



The nation's wedding fever hasn't had much effect on that rascally restaurateur **Raymond Blanc**, who is no closer to formalising his relationship with Russian doctor Natalia Traxel (pictured), to whom he has been engaged for six years. Although Monsieur Blanc is full of talk about passion and dedication (at least on his TV series) the prospect of marriage remains eerily distant for Natalia, although she does share his house near his Michelin-garlanded hotel, Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons. Given that Raymond, 61, has been hitched twice before, maybe it's Miss Traxel who is a little wary. A few years ago this watchmaker's son from Besançon went down on bedded knees imploring fragrant nutritionist Amanda Ursell to share his set of saucapans – but he never saw it through. As I remember him telling me at the time: "I saw this gorgeous girl and I suddenly had this wonderfully warm feeling that I had found my true companion for life." But rather like an overcooked soufflé, the twinkly-eyed chef's relationship started full of promise then fell flat in the middle.



# Adam Helliker

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Picture: PA

Estate agents in Buckinghamshire will be tripping over their tape measures in excitement when they hear that **JOHNNY DEPP** is about to start looking for a suitably expensive roost to rent when he relocates to Britain to film Tim Burton's version of the Sixties' gothic soap opera **Dark Shadows**. I hear that the star wants a house near Pinewood Studios where he can live with his partner, Vanessa Paradis, pictured with him above, and their two children while he works on his role as a vampire in the film, which is expected to take up to a year to make. Also starring will be Burton's wife Helena Bonham Carter (surprise, surprise) and Michelle Pfeiffer. "This is Tim's big ambition of a movie and it's Johnny's too," reports a breathless member of Depp's entourage. "Johnny's been working on his character, called Barnabas Collins, with the help of his kids (Lily Rose, 12, and John Jack, nine) who just love the vampire."  
Depp's wife Vanessa seems happy enough to uproot her family from their idyll in France, where they live next to their vineyard in Provence but then she has fond memories of Britain where she had a hit in the Eighties with her squeaky-voiced song **Joe Le Taxi**.

# Lady Thatcher loses iron grip

ONE OF the most notable political absentees from the royal wedding will be Margaret Thatcher, who has had to decline her invitation due to ill health. Sadly, her increasing frailty now means that she is unlikely to be making any more public appearances. I can disclose that the fragility of the former Tory PM, who has suffered a series of minor strokes, means that even the Thatcher Foundation, which she set up on leaving Downing Street 21 years ago, is now being wound down. Key staff are being let go and her right-hand man and official spokesman Mark Worthington will only be available on a part-time basis. "It's all down to her declining health," says a departing staff member. "She still gets invited to speak and lecture all over the world and to greet foreign dignitaries when they come to Britain but she's just not able to do things like that any more." "She still has her intellect but there are lapses where she doesn't recognise



FRAIL: Lady Thatcher relies on carers

anybody. She relates to her children Carol and Mark and her close friends, like Bernard Ingham and Tim Bell, but there are periods where she's very confused." Although she's had to have several spells in hospital, Lady Thatcher will be 86 in October) continues to live in an elegant apartment in Belgravia, where she relies on the support of a team of carers. In a book about her memories of Downing Street, Carol Thatcher was the first to reveal her mother was suffering from dementia. She said: "Whereas previously you would never have had to say anything to her twice, because she'd already filed it away in her formidable memory bank. Mum started asking the same questions over and over again, unaware she was doing so." "She'd struggle to remember things like what she'd had for breakfast that morning. But when a friend asked, off the cuff, 'Oh Margaret, do you remember rationing?' he got a full 10 minutes of my mother's best tips on how to jazz up tinned Spam or powdered egg."



While the world grows bored with speculation on the identity of the royal wedding dress designer, that Australian megaphone **Kathy Lette** wants us to know she chose her outfit some time ago. Chatting at the launch of Terry Ronald's novel *Becoming Nancy*, she declares: "I'm covering the wedding for Australian television and I'll be wearing a diamante-encrusted frock made from corjis and crowns." The raucous author says she hopes to upstage the bride. "Well, one must make a statement, mustn't one?" In her case, always.



Once he was the Royal Family's favourite photographer (being married to the Queen's sister Princess Margaret helped) but **Lord Snowdon** won't have his Leica out for the wedding and instead won't even be at the Abbey to see his granddaughter, Margarita Armstrong-Jones, serve as a bridesmaid. Old charmer Tony Snowdon is 81 and has difficulty walking these days (a legacy of childhood polio). He tells me: "I'm quite happy to sit at home watching it on television."

