

Duncan Campbell discovers further huge leaks from Thames Valley police files

Sultan's staff checked on police records

PRIVATE SECURITY STAFF working for the Sultan of Oman were able to carry out dozens – and probably hundreds – of checks of criminal records and other police information earlier this year.

The Sultan owns and runs, through British agents, the large Wargrave Manor estate near Henley-on-Thames. When hundreds of temporary security staff, gardeners and servants were taken on for a three month visit by the Sultan's mother in April this year, their names were checked through the Thames Valley Police Criminal Records Office at Kidlington, near Oxford. Earlier this week, however, a Thames Valley Police spokesman claimed that: 'No information (about criminal records) is given to any private organisation', and only certain public bodies could, with Home Office permission, get information on prospective employees' criminal records.

This was not however the experience of employees who were hired to work at the Manor, some of whom have been contacted by the *New Statesman*. One, an ex-detective, commented that even with a Metropolitan Police background, he didn't know of anyone who 'could get half the things done that were done in Thames Valley.'

A colleague of his was infuriated at being cross-examined two days after starting employment about

details of a previous conviction (in fact, a fairly minor offence of criminal damage). A woman employee was transferred from being a chambermaid to being a laundry assistant after Manor security officers discovered she had a conviction for shoplifting.

The Chief Security Officer of the Wargrave Manor Estate, Mr Derek Carter, and his deputy Mr Steven Rolfe, are both former Royal Military Policemen. Both men are well known to police locally and at the Thames Valley force's Kidlington headquarters because of the special security requirements for the visiting Omani royal family.

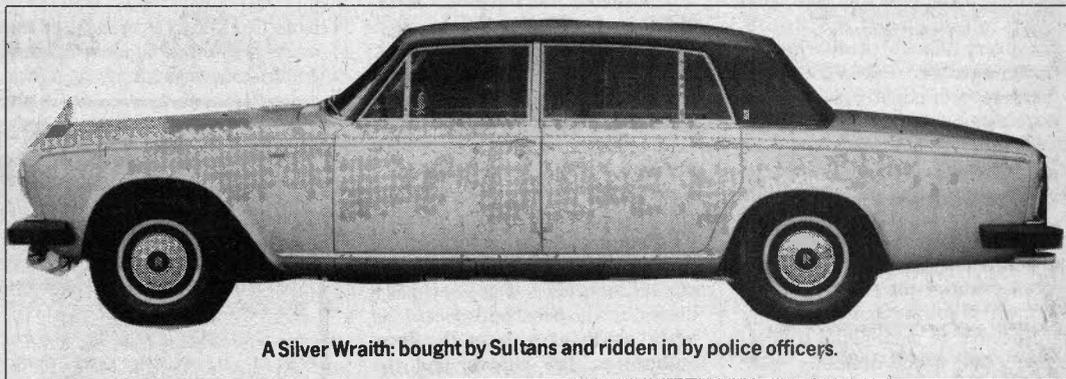
HOWEVER, the relationship with some Thames Valley police offic-

ers seems to have gone well beyond proper liaison requirements. On one occasion, a police officer (whose identity we have not established) was taken out to lunch from Kidlington in a Rolls Royce Silver Wraith normally used by the Sultan's family.

Unauthorised checks on criminal records are illegal. Former Metropolitan Police detective Barry Morse, who joined the Wargrave staff during April as a bodyguard, says that he warned the Security Officer of this. Mr Carter, he alleges, then claimed that the checks were authorised because of the diplomatic protection neces-

1979 when a team of ex-SAS guards then running the estate's security applied for planning permission to convert a milking parlour into a shooting range.

Between 200 and 400 staff were vetted before working at Wargrave Manor. Morse confirmed that a detailed dossier which would eventually include details of police criminal record checks was drawn up on each employee. Names were given to the police contact – believed to be a medium- or high-ranking officer at the Kidlington HQ – in batches of 30 to 40, and anyone 'traced' on police records was normally sacked.



A Silver Wraith: bought by Sultans and ridden in by police officers.

sary for the Queen Mother of Oman. This appears unlikely, as in fact no police officers provided her with any diplomatic protection, unlike King Hussein of Jordan who paid a fleeting visit accompanied by a posse of Special Branch officers.

Two days after arriving at Wargrave, Carter told Morse that he had 'done a check on (another bodyguard) and he's got form'.

The Wargrave Manor estate was a source of local controversy in

Details of this further leak, which follows last month's *New Statesman* revelations of how personal and vehicle records could be bought for between £4 and £15, have already been passed to the Thames Valley Police investigation, headed by Chief Superintendent Ray Tilly. Two former employees at Wargrave Manor have offered to make statements to the police about how they saw the criminal record information being obtained. □