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IN THE MONEY: Nat Rothschild with wife Loretta. Top, Nat with his father, Jacob, and mother, Serena, and the family pile, Waddesdon Manor. Left, Jacob with Diana at Henry Kissinger's birthday dinner at Spencer House in 1993

The playboy black sheep of the banking dynasty committed the unforgiveable sin of losing money... and then snubbed his mother and father on his wedding day



By Adam Helliker

RIFT OF THE ROTHSCHILDS



THE FIRST "important strength of the family is unity" declared octogenarian financier Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, when asked to pronounce on the resilience of the great banking dynasty whose name is synonymous with enormous wealth.

In reality of course, most of us realise that huge riches do not automatically equate with increased happiness – witness the travails of Getty, Onassis or, more recently, the marital discord of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

The Rothschilds have, to be fair, managed to survive relatively unscathed from internecine squabbles since the family coffers first began to swell under the direction of businessman Mayer Amschel Rothschild, who set up a bank in Frankfurt in the 1760s.

But the death earlier this month of Serena Rothschild, the 81-year-old wife of Lord (Jacob) Rothschild, is a reminder of a recent conflict within the gilded family which saw mother and father pitted against their only son in a disagreement over his lifestyle.

Such was the enmity between Nathaniel Rothschild (known as Nat) and his parents that the 47-year-old entrepreneur did not invite them to his wedding two years ago to model Loretta Basey. Neither Jacob nor Serena attended the ceremony at the Swiss ski resort of Klosters or the wedding party held a week later in Wiltshire.

Speculation at the time that Loretta's glamour career – with multiple Page Three appearances to her name – had not met with Lord and Lady Rothschild's approval were unfounded, with sources insisting Loretta's past did not bother her prospective in-laws.

What seemed to cause them more concern was their only son's perceived lack of care over investments. In short, this family schism was all down to money.

Nat had experienced a tricky few years, with several questionable investments, including millions spent on a disastrous stake in the Indonesian coal market, causing him to drop (according to the Sunday Times Rich List) from being worth an estimated £1billion, down to £170million in just three years.

Nat found himself shamed by some of his own relatives for the way he had purportedly allowed the family's most precious asset – its name – to be dragged through the full glare of a public row over mismanagement and missing millions during his entanglement in Indonesia.

"Jacob was very concerned with Nat's handling of investments – he felt his

behaviour was risking the family name – and the two fell out," says a family source. "No one should underestimate the degree of tenacious protection exercised by senior family members to protect the Rothschild reputation."

Jacob Rothschild, 82, a wise and generous philanthropist to whom Princess Diana often turned to for advice, was said to be bitterly disappointed at his son's dwindling reputation. He had hoped that tensions between himself and Nat were a thing of the past.

Previously those tensions were not about finance but over personal issues such as Nat's unfettered hedonism at Oxford, and incidents such as an escort girl's story that she was asked to provide strippers and drugs at a party he hosted at Waddesdon Manor, the magnificent family seat in Buckinghamshire (now run by the National Trust).

Indeed, almost from the start of his gilded life, it appeared that Nat was a libertine set to self-destruct.

A friend at Eton remembers him as "a rather scruffy and unpredictable boy with a

rebellious streak, whom you would never have tipped to make a big success of his life".

While at Oxford, Nat soon became infamous for his excesses, revelling in his membership of the Bullingdon Club, the notorious all-male drinking society whose members have famously included David Cameron, George Osborne and Boris Johnson. He once pushed a portable builders' lavatory down a steep hill – with a friend still inside.

AN OXFORD contemporary at Wadham College remembers: "He was a playboy who was a babe magnet – at parties, the prettiest girls would flock to him like bees to honey. That's what the name Rothschild does for you, it seems to be a very powerful aphrodisiac."

When Nat embarked on a romance with Kate Moss's friend, model Annabelle Neilson, his family must have cast a jaded eye over his latest choice, whom he had met on a beach in India. They were even more horrified when, aged just 23, he eloped with Annabelle to Las Vegas, and married her.

"It was a huge shock to Jacob and Serena,"

says a close family friend. "Marrying Annabelle was incredibly impetuous – and as they predicted, it ended in tears."

The couple divorced after three years and Neilson received a generous financial settlement in return for rescinding the dynastic name and signing a confidentiality agreement. After years of addiction problems, she was found dead last year in her London home from a heart attack, aged 49.

When Nat embarked on a career in the City it upset Jacob that his son seemed to revel in his flashy entrepreneurial style, so different from the Rothschilds' usual discreet and understated methods. He felt deeply uncomfortable at Nat's use of the most revered name in global finance to attract investment into speculative activities.

Yet Nat is now a success, on his own terms. He is chairman of a business advising investors in emerging markets and is happily married with homes in Switzerland, New York and London. Family friends hope the death of his mother Serena may, at least, bring about reconciliation between Nat and his father.

● Adam Helliker's diary returns next week

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Mystery over the royal love letters

Picture: ALAMY



AMOROUS: Prince Charles and Lady Tryon

THE RECENT demise of Prince Charles's friend Lord Tryon has raised a sensitive question: what has become of the amorous letters that passed between Tryon's spirited wife Dale and the prince? The letters were treasured by Melbourne-born Lady Tryon, known as Kanga, as tangible proof of the time when she was the bachelor prince's lover in the early 1970s (before he became pre-occupied by erstwhile mistress Camilla Parker Bowles).

As a teenager Charles had first met Dale, daughter of a printing magnate, at a dance when he spent two terms at school in Australia. They met again, and became lovers, when she moved to London to work in PR.

But the voluptuous blonde wasn't considered suitable marriage material for the prince and in 1973 she married merchant banker peer Anthony Tryon, with whom she had four children.

Lady Tryon's close friendship with Charles continued, although she became increasingly indiscreet, telling favoured journalists how the prince would call her out of the blue and ask whether he could drop by her Wiltshire home for what she euphemistically called a "comfort stop".

She founded a successful fashion business – called Kanga – in 1983 but was eventually overcome by health issues, becoming dependent on painkillers and alcohol following uterine cancer in 1993 and a paraplegic after a fall. In 1997, two months after she had been divorced by Anthony, she was dead from septicaemia at just 49.

Says a family friend: "Dale would often leave the Prince's letters around so visitors would recognise his 'spider handwriting'. But shortly before her death, at a time when she was in despair and confusion, the letters went missing.

"One theory is that Anthony, who had always known about the affair, posted them back to Charles. But they could be anywhere; they certainly haven't turned up in all the stuff the family have been sorting through after Lord Tryon's death."



