to learn about the culture and to see Emir Mohammed Ibn Rashid's famous horses. Lady Anne found them to be of high quality, once seen moving, as they were in very rough winter condition at the time, and unfortunately not for sale. Ibn Rashid was a ruthless man who ruled over Arabia from Asir to Aleppo to Damascus and Basra. Their stay in Hail was tempestuous and Lady Anne commented that 'Hail was a lion's den, though fortunately we were friends with the lion. We began to make our plans for moving on.'

From there they went to Baghdad with a caravan of Persian pilgrims and it was on the next leg of their journey through Persia to the Gulf that Wilfrid became seriously ill. There had been other difficulties too in what was becoming a nightmare but it was also a hugely significant time for Lady Anne. While praying for Wilfrid's recovery she had a vision she could not describe but was so glorious she 'knew' the Catholic religion to be true.

Lady Anne's knowledge of the Arabic language, culture and horses, and no doubt her courage too, made her well respected by the Bedouin. She utilised her mathematical prowess noting in her diaries compass bearings, aneroid readings and barometric pressures. She was meticulous over her watch which had to be accurate and set to GMT regardless of where in the world they were.

Links were forged with Egypt at a time of high tension with Britain, and both Wilfrid and Lady Anne threw their energy into supporting those subject to abuse by the British establishment and were not afraid to criticise and make the Government in London fully aware of any bad behaviour. They bought Sheykh Obeyd gardens during this time where they built the Pink House. She acquired the pick of the remaining horses from Ali Pasha Sherif's stud, and Mesaoud was given to Judith as a present. Although Wilfrid was apt to claim the credit for the Crabbet Arabian Stud it was Lady Anne who was responsible for the selection and purchase of the original stock and overall supervision of breeding. Judith later confirmed the success of the stud was due to Lady Anne.

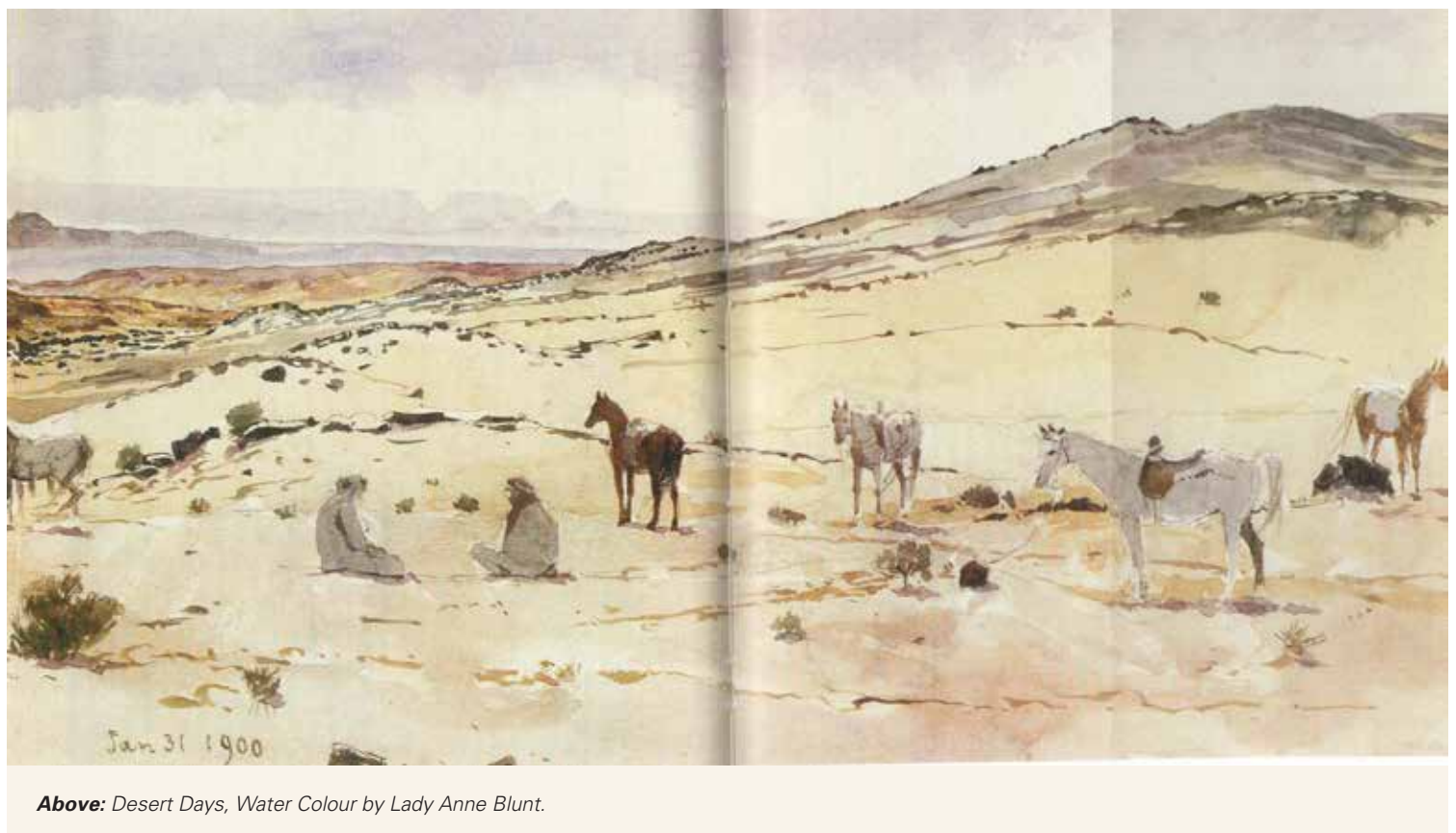
By 1883 Lady Anne had given up all hope that her marriage was going to be a happy one. The only times they seemed to come together was on their desert travels. Her loyalty to him was unrewarded – quite