Despite reports elsewhere that the company set up by **Michael Fawcett** (pictured) had been handed the lucrative contract to organise the evening wedding party, I can report that Prince Charles's former valet will not be overseeing the dinner and dance for 300 at Buckingham Palace. As Charles is paying the bill, he had wanted his favourite factotum (and one-time toothpaste-squeezer) to look after every detail, as he usually does at every private event the Prince hosts. But Prince William, who is not a great fan of Fawcett, argued the job could just as easily be done by the wedding team headed by his own private secretary, Jamie Lovthor-Pinkerton. Nevertheless, although his hectoring manner made him many enemies among royal staff, Bexley-born Fawcett continues to exert considerable influence over Charles. "My husband confides more in Fawcett than me," lamented the late Princess of Wales. Camilla takes a more sanguine view, once observing: "Charles is a fusspot; Michael knows how he likes things done."



Should he find himself chatting about any future royal offspring at next week's wedding, don't expect **Ben Fogle** to advocate public schools to his chum Prince William. Although he went to Brynston, Fogle and his wife Marina (pictured) won't be sending their son Ludo to the Dorset school (whose alumni include Emilia Fox, Sir Terence Conran and Lucien Freud). Ben recalls that when his parents first took him to Brynston, where he was to board for five years, he stood in the middle of the drive with tears pouring down my cheeks pleading with them not to leave." He says: "I'm certainly not planning to send my son to a public school. I don't think people have to have a private education to have a good education."

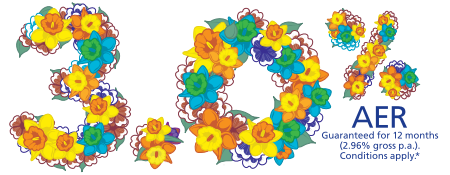
More news of this column's favourite actor, **Hugh Bonneville**. As he beavers away on the hotly-anticipated second series of *Downton Abbey*, the flirtatious smoothie admits he's worried about living up to his previous performance as the Earl of Grantham. He says he and the cast are "well aware of the expectation; we've got to keep ourselves on the top of our game and we're striving hard to do that and deliver."



BIG ADVENTURE: Greg with Gaia and Emma

The forthright **Emma Thompson** faced much criticism when she announced that she was taking her 11-year-old daughter, Gaia, out of her primary school in North London for a gap year. Yet reports reach me from Borneo that young Gaia's education has been boosted by her travels. "Mummy and I have just taken a diving course," Gaia proudly told guests at the Kinabatangan Riverside Lodge, a collection of chalet bungalows in the heart of the Malaysian jungle, where Emma and her husband, actor Greg Wise, gathered to celebrate the actress's 52nd birthday last week. "I've seen orang-utans and proboscis monkeys with big noses and swiftlets whose nests are made into bird's nest soup. Next we're going to an island to see a turtle lay her eggs." "We've only brought one suitcase each to last four months, so we've got lots of travel wash. I think when I get home I'll be much keener to go with Mum and Dad on long walks. I used to be really lazy but this holiday has made me really interested in wildlife." Miss Thompson is keeping a diary of the family's travels, which will take them to Australia next month and then to the Amazon. It won't be long after she returns to England, I fancy, before we can expect a volume from the creator of *Nanny McPhee* entitled *Travels With My Daughter*.

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With a war raging between David Cameron and Boris Johnson over finding money for extra police I am amazed to discover that the chateau of one of England's stately homes has come to the aid of her local Berkshire constabulary by providing a free police station on her estate.

The Countess of Carnarvon has converted a stable block in the 6,000-acre grounds of Highclere Castle to be used as a crime-busting unit. "We approached Lady Carnarvon and she said 'fine' and it's been great," said PC Matthew Deery who mans the station with PCSO Dan Lines. "It saves on fuel and we are nearer the crime when it occurs, it's about trying to keep policing local".

With the revenue Lord and Lady Carnarvon receive for letting ITV film the drama Downton Abbey at their home, they can clearly afford such acts of generosity, even if the only crime in the area is the odd bout of poaching.

"As I sit on loads of committees I try and feed the police information," says the authoress wife of the 8th earl, who likes to pop into the station with her two Labradors.

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Pictures: SPLASH NEWS; REX; GETTY



## All eyes on the helicopter prince

AS IF LOSING his hair wasn't ageing enough Prince William is now having to wear glasses on a more regular basis prompting speculation that his eyesight is deteriorating.