★ **Tom Brittney**, the actor who has taken over from James Norton in *Grantchester*, is a sensitive sort of chap. He was so moved on meeting Tom Hanks that he burst into tears.

Gravesend-born Tom, 28, who plays alongside Hanks in the forthcoming film *Greyhound*, says of being with the American star: "I started to cry when I first saw him.

"I couldn't believe that I was in the same room with the man who is pretty much responsible for me being an actor. As a kid I watched *Saving Private Ryan* and thought that was the kind of film I wanted to do."



★ Although **Penny Smith** presides over the Costa book awards ceremony, her own literary career has come to a halt. After three novels, the broadcaster is struggling to produce another. "I've got plenty of ideas but writing is so solitary and by nature I'm a herd animal," she told me at the awards.

If she does finally put her thoughts on paper, the result is likely to be sensuous – in her first opus she memorably described the effects on her heroine of using a self-pleasuring device called a Rampant Rabbit.

Happily Penny, 60, whose former lovers include Rory Bremner and Paul McKenna, has her own rabbit in the form of actor Vince Leigh, who has long shared her duvet. She still feels passionate about Vince, especially his hirsute back. She purrs: "I love the way the hair goes up my nose when I rub against it."

★ *Cold Feet* attracts its fair share of online traffic as viewers vent their opinions on the new series but **Hermione Norris**, 51, will not be peeking at any comments on social media.

"I'm nervous of it; I don't want to read something that I don't want to see. I've witnessed other people being burned by it," says the actress, who also does her best to discourage her son Wilf, 14, and daughter Hero, 11, from spending too much time online when they are at home in the Somerset village of Bruton.

"If they're on screen for a long time, you can watch their moods change in front of your eyes. The best thing was when the dog chewed through the cables and we had a whole weekend without wi-fi."

Picture: DAVE BENNETT/Getty



★ Is there no end to the talents of **Michael Gove**? The polymath politician is fluent in sign language; he says he was taught by his mother who used to work at the Aberdeen School for the Deaf.

Yet I recall Govey, 51, becoming rather hard of hearing himself at Oxford when he seemed unable to catch the sobbing entreaties of a girlfriend as she begged him not to end their relationship.

Despite being dumped by this unlikely lothario, the lovestruck lassie continued to turn up at his college every day to iron his shirts.



★ **Joanna Lumley** has robust opinions on most matters, so does she ever aspire to be prime minister?

"No," she states firmly, "I think we need a bloke. Women are quite used to being led by men. That's part of our job. Men don't really like to be led by women. They don't mind being spanked by them but they don't want to be led by them."

She continues (giggling): "Actually, what we really want is a bloke on a horse – someone like the Duke of Wellington. Or a headmaster. People quite like them as a figurehead."

★ Olympic cyclist **VICTORIA PENDLETON** is still bruised after the end of her five-year marriage to Scott Gardner and is in no hurry to start another relationship.

"The only male in my life is my horse, and he's enough trouble as it is," the amateur jockey told me at a party in Kensington.

Victoria, 38, began her relationship with Scott during the Beijing Olympics when he was a Team GB cycling coach.

As for the idea of finding love on a dating app, she recalls: "I just couldn't do that. It terrifies me."

★ A fond farewell to **Lord Carrington**, the former foreign secretary whose memorial service was held at Westminster Abbey last week. The Tory statesman brought clarity to complex situations, tutoring me on world affairs whenever we met.

During one of our last chats he was vigorous in his warnings about the danger of the current Russian regime: "It was actually better as the Soviet Union during the Cold War, when everyone was very careful about putting a foot wrong for fear of a nuclear war. It imposed a discipline that has now disappeared.

"The Americans no longer wish to spend their money in policing the world and who will take over? Certainly not Britain, we don't really even have a Navy any more."

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Will Elle say yes to the Doc?



★ While researching her role as a deposed sovereign for the TV adaptation of Sue Townsend's novel *The Queen And I*, Samantha Bond was given an insight into how our own dear Queen uses her trusty Launer handbag to signal her wishes.

Says the actress: "I was told that if she's fed up with someone she takes it off her left arm and puts it on her right. And if she wants to go home immediately she puts it on the table."

A courtier illustrates the use of the handbag further, telling me that all royal staff are instructed that it's HM's most important accessory. He says: "She will place it on a table at events to indicate to aides that she's ready to leave. Another signal is a discreet twist of her wedding ring, which she uses to emphasise to us that she'd like to be moved on from a conversation."

THE ODD match between Elle Macpherson, the Australian supermodel who devotes her life to wellness, and Andrew Wakefield, the controversial English doctor who has been branded a one-man global health catastrophe, was said to have hit the buffers shortly before Christmas.

But, in fact, I learn their relationship is growing ever stronger, with talk that the anti-vaccination campaigner, who is now sharing Elle's home in Miami, has proposed marriage – despite his divorce from his Irish wife Carmel not being finalised.

The two have been entwined for eight months since they were placed next to each other at a medical awards ceremony in Orlando. Elle, 54, had settled in Florida after being awarded \$53million in her divorce from billionaire Jeffrey Soffer.

Just a month before Berkshire-born Wakefield met Elle, the father of four had walked out of his 31-year marriage, telling his wife he wanted to "find himself".



PROPOSAL: Disgraced Wakefield wants to wed supermodel Elle

A former gastroenterologist at London's Royal Free Hospital, Wakefield, 62, had fled to America after he was banned from practising medicine in the UK over his fraudulent theory that the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine caused autism and bowel disease. His anti-MMR crusade has been linked to steep rises in international measles rates.

In continuing her romance Elle – once known as *The Body* – has ignored the advice from some of her business colleagues who warned that the reputation of her nutritional products, all based on an alkaline diet, could be damaged by her association with the disgraced doctor.

Wakefield's fellow anti-vaccination campaigner Polly Tommey confirms the couple are very much together, and insists his marriage was over months before his chance meeting with Elle.

"Andrew is deliriously in love and they are really happy," she says. "Elle's a sweetheart – she's put him on these nutritional shakes so he looks fitter than ever."

"He's portrayed as some horrible child killer but he's just a lovely guy who only wants to protect children. He deserves happiness as much as anyone."

★ Now that he's giving up his position on Radio 4's *Today* programme, John Humphrys won't have to hide his irritation whenever the subject of further education – particularly Oxbridge – arises. He left grammar school in South Wales at 15 to work on his local paper but says he still envies those pupils who went to university.

"When they came home for their 'vacs' I wanted to strangle them with their 'uni' scarves. I had a chip on my shoulder the size of the Bodleian Library," he fulminates. "The chip is a bit smaller but it's still there."



★ Turning 61 has given Dawn French a whimsical shiver as she looks back at her teenage years – a time seemingly dominated by her desire for sex.