the opposite – his infidelity continued unabated and she was expected to keep out of the way, and did not receive any attention except when necessary.

Their next trip was to India where they spent six months. Judith was now 11 and as they were away so much they had seen little of her. Judith described her mother's devotion 'a record of heroic self sacrifice' with a tinge of 'abjectness' about it. In the autumn of 1884 the Blunts travelled to Constantinople as it was then called. They went on to Count Roman Potocki's stud at Antoniny in Russian Poland. Count Potocki had bought Pharoah at the first auction held at Crabbet in 1882, paying the top price of 500 guineas (over UKE44,000 in today's money).

In 1887 Wilfrid and Lady Anne became embroiled in the affairs of Irish Nationalism, where again they supported the underdog, even getting into fights with the police and arrested. Lady Anne was also involved in the fracas and at one point grabbed by the neck.

Judith went with her parents when they travelled to Sheykh Obeyd in Egypt for the winter of 1888/89. A trip that was to become regular now that Wilfrid was allowed back in the country by the authorities. Judith spent her 16th birthday there and described it as her happiest yet. Lady Anne had always found it hard parting with Judith and Crabbet as they set off on their travels.



**Above:** *Desert Days, Water Colour by Lady Anne Blunt.*



**Above:** Mesaoud. 'Beautiful head and ears, very fine shoulder, great depth in front of girth, powerful quarter, large hocks and knees and remarkably deep cut sinews. Very fine mover, fast walker and trotter. Tail set on very high and carried magnificently.'

Sheykh Obeyd became a haven for Lady Anne. She spent a lot of her time translating Arabic poetry, a difficult task given the difference in the languages. Wilfrid would attempt to turn the translation into English verse, so these endeavours, like their travels in the desert, did give them a shared interest. Lady Anne's other great endeavour was the 'book', which contained a wealth of information on the Arab horse. Sadly she did not quite finish it, a task that Judith completed, and it was published in her name, Lady Wentworth, as 'The Authentic Arabian Horse'.

Matters came to a head in 1905. They had employed a nurse, Miss Lawrence to look after Wilfrid as his health was deteriorating, but she started trying to dominate domestic affairs at Newbuildings. Lady Anne was being forced out so she stayed with Judith and her family initially before buying a cottage at Three Bridges for the summer, and continued to go to Egypt for the winter. She began to take a stand against Wilfrid and hoped she would now be able to

attend to affairs of the stud without Wilfrid's interference. He agreed she should take over the horses and she left Guy Carleton, their stud manager in charge of the horses when she left for Egypt that winter. Wilfrid went back on his word and in the end a partition of the stud was agreed in 1906. By then Wilfrid had installed Guy Carleton's sister, Dorothy, at Newbuildings – another grievance for Lady Anne. Furthermore, Lady Anne had to buy land from Wilfrid following their separation, property she had bought in the first place and at a much lower price than Wilfrid now valued it at.

At 70 years old, Lady Anne was still able to jump on a horse without a stirrup and ride with a rope halter as the Bedouin had taught her to do years before. She loved the tranquility of sitting on a manger watching the mares eat their hay, especially Jauza. 'She it is that one can't help loving personally more than any other. Dalal is interesting and her Saadun filly is a jewel. Only Jauza has some undefinable charm.'

She continued to ride through her seventies and devoted her efforts to her

horses and her written works, hoping that both would be her legacy. She still had hopes of a reconciliation with Wilfrid but Dorothy Carleton was firmly established in her place. They did however, have an amicable meeting in 1915, after which Wilfrid wrote to her with some affection saying how much he had enjoyed seeing her, and hoped to see her again.

Following this she made her final journey to Egypt and was unable to return because of the danger of German submarines. She was still riding and working on her book at 80, the year she died.

Aware that her days were coming to an end she wrote to Wilfrid and told him about her vision in Persia 38 years before. She could not tell him before because she found it so hard to write or speak of matters that stirred her deeply. When she fell seriously ill in late 1917 she did not wish her family to risk the journey and she died in hospital on 15 December 1917. Judith described her as having 'the heart of a child, the brain of a scholar, and the soul of a saint'. U