The Duke of Cambridge was photographed last weekend wearing a pair of spectacles while taking a stroll through the grounds of Holyrood Park in Edinburgh, following his cousin Zara Phillips's wedding.

"Normally William wears his specs just for driving his car or flying helicopters but now he is wearing them when he goes out for a walk which would seem to be an indication that his vision is worsening," I am told by one of William's friends. "It is unfortunate that he is not even 30 yet is already showing signs of premature ageing by losing his hair and having trouble with his sight."

The last time William was seen publicly wearing glasses was when he and wife Catherine went to see the film *Bridesmaids* at their local cinema in North Wales, just after they returned from their tour of North



IN FOCUS: Prince William's spectacles

America. William has worn glasses for several years as his spokesman confirms. "It has long been recorded that the Prince occasionally wears glasses." But friends report he has been wearing them more often.

When he is performing his duties as a search and rescue helicopter pilot, he has to secure them under his helmet and behind his night-vision goggles.

But seeing him wear them publicly just for walking around raises the question that if his eyesight deteriorates further, will he be able to continue flying?

"Only fighter pilots require 20/20 vision," an MoD spokesman assured me. "Lots of pilots who fly search and rescue helicopters wear glasses but all have to undergo an annual medical to prove eligibility."

At least the Prince can always rely on a constant supply of good-value eyewear. His old Harrovian chum Jamie Murray-Wells, 27, is the multi-millionaire founder of Glasses Direct, an online discount spectacles company he set up when he was a student at Bristol University.

The diesel-powered tractor that has chugged around the Queen's Sandringham estate in Norfolk transporting visitors in open carriages has been consigned to the scrap heap and replaced with a more eco-friendly version.

"It makes the trip much less breezy and dusty," an estate spokesman said of the new enclosed electric train. "It's quicker and quieter than the tractor and of course is also greener - part of our ongoing efforts, like recycling and composting waste, to reduce our carbon footprint where we can." Quieter and greener it may be but it sounds much less fun.

It's hard to imagine Cora, Countess of Grantham, snapping on her Marigolds and flicking a feather duster around Downton Abbey, where a swarm of servants is always on hand to buff up the ballustrades. But Elizabeth McGovern, the actress who plays her and will bring Cora back to life in the next series of the ITV drama, is in close touch with her domestic side.

"At home I still do the dishes and the laundry and look after our Yorkshire terrier," laughs the American-born law professor's daughter, who shares a home in West London with her Cranford-director husband Simon Curtis and their two children Matilda, 17, and Gracie, 13. Fortunately Elizabeth's off-screen life is not limited to the household chores.

She's currently working on a second album with her rock band, Sadie And The Hot-heads.



Marriage to Rachel Weisz seems to have made actor Daniel Craig even more paranoid about his personal life as he reveals: "My private life and, as I go on, I become more and more private."



The daughter of raddled Rolling Stone Keith Richards is locking up her home in New York and heading Down Under to help save another endangered species from extinction.

Alexandra Richards, 25, who makes a living as a model and a disc jockey, is joining her fellow platter-spinning boyfriend of four years Nick Cohen in his home town of Melbourne to stage a fund-raiser to rescue the Tasmanian Devil.

"I seem to like everything Australian," giggled Alex, whose musical talents command fees of \$10,000 a gig. This one in Australia is being sponsored by a brand of vodka, the tipple that nearly killed her guitarist father when he was downing a bottle of Stolichnaya a day.

Unlike Keith who has also faced several drug charges during his career Alex has managed to keep out of trouble. However her older sister Theodora appeared in a New York court earlier this year after screwing graffiti on the wall of a convent while in possession of cannabis.

Alexandra and Theodora's mother is Keith's long-suffering wife of 28 years, leggy American Patti Hansen. He married the actress after 13 years with Italian rock chick Anita Pallenberg.



Islanders off the coast of Greece really thought their ship had come in when the 40ft, seven-storey superyacht Octopus dropped anchor in the fashionable Crete port of Agios Nikolaos last week. The tavernas were abuzz with rumours that Microsoft boss Bill Gates was on board the maritime monster, looking to offload some of his \$56 billion (£24 billion) fortune on building a Greek holiday home for his family.

As it turns out, the \$120 million Octopus, which has its own basketball court, submarine and a couple of helicopters on board, belongs to billionaire Bill's former partner, company co-founder Paul Allen (above).