"At 16 I was virginal," she recalls. "I thought about sex almost every hour of every day; anticipating it, fearing it and longing for it."

"I was at a girls' school and my brother was at a boys' school. So I fell in love with each of his friends in turn, mostly misguided crushes; always asking, when will the moment happen?"

"Before that I'd practised kissing on plums, other girls, pillows..."



Picture: GISELA SCHÖBER/Getty



★ Roger Daltrey is adamant that he will never change his basic mobile for a smartphone. "Life is not about looking down, it's about looking up," says the Who singer. "Every app is another step to make you look down and you're not doing stuff for yourself."

"I was nervous when the internet came along. I used to say 'I'm not sure it's going to bring about good, it could destroy civilisation'."

"Once artificial intelligence controls the internet we'll be in trouble and all those who are addicted to their phones will be brainwashed."

★ Sir David Attenborough has encountered plenty of scary situations during his global expeditions, but one of his most alarming experiences was in bed in London.

Sir David had returned home after months in Borneo and was relishing the prospect of his first night in crisp sheets. But he woke up drenched in sweat and his first thought was that he had malaria.

"So I woke up my wife Jane and said, 'I've got malaria, what do I do?' Then I put my hand on the sheet and it was red hot. While I was away, she had bought an electric blanket with a dual control."

"My side was on all night – I was absolutely parboiled."

★ John Nettles has been promised a cameo role in *Bergerac*, which is to return to TV after an absence of 30 years.

But that will mean Nettles, 75, interrupting his retirement in Devon where, he once told me, he had the three things he considered a man needed to be happy: "The first is a large bank account, the second is a beautiful wife and the third is an Indian restaurant not too far away."

★ No matter how many plaudits come her way, one thing that Olivia Colman won't be trying is directing. "No way!" she exclaims. "If I'm not needed for a scene I have a lie down, but directors have to be there, making decisions. The amount of times you see someone going 'Can I just ask you a question?' If I was the director, I'd go: 'No!'"

★ His first attempt at scriptwriting – a film called *The Golden Years* – was not a critical success and could have done with an SOS makeover, but Nick Knowles is game for another try. "I'm writing a new movie, based on *Jack the Ripper*," the presenter of BBC One's *DIY SOS* tells me. "It's bringing out my dark side, which is something I keep in the closet back home and don't bring out very often."

★ That old swinger Terence Stamp, still rakish at 80, has never been shy about stepping forward when he finds a woman attractive – with the exception of Princess Margaret.

Reminiscing about the "intense chemistry" he felt existed whenever he met the Queen's sister at parties, the erstwhile lover of Julie Christie and Jean Shrimpton admits he was too reserved to make the first move.

So he asked for advice from his more worldly brother Chris, a rock impresario, who told him to be supremely confident.

Says Terry: "I always liked Princess Margaret and she liked me but I didn't know what to do. Chris told me to just slam her up against the wall. But I never did."

Thank goodness.



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Robinson snaps back at Balding

ANNE ROBINSON is not impressed by Clare Balding's claim that she was only well paid because BBC executives "were terrified of her". During her heyday at the BBC presenting *The Weakest Link*, Robinson was on an annual salary of £4million. Balding has blamed the BBC's gender pay gap on a culture of rewarding the people who shout the loudest, saying: "Anne is scary as hell. I don't want to have to behave like that to get equal treatment. It upsets me when people get rewarded for that sort of behaviour."

This rather disdainful assessment of her tactics has miffed Robinson, who says: "Yes, I'm a tough negotiator, but I despair that many women are poor at

expecting and asking for what they deserve. And there's no need for bad behaviour, simply firmness.

"It also depends if you have the skill to know how much they want you. The less you care if you lose out, the firmer you can afford to be."

The rules of engagement, says Anne, whose personal fortune is estimated at £50million, are simple: "Never be embarrassed about money. And when they say no, that's just the start of negotiations."

Ms Balding has said discovering she was paid less than fellow hosts Alan Shearer and Gary Lineker was "soul destroying". Last year the BBC paid her £180,000, but she earns much more from corporate work and books. Her company accounts show she has taken dividends of £2million over the past two years.



★ *That peripatetic polymath Stephen Fry admits that one thing he can't do is sing. He says: "At weddings and funerals I still prefer to mime. At one memorial in St John's Wood, the person I stood next to said to me encouragingly, 'Come on, Stephen - you're not singing. Have a go!' "Believe me, you don't want me to," I said. Besides, I was having a much better time listening to him. 'No. Go on'. So I joined in the chorus. "You're right', Sir Paul McCartney conceded. 'You can't sing'."*

★ While some of his more flouncy interiors may be questionable, **Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen** can take pride in one of his most enduring creations - his marriage. The frilly-sleeved designer and his wife Jackie are celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary, having met on a blind date when they were both 19. He says there was an "Olympic-sized attraction between us - despite her thinking I was gay at first."

"We've had tremendous highs and lows. You can have an awful day or even a horrible year, but in the context of a long marriage, that's nothing. You just have to be patient."

He adds, rather cringingly: "Jackie and I are now enjoying a Pre-Raphaelite intensity of intimacy."



DESIGNER MARRIAGE: Jackie and Laurence



Picture: DAVE M BENETT/Getty

★ **The Queen's** long union to Philip has been sustained by humour, with both liking to share the more amusing sides of their duties (especially Elizabeth, who is a skilled mimic - her impersonation of William Hague is said to be hilarious).

One of Philip's favourite anecdotes is of the French State Visit of General de Gaulle and his wife. During an awkward spot of conversation at Buckingham Palace, a guest asked Madame de Gaulle what she was most looking forward to in her retirement, which was imminent.

With great elaboration (as she didn't speak much English) she replied: "A penis."

Consternation ensued for some time, until the Queen herself came to the rescue. "Ah, happiness," she said with a broad grin.

★ *Step aside, Theresa May; actress Caroline Quentin has her own manifesto to be PM. Her vision for the nation includes the return of free school milk, a traffic-free "day of peace and quiet", and a free Friday foot rub for workers who stand all day.*

Plus a tax on over-50s who don't have an afternoon nap - all proceeds going "towards the national chocolate muffin budget".

★ What would we do without **Brian May** to guide us through life? "I try to make sense of it all; what I should be doing with the power that's been given to me..." muses the bouffant-haired, badger-defending plectrum-plucker.

"I think the answer is: to use whatever I have to try to change the world for the better. I feel strongly that we've veered so far off the path of decency. We need a radical shake-up." And maybe a haircut.

