



WILLIAM HANSON



*'People who try to pretend they're superior
make it so much harder for those of us
who really are.'*

Hyacinth Bucket – Keeping Up Appearances

TO THE MANNERS BORN

Etiquette is a product of France, which comes as a great annoyance to the British who would like to be able to claim its invention as their own. Louis XIV (1638–1715), the foppish ‘Sun King’, decided to come up with little ‘tickets’ to place around his palace at Versailles for his courtiers to observe. ‘Keep off the grass’ (or, more correctly, *défense de marcher sur le gazon*) is widely thought to have been the very first of these tickets, as Versailles did – and still does – have lovely lawns that would be spoiled by clodhopping paysans tramping all over them.

The irony is that the country which largely eliminated its upper classes in the revolution of 1789 has to a great extent written the lexicon of etiquette. You will therefore need to possess an easy familiarity with such words and expressions as *lèse-majesté*, *noblesse oblige*, *politesse*, *place à table*, *de rigueur*.... All will become clear in due course.

You must also be aware that manners and etiquette are more or less the same thing; do not even begin to suggest otherwise. They are most certainly bedfellows;

manners need etiquette to survive and vice versa. Manners are the guiding principles of respect and social interaction, and etiquette is the unwritten code of exact rules. Such as with football – the aim is to score a goal, and things like the offside rule help you to fairly and correctly score that goal.* Apparently.

Some may think that in the über-progressive second decade of the 21st century (there is no hard and fast rule about how to describe this period, but please don't say 'teenies'), etiquette would have died a death. *Au contraire!* In Britain we are now even more obsessed by social codes and *politesse* than ever before. You may be more Crystal Palace than Buckingham Palace, but with the right knowledge you will go far. Families like the Middletons are prime examples.

But, like them and the rest of us, there are occasions when you will have to bluff. And here you enter perilous territory, which is where this short guide can offer invaluable help. It sets out to conduct you through the main danger zones encountered in discussions about etiquette in British society, and to equip you with a vocabulary and evasive technique that will minimise the risk of being rumbled as a bluffer. It will give you a few easy-to-learn hints and methods that might even allow you to be accepted as an etiquette expert of rare ability and experience. But it will do more. It will give you the tools to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your knowledge and insight – without anyone discovering that, until you read it, you probably didn't know the difference between *comme il faut* and a *faux pas*.

*The author cannot take this analogy further as – and this may come as a shock – he does not care for the sport.