Mr Allen may be worth a mere \$13 billion but his hovering helicopters are whipping up hopes that he may be thinking of buying up a plot as well.

"They got a really warm welcome," I am told. Hardly surprising perhaps since each of them could probably buy the whole country and still have change.

Edited by JANE SLADE

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While KATE WINSLET has been frolicking in the Cornish surf rekindling her romance with Louis Dowler, the floppy-haired model she stepped out with briefly last year and pictured with her here, speculation that she may be thinking of remarrying is wide of the mark.

"She has no plans to get married again," a confidant of the Oscar-winning actress tells me. "She is just having a lot of fun spending a few days with Louis in Cornwall meeting his family." In the meantime her former husband director Sam Mendes has been shuttling between London (where I saw him at the Caprice restaurant last week enjoying lunch with actor Albert Finney) and his manor house in the Cotswolds where he likes to go at weekends. "Sam is spending as much time as he can in Gloucestershire before he starts filming the next James Bond movie in London," I am told. "He also hopes to have some time with his son and Kate's daughter before they go back to school in New York."

Mendes bought the 18th century house near Stow-on-the-Wold for £3.3 million after marrying Ms Winslet in 2003 and then lavished £1.5 million on restoration. "It has been a constant work in progress for Sam who just loves the place," adds his friend. "He has been overseeing more building work and has put in for planning permission for a new guest bedroom."

"Although it is Sam's property, it's become sort of neutral territory where he and Kate can spend time together with their son Joe, and also Mia [Kate's daughter from her marriage to Jim Threapleton] as they did last summer."

While Sir Trevor Nunn has been enjoying the attentions of a new female companion (they were spotted cosyng up in a London restaurant last week) his erstwhile distraction Nancy Dell'Olio has lost no time in catching up with the novel she put on hold during her brief romance with the theatrical director.

I learn that she picked up her pen during her holiday for one in Sardinia to continue her story of a powerful Italian woman who pursues a handsome British prime minister.

As the Italian firecracker prepares to pack her writing case once more - this time she's off to Puglia in a couple of weeks to celebrate her 50th birthday without her 71-year-old former paramour - she reflects: "Of course, mentally, physically, sexually, psychologically, I'm demanding. If it's love it's stronger than you so what else can you do?"

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FESTIVE MAKEOVER: Laurence and Jackie with Hermione and Cecile

Even that most flamboyant flouncer **Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen** will be having his version of an austerity Christmas at his manor house in Gloucestershire.

Last year Laurence and his wife Jackie wallowed in a gitzzy seasonal celebration in Barbados but this time he's staying home and issuing a set of "no frills" rules to his two daughters, Hermione, 13, and Cecile, 16, with each receiving no more than five gifts in total.

"If you're not careful you can get present blindness," dictates Laurence sternly. "It's not necessary and it's expensive."

His edict extends to food too. "Why do we need cheese, cake and choccyies after a huge Christmas lunch that racks up about 6,000 calories?" adds LLB, as he minces off to turn down the central heating.

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Donna Air (left) sparkles at the party held by Richard Desmond (above) with fiancée Joy Canfield

After a tricky year recovering from a road accident in which she badly injured her foot, **Donna Air** was all smiles at the sumptuous party to celebrate the birthday of Express Newspapers chairman **Richard Desmond**.

The TV presenter was among 700 guests at the Dom Perignon-fuelled extravaganza held at London's Old Billingsgate, which was packed with millionaires and billionaires such as **Mohamed Al Fayed**, **Sir Brian Soutter**, **Gerald Ronson**, **Sir John Madejski**, **Harvey Goldsmith**, **Charles Dunthorne**, **John Caudwell**, **Sir John Ribbit**, **Lord Fink**, **Nick Candy** and **Sir Philip Green**.

Others enjoying the speeches made by **Mr Desmond**, his fiancée **Joy Canfield** and his son **Robert**, were **Eamonn Holmes**, **Holly Valance**, **Peter Andre**, **Kerry Katona**, **Gavin Henson**, **Amy Childs**, **Vanessa Feltz** and **Sunday Express** favourites **Anthony Worrall Thompson** and **Alan Titchmarsh**.

Meanwhile **Donna**, who had a long relationship with casino owner **Damian Aspinall**, has a new man in her life: **James Taylor**, a model who is six years her junior. She's also feeling a lot more optimistic after her car accident in which she broke several bones in her left foot.