★ According to surveys on romance, men are twice as likely to have chosen Valentine's Day to propose to their partners. But last Thursday **Raymond Blanc** did not feel the urge to pop the question to his Russian companion Natalia Traxel.

The willowy Natalia, 47, is sharing a house with the twinkly-eyed chef near his Oxfordshire hotel, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, and was once very keen to become Mrs Blanc, but a wedding is no longer on the menu.

The Michelin-starred monsieur feels that, at 69, he has "done" marriage, having tried it twice before.

Although Raymond may no longer be keen on matrimony, romance is in his genes. He wooed Natalia, a dermatologist, by calling her and saying things like: "I have to see you now; I found a beautiful leaf on the Champs-Elysées and I want to give it to you."

The Gallic gourmand confirms that a wedding is not a matter that preoccupies him as he rummages in his spice cupboard each day. "I'm very busy, I'm opening a lot of new places. Natalia and I live together, we are very happy. Pourquoi tanguer le bateau? [Why rock the boat?]"

★ **Matt LeBlanc** is miffed that a new generation of viewers of *Friends* don't recognise him now that he has grey hair and has gained a few pounds.

The American star, 51, right, says that youngsters ask him if he is Joey's dad from the hit series, which ended 14 years ago.

"Every year there's a new generation that discovers the show. But now there's enough time gone by that kids come up to me and say,

"Hey, are you Joey's dad?" One teenager who is more aware than most of Matt's role as Joey Tribbiani is his daughter Marina, 13, who likes to watch repeats of the show with him.

He says: "She loves to ask me questions about it, like: 'Was that real? Did you really eat that? Ooh, you ate that off the floor? That's gross!'"



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Royals' pal bids to save his business

THE BIDDING has not been proceeding smoothly at Paddle 8, the trendy auction house which has impeccable royal connections – the firm's founder Alexander Gilkes is close to Prince Harry and was the first to employ Princess Eugenie.

Losses at the company, which connects buyers and sellers of fine art through an online site, reached such a level that it was plunged into voluntary liquidation, to the consternation of backers who include Damien Hirst, gallery owner Jay Jopling, and film producer Eric Fellner.

The dire financial situation is an embarrassment for Gilkes, right, an Old Etonian entrepreneur who was married to Misha Nonoo, the designer who is one of Meghan Markle's best friends – she was responsible for setting up the first date between the Suits actress and Harry.

Gilkes, 38, a former auctioneer who is now dating tennis star



Maria Sharapova, had set up Paddle 8 after observing that attendance at traditional auctions was dwindling. His company, which was likened to “an online Christie's for contemporary art”, expanded rapidly, attracting millions from investors.

But a merger with the German art company Auctionata proved a disaster, leading to job losses for nearly half of the 120 staff at Paddle 8's offices in the US and London.

Gilkes, the son of a dermatologist, had employed Princess Eugenie at his New York office, referring to her as an “amazing asset”, but she had left by the time the company started to run into trouble. He remains close to Eugenie and Beatrice, and to William and Harry (he was a guest at both the Princes' weddings).

Last night a spokesman for Paddle 8 confirmed that the company had been the subject of a Creditors' Voluntary Liquidation but added “all matters have now been successfully resolved”.

★ Wise words, at last, from **Elizabeth Hurley**, 53, who muses: “One of the best things about getting older is that you care so much less. We all go through big moments in our lives – losing a parent or having a child – and as they happen, you let go of so much trivia.”

Adds Basingstoke-born **Liz**: “I've learnt to distinguish between what's important, and what doesn't matter. Having a spot, putting on 2lb, not being invited to a party, who cares about that stuff? I feel much more content having let go of the rubbish.”

Just as audiences “let go” of Miss Hurley's last work, the dire cable TV series *The Royals*, in which she acted (using the term somewhat loosely) as a spoilt queen.

★ What exciting project will the Greek film director **Yogas Lanthimos** be undertaking after his triumph with *The Favourite*, which won Olivia Colman her Oscar? I hear that Yogas, who lives in north London and whose first career was in advertising, has been hired by disposable underwear maker Tena to “reinvigorate” the image of its line of Silhouette incontinence pants.

“It's not to be sniffed at,” reports my source, drily. “Yogas is getting paid a record amount for a commercial.”

★ While she remains open to finding love again 18 years after the death of her husband **Desmond Wilcox**, **Dame Esther Rantzen** is not tempted to try cruising the web for a date.

“I once advertised for a cleaning lady and there was a ring on the doorbell and the woman said: ‘Oh my God, not you!’ and ran down the path!” giggles **Esther**, 78. “And I can only assume that if I went internet dating, people would have the same response.”



★ While the audience raved about the **Captain Marvel** film at its premiere in Mayfair, alluring star **BRIE LARSON** didn't relish her appearance on the big screen. “I prefer to watch my work on a phone or an iPad; seeing my own face bigger than how I see it in the mirror makes me feel weird,” declared **Brie** (who wasn't named after her father's favourite cheese – it's an abbreviation for **Brienne**).

The Californian actress, 29, is rather earnest, adding loftily that she usually prefers to do work that “illustrates the human condition”.

No wonder **Alex Greenwald**, the laid-back musician to whom she became engaged two years ago, has decided to take a “step back” from their relationship.

★ How many people would recognise **Martin Kemp** in the street? Too many, according to the preening performer, who finds being famous makes it difficult for him to go out.

“When I was in Spandau Ballet, I used to quite enjoy it but the older you get, the more difficult it becomes because you value your privacy more,” sighs **Kemp**, 57, who played villain Steve Owen in *EastEnders*.

“It's something I've dealt with since I was 17, so that's a good few years of being recognised. I suppose it's just part of the work I do.”

Such a trial for the poor chap. Maybe everyone should just ignore him.

★ The Royal Family has much in common with the world of showbusiness, given that both have to give a good performance while on show.

The head coachman at Buckingham Palace, **Arthur Showell**, who has died aged 92, was privy to many of the **Queen's** observations during his years of service, and recalled her once muttering as she got into the Gold Coach for a procession: “We're all actors upon a stage.”

Of course some royals (Prince Edward and, more recently, **Meghan**) have more of an affinity with luvviedom than others.

★ **Alan Sugar** was so incensed by the referendum that he declared the result was void because the public had been misled by anti-EU campaigners such as **Boris Johnson** and **Michael Gove** who, he fulminated, should be “jailed for their lies”.

Now **Lord Sugar** seems to have softened. “It's a total disaster, but I've given up worrying about it,” says the bellicose businessman. “For me the big error was made when people voted Leave, but we can't turn that around.”

“I think it's going to take 10 to 15 years post-Brexit for us to see the real ramifications. But life will go on; it will have to go on.”



