

The August bomb inspection

Richard Barr's young daughter falls in love with a police dog during a bomb search at his law firm



Richard Barr

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The late Queen Mother had strong links with the Kings Lynn Festival. Back in August 1985 a special evening concert was laid on to include a recital by the cellist Rostropovich to celebrate her 85th birthday.

Sometime during the afternoon of the performance, the police rang me at home to say they would like the opportunity to check the office for bombs. They said it in such a way that they would be doing it whether we liked it or not.

Sophie (my then five-year-old daughter) and I set out to the office through the rain. We knew we were getting close when we saw council workmen – no doubt on double overtime – picking up tiny pieces of litter from the side of the road along which the Queen Mother would take her journey from Sandringham to King’s Lynn.

At the office, we forced open the door against the mountain of weekend post. Sophie was intrigued. She hadn’t considered that we received post at the office. She wanted to open it all. At once.

The office was warm, the time switch for the central heating having gone wrong again. Sophie quickly became thirsty and had to be satisfied with the Coca-Cola bought the week before last, when we’d had a rare couple of days of sunshine in a damp and dreary summer.

The police were late. We started to open the post. Sophie (having noticed a small pot of trifle in the office refrigerator) developed symptoms of starvation. I fixed her up with the trifle. We opened more letters. I discouraged Sophie from throwing a £20,000 cheque into the waste bin.

We had almost finished the post when three policemen walked in; one in uniform, one wearing a bald head and a pin-striped suit; and one with a shining evening face looking like an estate agent.

“When was anybody last in the office?” they asked. “Last Friday I think”, I replied defensively. Suddenly, I started to feel nervous in my own office. It wasn’t the bombs, it was the feeling that I was under suspicion. After all, why shouldn’t people come to the office? It was our office.

The officers started to poke around with mirrors and torches. Then they decided this was a matter for the dog. The officer in uniform went off to fetch the dog while pinstripe and estate agent continued their probing.

From time to time they asked questions along the lines of: “What’s in this cupboard?” and “Where does this door lead to?”

I was half hoping they would ask me about the rule in *Rylands v Fletcher* – but no. Each time I gave them the answer there seemed to be an undertone of: “We’ll see about that, sir!”

The dog came in. A very large fluffy Alsatian. Sophie thought he was gorgeous. The dog was much more thorough than the policemen. He systematically worked his way around each room, sniffing everything, finding nothing.

Meanwhile, the officers continued their snooping. I had the feeling they were as interested in the inside of a solicitor’s office as in finding a bomb or a bomber.

I nervously continued to be immensely co-operative with the police – flapping with them from room to room like a nun who’d just been goosed. Everything I said sounded hollow- and suspicious. I felt I was having to protest my innocence - but that I was overdoing it and arousing suspicion in doing so.

Soon, the dog pronounced the place free from bombs, leaving Sophie with a half-eaten trifle and in love with the bomb dog.

We reset the burglar alarm and set off home along the rain-soaked and litter-free streets.

That night, the Queen Mother’s visit hit the national television news. Our office hit the news too, but sadly nobody would know it. I thought that for the next royal occasion we should drape a large banner from the windows: “We wish the Queen Mum a happy birthday – and by the way we’re good solicitors too.”

Nearly 35 years on, Sophie is head of legal at a large energy company. She also has a daughter who’s nearly the same age as her mother was when the bomb inspection took place. If any passing royals approached Sophie’s office now, I’m sure her daughter would be more than happy to open the Sunday post and fall in love with the police dog.

And the Queen Mother? She died in 2002 at the age of 101 but I’ve no doubt she is turning over and over in her grave every time she hears the word ‘Brexit’.

*For more from the pen of Richard Barr read his book of SJ reminiscence, *The Savage Poodle*, available at £7.99 + P&P from Amazon UK or direct from Richard: Richard.barr@paston.co.uk*

