

that can be made without first examining Ghislaine's relationship with her father.

Robert Maxwell was a one-off. A good thing too, many might say. His daughter-in-law Pandora called him 'the fat crook'. Born into a poor Jewish family in pre-war Czechoslovakia as plain Ján Hoch, he joined the British Army during the Second World War, won the Military Cross and was commissioned as a captain. After the war, he settled in Britain, started a publishing company and became Labour MP for Buckingham North. He prospered in business, took over Mirror Group Newspapers and founded *The European*. He settled his family at Headington Hall, a grand house in Oxford, and, as his fortune and influence grew, so too did his capacity for being unbearable. Maxwell could be brilliant and charming but many, especially those who worked for him, found him an overbearing bully. So, on occasion, did his children.

Ghislaine's mother Elizabeth (always known as Betty) once said: 'Bob has only to look at me and I get pregnant!' She had nine children; two died tragically. Michael, the eldest was seriously injured in a car accident at the age of 15 and died, still in a coma, six years later. A daughter, Karine, died of leukaemia at the age of three. Philip, the eldest surviving child, is an academic who won a scholarship to Oxford at the age of 16. He was never interested in his father's business and now, aged 63, lives in London and is said to be writing a book. Anne, 62, became a teacher and, according to a recent report, now works as a hypnotist. Twins Isabel and Christine, 60, once featured in *The Sunday Times* Rich List, with a fortune of £100 million gained from their internet business. They lost heavily when the dotcom bubble burst, though Isabel still runs her business from New York. Christine is married to a scientist and lives in France. Kevin and Ian, in their early 50s, were the Maxwell children most involved in their father's business. They stood trial on charges of defrauding Mirror Group pensioners but were acquitted. Kevin was declared bankrupt with debts of £400 million and the two brothers still work together from an office in Mayfair. They are believed to have invested in property and a recent report said that Kevin was working on power-station deals in the Middle East. Betty Maxwell, who celebrated her 90th birthday in March, lives quietly in London. After her husband's death she took up academic studies. Born in France, she now uses her maiden name and is known as Dr Elizabeth Meynard.

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Ghislaine, Robert Maxwell's favourite child, adored and feared her father. 'Riding crop or shoehorn?' he would ask when a spanking loomed. Philip, Kevin and Ian were all very bright and secured places at Oxford. The pressure on Ghislaine to do the same was enormous. A contemporary at Marlborough recalled that she crammed ferociously to meet her father's expectations. 'She struck me as being rather needy,' he said. Ghislaine read French and history at Balliol and, tearing between parties in Oxford and London in her VW Golf convertible, had a lot of fun. Her friends included Robert Hanson, Jamie Sainsbury, David Faber and Rupert Fairfax.

'She was naughty and funny at the same time,' Fairfax, a successful businessman, told *Tatler*. 'You couldn't help but like her. She was one of life's givers; if someone needed a hand, or if there was something to celebrate, she'd be the first one to get stuck in.' He recalled a visit to Headington Hall, where he met the rather frightening figure of Robert Maxwell. 'He boomed at me, "So which college are you at?" I said I wasn't at Oxford. He turned around and walked off without another word.'

Another contemporary remembered Ghislaine's 21st birthday at Headington: 'There were about 300 people and her father gave a speech after dinner which was rather embarrassingly fulsome about how wonderful Ghislaine was. Then he said he was tired, would join us for one dance and go to bed, but hoped we would have a good time. He went to bed but – about 10 minutes later – the music began to annoy him. Five minutes after that, he had the electrical supply to the sound system turned off. And that was that. Ghislaine was in tears. It was 11.30.'

Rupert Fairfax confesses to finding himself baffled by the allegations swirling around his friend of 30 years. 'I just don't recognise the person I know in the context of these accusations,' he said. 'Ghislaine is not a bad person. She is warm and funny and naughty. In all the time we have been friends I have never seen a trace of malice in her.' This view is echoed by her friend Cosima Pavoncelli, who told us: 'I'm really surprised to see her involved in allegations like these. She just isn't a bad person. The only thing wicked about Ghislaine is her sense of humour.'

Ghislaine was working for her father when he died, moving between jobs in his newspaper empire. She tried her hand at running a diary and later worked as a fashion director. She impressed many hard-bitten hacks with her enthusiasm and chutzpah, although one recalled that he was never allowed to forget that she was the boss's daughter. John

Below, from left, Ghislaine with Isabella Blow; Tamara Mellon; Count Gianfranco Cicogna; and Rupert Fairfax