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Boris tells family to button it



★ **Lucy Worsley** has a productive life, beavering away with all those books and TV shows, not to mention her day job as chief curator of the Historic Royal Palaces. But she almost didn't choose history as a career, because her father, a geologist, wanted her to be a scientist.

"I was doing science A-levels to please him, but then switched. He said I would end up cleaning loos. It was Mum who encouraged my love of history."

Amid this was the distraction of her young brother. She says: "I was quite mean to him and there are two things I did that he's asked me never to mention because they're too bad to be known. They involved nettles and an electric fence."

★ Thanks to his televisual success, **Martin Clunes** lives comfortably on a farm in Dorset, where he helps his wife look after a menagerie of chickens, horses and sheep. But he's not over-sentimental about his critters.

"There are some contradictions in my affections," he concedes. "For example, we put the lambs by the Aga to keep them warm. But then a few months later they're back in the Aga... to cook."

WITH Theresa May's future in the balance as MPs prepare to have their meaningful vote on her Brexit deal, I hear that Boris Johnson has been involved in preparations for what he sees as his ultimate chance to become prime minister.

Since his resignation six months ago as foreign secretary in protest at Mrs May's "abominable" Chequers plan, Boris has artfully sidestepped questions of whether he still has designs on Number 10. But any thought that BoJo may have lost his mojo can be instantly dismissed.

A close friend of Boris's tells me that plans for a leadership challenge are "advanced" and, intriguingly, that he has asked the more garrulous members of his family, his publicity-prone sister Rachel and father Stanley, to keep lower profiles during any leadership contest.

I'm told: "Boris got the family together and told them that this was his last opportunity for the top job – so could everyone be on their best behaviour at what would be a time of heightened media scrutiny."

"It was aimed at those who particularly love the limelight, but it was delivered to everyone in a typically bouncy Boris style, along the lines of 'Button it you Johnsons!'"

The putative premier, 54, who has always been rather shambolic, is being "managed" by his perky girlfriend Carrie Symonds, 30, a former Tory PR adviser, who is responsible for Boris's slimmer figure (he has lost nearly 2st) and for choosing his new suits. While his divorce from his wife Marina is nearing its conclusion, Boris is sharing Carrie's flat in South London (she calls him "Bozzie Bear" after Fozzie, the fluffy-haired Muppet).

As for Boris's tilt at the premiership, one of his camp says: "BJ is the Tories' best hope, a figure whom the public actually likes. Behind that mask of Gussie Fink-Nottle there's a Machiavelli who is a supersmart, ultra-ambitious politician."



SLIMMED: Boris

Kate Winslet seems a lot less fraught these days. Has she taken up meditation perhaps? "No," replies the Reading-born actress. "I can't do that because I just end up making lists: 'PE kit, blueberries, smoked salmon, Manchego...'"



★ **Having a boyfriend 21 years her junior is doing wonders for TAMZIN OUTHWAITE, who is feeling decidedly friskier since fitness instructor Tom Child moved his exercise equipment into her North London home a few weeks ago. "I feel appreciated and loved; Tom makes me very happy," twinkles the EastEnders actress, 48. He is the second significant Tom in her life: five years ago she parted from Tom Ellis (who played the hunky chef Gary in Miranda Hart's eponymous TV series).**

She was devastated when Ellis confessed to a night of illicit rumpy while away filming in America. The couple tried to patch up their seven-year marriage for the sake of their two daughters but eventually Tom left home and she filed for divorce.

Of her new beau, Essex-born Tamzin says he keeps her in peak condition by encouraging her to run and lift weights. "He motivates me; he'll say, 'You need to sweat today.'"

★ Her jealous rivals have always wondered just how **Minnie Driver** managed to attract a plethora of alpha males, with an exhausting list of paramours such as Matt Damon, John Cusack and Matt LeBlanc. Indeed the Hollywood-based actress joked about her love life: "There was one time I realised I'd slept with a whole billboard! My sister pointed it out when we were driving past and we laughed so hard."

Now Minnie, 49, who grew up in Mayfair but moved to California when she hit the big time in *Good Will Hunting*, has disclosed that her winning way with men is: treat them like dogs.

Currently snugly entwined with writer Neville Wakefield, left, she confesses: "The best training I ever had in my understanding of boys was having Labradors."

"They need three things: to be run, to be fed, and to be loved. Cover those three bases and you're good to go."

"We tend to over-complicate relationships with our men, which we shouldn't because they're very simple creatures – not stupid but simple in the best way: straightforward and pragmatic."



★ While **Francis Rossi** has always been open about his background – the Status Quo guitarist grew up in South London as the son of an Italian ice-cream seller – he says his old chum Sir Elton John has changed a great deal. "When I first met him, he was Reg Dwight [from Pinner] but we're not allowed to call him that any more," muses Rossi. "But he'll always be Reggie to me."

★ **Alison Steadman** advises that amidst a tide of national uncertainty it's helpful to appreciate the little things. "Last week I had to leave my house at 6am for filming but I stood outside on my own and heard the birds singing – it was the nicest thing."

★ No wonder **Michael Portillo** spends so much time on trains these days. "I always feel a bit sorry I didn't have any electric trains as a child; I had a clockwork railway," sighs the former Tory defence minister, 65. "I feel I had a rather deprived childhood, because my friends had lovely electric ones."

★ That old rocker **Rick Wakeman** admits to having an "excessive" personality. The Yes musician, who is about to turn 70, says: "Cars – I can't have one, I had to have 22. Keyboards – I can't have two, I had to have 22. Wives – I've had four."

★ **Jeremy Corbyn** has not had a single chat with Tony Blair since becoming Labour leader. Any reason, given that Blair won three general elections for the party? "Nope," shrugs Corbyn. "If Blair were to make contact, would he speak to him? 'I'd talk to anybody,'" he replies. "I'm very polite."

★ Quote from **Mary Berry**: "Nothing gives me more pleasure when I'm out shopping than someone tapping me on the shoulder and saying, 'I've just made your lemon drizzle.'"

By Adam Helliker

LIVING quietly in a small house in a pine forest not far from Moscow is a notorious traitor whom many in Britain may have assumed died years ago. Yet George Blake is still alive, although his failing health may mean he won't reach his 97th birthday this year.

Few in this country are likely to mourn the fate of this half-blind old man when reminded that during the Cold War he gave the KGB the names of several hundred British agents, most of them living behind the Iron Curtain – ensuring their execution.

Now a rumour has spread among the small circle of Russians who keep in touch with Blake that lately the old traitor has become rather misty-eyed about England and has expressed a desire to make one last visit here.

