



## 'DEBO' – MITFORD, CAVENDISH, DEVONSHIRE DUCHESS, HOUSEWIFE SIMON SELIGMAN

The Arts Society Fylde

Lowther Pavilion Theatre

7 February 2024 at 2.00pm

Life in the household of the 2nd Baron Redesdale cannot have been, well, dull: mentioning “the Mitford Sisters” easily conjures up images of his six widely (and wildly) different daughters whose lives were intertwined with art, society, literature, politics and some of the great events of mid-20th Century Europe. Deborah - the subject for Simon Seligman’s very welcome second visit to The Arts Society Fylde - was as *The Guardian* suggested in 2014, “one of the few people to have met both Adolf Hitler and John Kennedy, [to have] been a familiar of the Queen . . . and [be] related by marriage to Harold Macmillan and to go shooting with him”. One sister mused that Debo was not so much looking for “Mr Right” as for “The Duke of Right”. With the death of her brother-in-law in 1944, her husband Andrew inherited the Devonshire title in 1950 - and one of Europe’s greatest treasure houses, Chatsworth. The Duchess transformed it from being the worn-out survivor of decades of taxation, war and social change into one of the best-loved, most-emulated and popular historic houses and estates in the country. Though her passport gave her occupation as “housewife” she was friends with a dazzling array of some of the brightest and most fascinating of her contemporaries, including President Kennedy, Evelyn Waugh, Oscar de la Renta, John Betjeman, Lucian Freud, Tom Stoppard, Neil MacGregor, Patrick Leigh Fermor and Alan Bennett. Debo had a lasting impact not just on Chatsworth but on everything she touched and everyone she met. Our speaker was, as he says, “lucky enough to work for and with her over more than 20 years”. He promises to pay tribute to an astonishing life.

### SIMON SELIGMAN

Simon studied art and architectural history at Warwick University, which included a compulsory term living in Venice, an experience of cultural immersion from which he is, he says, “still recovering!” For 19 years until 2010, he worked at Chatsworth in a variety of roles ending as Head of Communications. He has lectured extensively about Chatsworth, the Devonshire Collection and associated topics, throughout the UK and on several US tours, and he continues to lecture on a growing range of cultural topics. For more than 30 years he and his family have lived in the heart of Derbyshire's Peak District.



### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

*Wait for Me*, by Deborah Devonshire

*The Mitfords: Letters between Six Sisters*

Mr Seligman recommends a very touching video of one of her last public engagements, when she was interviewed by her niece, and editor, Charlotte Mosley, at the Frick Collection in New York in her 90th year: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=25IO32AxGq4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25IO32AxGq4)

*Image: Deborah Vivien Cavendish (née Freeman-Mitford), Duchess of Devonshire, Bassano Ltd, 30 March 1938, National Portrait Gallery, London, by permission*