It is a fanciful notion that is unlikely to be fulfilled. If Blake sets foot on British soil he would be arrested – he has the remaining 37 years of his 42-year jail sentence to serve, a stretch which was rudely interrupted by his escape in 1966.

While working for Britain's secret intelligence service, Blake had passed on numerous secrets to the Soviets. One of his biggest "successes" was to report the building of a secret underground tunnel in Berlin, running from the American sector into the Russian zone, which allowed the CIA to tap underground cables and listen in to Soviet communications.

He was jailed for espionage in 1961, but five years later was sprung from Wormwood Scrubs prison. He fled to East Germany then Russia where, ever since, he has basked in his status as a national hero.

Blake is the last survivor of the British spies who turned traitor for ideological reasons. Now known locally as Georgy Ivanovich, he has remained committed to the Communist cause and two years ago received renewed acclaim in Russia when he issued a new call to arms against the West.

In an extraordinary message relayed to young recruits working for Russia's intelligence service, he said: "There is a real war going on between good and evil. I believe you will serve our common cause selflessly and courageously."

RAILING against the West, he added that intelligence officers were battling a "devious enemy, the possibility of whose final defeat gives me energy to live. Your mission will be a difficult one – to save the planet when its destruction in nuclear war has again become a possibility due to irresponsible politicians."

Maybe Blake's sabre-rattling was prescient, given that politics is dominated by an autocratic Russian leader who competes on the global stage with a morally-conflicted US President prone to making irrational judgments.

Certainly Putin, himself an ex-KGB man, is a great admirer of Blake, on whom he has bestowed several medals, including the Order for Personal Courage.

Blake has never shown any remorse for betraying his country and, unlike fellow spies Kim Philby and Donald Maclean, who never

THE SPY WHO WANTS TO COME HOME



UNREPENTANT: George Blake in Moscow in 1992. Inset, left, with son the Rev Patrick Butler in 2012

the North Korean forces, who "turned" him before he was released three years later.

Posted to Berlin at the height of the Cold War, he began to spy for the USSR. Exposed by a Polish defector in 1961, he freely admitted his activities.

Says Sergei Ivanov, a spokesman for the SVR, Russia's foreign intelligence agency: "It's thanks to Blake that the Soviet Union avoided very serious military and political damage which the US and Britain could have inflicted on it."

For his crimes Blake was sentenced to 42 years – at the time the most severe term in UK history.

But he escaped, aided by fellow inmates Michael Randle and Pat Pottle (CND campaigners) and petty criminal Sean Bourke. On October 22, 1966, he clambered through a broken window and scaled the wall with a rope ladder tied together with knitting needles.

At the top he had to make the 20ft drop. Dazed and bloodied, he was dragged into the getaway van. He was then smuggled across the Channel, and to East Berlin inside a wooden box attached under a car. Once in Russia he was feted.

Blake still speaks Russian with a British accent, but refuses to accept the label of a traitor, saying that one has to belong to a country first in order to betray it. "Once, when I was meeting up with the comrades from the service, I joked to them: 'What you see before you is a foreign-made car, that has adapted very well to Russian roads.' They found it funny."

Not half as amusing as it would be to see the treacherous Blake made to fulfil his jail term.

How the Kremlin's double agent George Blake longs to see Britain one last time

CAGED: But Blake escaped from Wormwood Scrubs

really settled in their new home, he adapted easily to life behind the Iron Curtain. In a recent interview with a Russian paper he said: "These are the happiest years of my life, and the most peaceful."

George Carey, who made a documentary on Blake, *Masterspy Of Moscow*, agrees that "if there's such a thing as a good traitor, a successful traitor, then it is him".

He believes Blake settled so easily into Russia because he wasn't so enmeshed in the society that he turned against; never having the glamour of the Cambridge spies. "Unlike Guy Burgess, who longed

for his clubs, and Kim Philby, who had thought he was going to be more significant than he was, Blake adapted well," explains Carey. (Burgess had described his first Soviet experience as being "like Glasgow on a Saturday night in the 19th century").

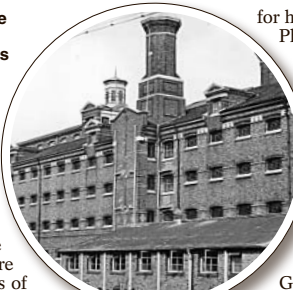
"Burgess and Philby drank like crazy. Donald Maclean did try to make a life of it, bringing his family over, but he also took to drink. They were all very sad guys."

Blake left a wife and three sons in England. But he went on to have another family in Russia. With his wife Ida he has a son, Mikhail, who is a financial adviser. Blake has said before that his biggest regret

was the way he treated his first wife Gillian, who did not know he was a double agent. She divorced him while he was in prison. In the 1980s his sons got in touch and were reunited with him on a visit to Moscow. Blake later reflected that this reconciliation was "the most significant event" of his life.

Youngest son Patrick, 58, a vicar in Guildford, says only: "Possibly when my father dies, we might be in a position to be much more open about things, but it's not a part of our lives we talk about."

BORN in Rotterdam in 1922 to a Dutch mother and a Turkish-Jewish father, George Blake fought for the Dutch Resistance during the Second World War before arriving in Britain and joining MI6. While posted to the British embassy in Seoul in 1950 he was captured by



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Brexit: The wives' tale

Picture: GETTY

THE NEW YEAR failed to bring forth any resolutions from David Cameron about forgiving his enemies. He continues to rebuff conciliatory approaches from his former close friend Michael Gove, even though their wives have overcome their differences and are speaking again.

Nearly three years after he called the EU referendum, Cameron continues to be in no mood to forgive what he saw as Gove's "two-faced treachery" over not supporting his Remain campaign. Gove's wife, Sarah Vine, has said Cameron was "shocked and hurt" when her husband decided he would back Brexit.

Samantha Cameron supported her husband's position and ignored entreaties from Sarah, to whom she had previously been close: the families had holidayed together and Sarah is godmother to the Cam-



RECONCILED: Samantha and Sarah

erons' daughter Florence. Indeed Sam vowed never to speak to Sarah again, and the one time the two did meet, at the 50th celebrations of Tory fundraiser Lord Feldman, she was overheard swearing at Mrs

Gove. Those close by described both women as "extremely upset".

But the hiatus between the pair ended just before Christmas when they found themselves at a mutual friend's drinks in South Kensington and they have since met for lunch. "We had not met since the referendum," says Sarah. "It's been lovely to see Sam; there's no frostiness."

Not so for Cameron, of whom a close friend tells me: "The frost has not thawed for David. He remains unimpressed by Gove's 'Brutus' behaviour."

Meanwhile, the former PM is far removed from Brexit squabbles. He has taken Sam and their three children to a remote resort in Costa Rica, where the family have been enjoying the surfers' beach at Playa Hermosa. For anyone wanting to feel envious, the Camerons are staying in an £850-a-night villa. And the temperature is 33C.



Now to the serious stuff: is there any truth in the rumour that certain royal staff refer to **Meghan and Harry as Monica and Chandler** after two of the characters in the American sitcom *Friends*? In the series, control freak Monica is played by Courteney Cox and amiable but weak Chandler by Matthew Perry (a typical Monica quote was: "Remember: if I am harsh with you, it's only because you're doing it wrong").

So is that true? I ask a courtier at Kensington Palace.

"Yes," he smiles. "Some of us can be very waspish."



★ **Maureen Lipman's** radiant complexion is due to her beauty regime using sparkling water. "I shove my face in a bowl of Perrier," the actress, 72, tells me. "It's very good for the skin. And it also entertains my grandchildren."

★ There's no doubt in **Alfie Boe's** mind as to who would be his ideal party guest. "The Queen," says the singer. "I've met her a few times," (he performed at the Diamond Jubilee and at her birthday last year). "She's such a lovely lady, with a great sense of humour. If she ever came for dinner, I think she'd be very appreciative of the cooking, no matter what it was." Although maybe not in Alfie's case – he often craves big bowls of ice cream, declaring a favourite flavour to be a combo of smokey bacon and vanilla.



★ *Heartening to learn that **John Cleese** is lapping up his new life on Nevis, the Caribbean island to which he decamped two months ago, having announced huffily that he had become "so disappointed" with the UK.*

*He cited a long list of gripes, including bankers, newspapers and the dearth of good comedy on TV (presumably not his dire Christmas offering, *Hold The Sunset*?)*

So how is the old curmudgeon, 79, amusing himself in the sun?

He reports: "I'm using loo roll with a picture of an angry Donald Trump on every piece."

The 11,000 residents of Nevis must count themselves blessed that such a wit has chosen to live among them.

★ The Cold Feet actress **Fay Ripley** – just back on our screens in a new series of the rebooted dramedy – seems a sunny sort of person. But her outlook wasn't always so breezy. "I was at a really low point in my life in my 20s and early 30s," admits the Wimbledon-born mother-of-two, 52. "I spent most of that time crying about things like not having a boyfriend. I was miserable – just emotional and silly. And then I got it out of my system. And as you get older, your focus changes from, 'I have to get into that pencil skirt' to, 'I just have to have a bath!' – and all those things that were huge issues in your life seem to fall away."

"I still cry, just about different things. Since I've had children I only have to watch programmes about family reunions and I'm off weeping."

★ With this to be his last series as the sleuthing vicar in ITV's **Grantchester**, Hollywood is, understandably, beckoning for **James Norton**. But the actor has no intention of leaving these shores, because he loves our damp climate.

"There have been a few meetings in America," says the Ampleforth and Cambridge-educated James, 33. "There are great opportunities out there but there are wonderful jobs here too. And I miss the rain. The problem with LA is that when you read for a part you see them thinking, 'So how much are you worth? How many Twitter followers do you have?'"

Yorkshire-born James adds he would also miss Peckham in South London, where he has bought a house in which he likes to spend cosy evenings canoodling with girlfriend Imogen Poots, above.

★ *After sifting through the deluge of responses to my annual quiz, two winners have emerged and can now look forward to a life of untold riches. Well, a bottle of fine champagne to start with...*

So congratulations on their knowledge of the past year's revelations go to: Miss Jacqueline Morris, of Botley in Oxfordshire, and Mrs J Cook, of Thorgill in Yorkshire.

★ **Jenny Eclair** is still wallowing in what she calls her post-festive cosy layer of extra fat. The comedienne, 58, muses: "For me, Christmas represented that delicious feeling of slowing down, letting my feet spread out in extra wide-fitting slippers and substituting jeans for a loose pair of pyjama bottoms. The only thing I've got that still fits is the duvet."

Is this £4m home fit for 007... and his Bond girl?



BODYGUARD star Richard Madden is moving to Hollywood... and has his sights set on this palatial mansion.

The Scottish actor, hotly tipped to become the next James Bond, was house hunting in Los Angeles last week after winning a Best Actor Golden Globe for the hit BBC series.

Madden, 32, was especially struck by the sprawling property in the celebrity enclave of Hidden Hills.

A real estate agent confirmed: "He was blown away by the location and also highly impressed with security arrangements."

The gated, seven-bedroom, 10-bathroom estate, which also overlooks a golf course, is part of a sprawling country club that is patrolled by security guards and is on the market for £4.2million.

As well as its panoramic views, the 8,239 square foot property also features a home cinema, gymnasium and sauna with an infinity pool, spa, barbecue pit and fire pit.

Madden, who has been dating 21-year-old English actress Ellie Bamber since last summer, was alone when he toured the property, according to the agent, who

From **Mike Parker** in LOS ANGELES and **Adam Helliher**

added: "He was struck by how quiet and peaceful Hidden Hills is, despite only being a half-hour drive from Hollywood."

If he does seal the deal, Madden will have the likes of Jennifer Lopez, Jamie Foxx and Britney Spears as neighbours.

Neither Madden nor Bamber has publicly acknowledged their relationship, although Madden has admitted: "I'm very happy with someone."

Bamber is playing Cosette in the BBC's *Les Miserables* and is set to appear in a forthcoming TV series about the 1960s scandal of the disgraced politician John Profumo. She will play Mandy Rice-Davies in *The Trial Of Christine Keeler*.

The actress has developed some sympathy for Rice-Davies, who along with Keeler was labelled as an utter floozy by the Establishment.

"Mandy was fun and vivacious," says Bamber, "but it must have been an awful thing to be shamed and put on trial for being a prostitute."



LICENCE TO THRILL: Richard Madden was blown away by the sprawling property in the celebrity enclave of Hidden Hills, California, which comes with infinity pool, a huge kitchen and sitting room.



UNDERCOVER: Richard and Ellie have not gone public on their relationship

We're banning Angels instead

IT'S USUALLY drink that needs to be cracked down on to stop student parties descending into chaos.

But at one college at Durham University, they're banning Angels instead.

Robbie Williams's 1997 power ballad is often played at the end of parties at St Mary's College and a tradition has evolved where students stampede into the centre of the room and start "moshing" - dancing wildly - when the line "and through it all..." is sung. But this mad rush escalated

By **Karl Grafton**

from a bit of fun to full-blown mayhem, in which a woman sustained a "very nasty injury".

An email sent to students from the college authorities confirmed the victim fell and was trampled on. That led to a shoulder wound which required surgery.

The email said: "Some of you may be aware that at the Winter Ball earlier this term, one of our students sustained an injury at the end of the night when the college

played its 'end of the night song' - Angels. College officers understand that a tradition has emerged around the playing of this song, which happens specifically at balls but, on occasion, at other events too - where students rush together into the middle of the room.

"On this occasion one student fell and had others rushing over them, which resulted in them sustaining a very nasty injury to their shoulder which has required surgery." It prompted St Mary's,

founded in 1899, to declare a ban on the chart-topper at future balls. They said: "We do not feel that the tradition that has formed around this particular song is safe in the confined space of our dining hall or within college buildings."

"The safety of our students is paramount and so it has been agreed that the playing of Angels will no longer take place at future college balls."

But management did say they will revisit the decision if students refrain from moshing.



SILENCED: Robbie's hit is a no-no

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Whatever's happened to Night Manager Two?

THE LAVISH television production of *The Night Manager* was such a huge hit, attracting some 10 million viewers an episode and making a fortune for the BBC in overseas sales, that there was a natural presumption there would be a second series.

Indeed last year Elizabeth Debicki, one of the stars of the stylish adaptation of John le Carré's novel, dropped hints that filming was to commence this February. But fans of the spy drama will be disappointed to learn that a subsequent series may be postponed indefinitely.

With no firm schedule in sight, the thriller's biggest names have now made other commitments. Oscar-favourite Olivia Colman is heavily in demand elsewhere, as is Hugh Laurie, while Tom Hiddleston is to star in a West End production of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* starting in March.

"The original production was such a big success that planning for a follow-up began almost immediately," says a BBC source. "But it rapidly proved to be a night-



LIGHTS OUT: *The Night Manager* cast is in disarray

mare, with one of the stars refusing to commit, affecting everyone else's schedule.

"It was then put back until next year but the impetus is fast disappearing. Morale was not helped by the lack of success of another of le Carré's works, *The Little Drummer Girl*, which failed to ignite viewers' enthusiasm."

Production plans have further been hampered by the decision of Danish director Susanne Bier, who made the first series, not to be involved. She says: "I just got worried that I would repeat myself or do something which wasn't as great."

The Night Manager was made in conjunction with the BBC by The Ink Factory, founded by John le Carré's sons, Stephen and Simon Cornwell. A spokeswoman for the company declined to comment on "speculation" over rumours that a second series had been shelved.



Picture: GC IMAGES

★ While not a drop of the hard stuff passed Kate Moss's lips when the newly teetotal model celebrated her 45th birthday in London last week, a vow of sobriety has yet to be embraced by her half-sister LOTTIE MOSS, who celebrated her own January 9 birthday in Mexico.

The difference in tone of the siblings' parties was marked by venues - Kate hosted a dinner at the Dorchester Hotel, while Lottie, also a model, toasted reaching 21 on a beach, swigging champagne from the bottle while wearing a cropped T-shirt bearing the slogan: *Sorry if my nipples offend you.*

No nipples on display back in London on Friday night, when Lottie, pictured, headed for Albert's private club in Chelsea.

First scouted by an agency at 13 she went on to front campaigns for Calvin Klein and Bulgari. But although she has now had endless exposure in front of the cameras, she still suffers from a lack of self-confidence. Lottie told me last year: "It's really overwhelming when I see people stare at me. I think, 'Oh my God. Do I look really ugly?' I don't know how I calm myself down. I just think 'Breathe, breathe, breathe'."

But the self-doubt is worth it, she freely acknowledges - not just for the money but for the goodies she receives from designers keen for her to be snapped wearing their clothes or touting their handbags.

"I get sent so much stuff. Me and my flatmate have a third bedroom where we shove all of our free clothes. We just hide everything and shut the door. But I do give away a lot to charity shops."

★ **Rory Bremner** can mimic most politicians but even he's struggling with Jeremy Corbyn. "I'm working on it," sighs the suave impersonator.

"I think of Corbyn as one of those grey, woolly mascots that you get on the front of a lorry that looks as if it's been through too many car washes.

"Somehow it has managed to stay on the radiator grille but you wouldn't want it driving the lorry."



★ **Ed Sheeran** has announced

that he is giving up marijuana, after years of smoking a couple of joints a day. Which reminds me of the time the singer plonked himself next to me on the steps of the American Ambassador's house in Regent's Park, where we had both been invited to a party.

After chatting for a while, Ed took out what looked like a cigarette, lit it and offered it to me. Realising that it was definitely something stronger than nicotine, I politely declined.

Feeling something of a killjoy I explained to the affable musician that it might not be the best place to be seen with drugs - from our perch on the garden steps we could see the glint of the rifles held by the US Marines who patrol the diplomatic residence.

"Yeah, you could be right," sighed Sheeran, extinguishing his joint seconds before he was tapped on the shoulder by a "fan" who wanted to say hello.

It was David Cameron, then prime minister, who wrinkled his nose at the exotic aroma and, with a big smile, apologised for interrupting our moment of "relaxation".

★ **The Duchess of Sussex's** comment that her due date is in April confirms my previous story on the sensitive matter of where Harry and Meghan conceived their baby. The distinction goes to the Castle of Mey in Caithness, the Queen Mother's former bolthole, where the couple holidayed last July with Prince Charles.

"They stayed there for five days and, even though they went for long walks during the day, nobody bothered them and they were very self-contained," says my source adding, rather indelicately: "They spent a lot of time in their room, so we think that's where it happened."

★ **After Theresa May's** bruising week her hubby might like to cheer her up with some new footwear. Her love of shoes is shared by Philip, who inherited his appreciation of loafers and slingbacks from his father John, who worked as a salesman for a Merseyside shoe wholesaler.

"Philip, unlike most men, used to love shopping for shoes with Theresa," confides a friend of the couple. "As it's now more difficult to get to the shops, they go online. But Theresa will always ask Philip's opinion first before she orders a new pair."

★ **Brenda Blethyn** left it late to get married - she was with her partner Michael Mayhew for three decades before they finally found their way to a register office - but the actress seems to have cracked it as far as compatibility is concerned.

"I think it helps that I'm up in Northumberland half the time filming my detective series *Vera*, so long may it continue," laughs Brenda, who will be 73 next month. "I think it's about having our own space. Even when we're at our home in Ramsgate we sit in separate rooms, Michael with his music in one, me with my crossword in another. He makes me laugh like nobody else and I think he likes me for my honesty."

Indeed she giggles at the memory of how former theatre director Michael proposed. "He popped the question on Skype. I think he went down on one knee but I don't know for sure because he went out of vision.

"He could have just been tying his shoelaces."