She says: "I realised I'm lucky to be alive; it was a life-changing moment. It was a wake-up call for me and has made me rethink things."

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# A royal cold shoulder for Anne's man?



POMPOUS: Tim Laurence is said to be unpopular with Anne's family

THIS CHRISTMAS at Sandringham could be rather awkward for **Sir Tim Laurence**, the former naval officer who has been married to **Princess Anne** for 19 years.

A new book by the Princess's biographer makes disparaging allegations about how members of the royal family regard him.

In particular the author claims that **Sir Tim**, who began an affair with **Princess Anne** while he was employed as an equerry at **Buckingham Palace** in the Eighties, has not been accepted by her children **Peter** and **Zara**.

"Peter and Zara adore their father (Anne's first husband **Mark Phillips**) but their relationship with their stepfather **Tim Laurence** is not entirely cordial and maintained mainly for the sake of their mother," claims **Brian Hoey** in his book, *Not In Front Of The Corgis*.

**Mr Hoey**, a writer and broadcaster on royal subjects for 40 years, the secured the first ever television interview with **Anne** claims that **Admiral Laurence** is not held in high regard by staff at **Buckingham Palace** either.

"He is thought of as a man with ideas way above his station and who has also adopted attitudes not usually found among those born to the purple," he writes. The impression **Hoey** has gained, after talking to several royal aides, is that **Tim** has become pompous and has succumbed to what palace staff call "red carpet fever" (the term for those who become over-impressed by their proximity to the royals and take on airs and graces).

The backbiting seems a little unfair on **Tim**, who commanded four warships before he was moved to a desk job at the Ministry of Defence, retiring with the rank of **Vice Admiral**. In March he was appointed senior adviser to an IT firm specialising in defence.

I have to say that whenever I've met **Tim** he's always been an affable and charming chap. Indeed I recall at a weekend house party in Sussex he was not only a crack tennis player but also introduced us all to a range of saucy party games, including one which involved attaching and swinging them pieces of string and oranges between our legs. Such larks.

As **Renée Zellweger** prepares to reprise her role as a hapless singleton in a third film, **Bridget Jones's Baby**, what news of **Helen Fielding**, who created ditty blonde **Bridget** 16 years ago in a weekly newspaper column? Well, if **Helen** was writing in the style of **Bridget's** diary, her entry might read:

Cigarettes: stopped counting; Alcohol intake: can't remember; Bank balance: over £30million from book sales and film rights. V.G. Personal status: **Singleton** (aged 53) after split with long-term lover; two children.

**Helen's** romantic status has gone from "in a relationship" to "singleton" again after the end of her 10-year liaison with American **Kevin Curran**, producer of **The Simpsons**, and she is now raising their two children on her own in **Los Angeles**.

The daughter of a Yorkshire mill manager, **Helen** went to read **English** at **Oxford** but found being a northerner among the dreaming spires an uncomfortable experience.

She got a job on a daily newspaper (she was in the next office to me) and the features editor suggested she write about what it was really like living in **London** as a single woman.

**Helen's** chardonnay-quaffing **Bridget** captivated a generation of thirtysomething females, who were also struggling to find love besides forging careers. The author admitted: "Even though I have spent a lot of time deifying that **Bridget** was me; she was."

So while **Helen** is now single, her alter ego **Bridget** is most definitely not in the new film.

**Mark Darcey** (**Colin Firth**) and **Daniel Cleary** (**Hugh Grant**) are still on the scene and **Bridget** is to have a baby whose father is **Daniel**. Or is he?



A FINE ROMANCE: Dame Judi Dench and her new partner, David Mills, who are making plans to spend their first Christmas together.

The Oscar-winning star of stage and screen has had a spring in her step since meeting **Mr Mills**, who describes himself as a "conservationist" (conserving what? Distinguished actresses?).

Actually he runs a wildlife centre in **Surrey**, and it was when he asked local resident **Judi** to open his new squirrel sanctuary that the two made a tentative date to see each other again, and romance soon blossomed.

"**Judi** is so happy with **David**," confides a friend. "She is such a giggler and he just loves that girlish quality about her."

Doctor's daughter **Judi**, who was 77 last week, was bereft when her husband, actor **Michael Williams**, died 10 years ago.

She coped by committing herself to as much work as she was offered, including playing **M** in the **James Bond** films, a role which she is about to reprise for the 23rd production.

Now she's all smiles and, crucially, her new lover has the approval of her daughter **Finty** and **Finty's** teenage son **Sammy**, who share **Judi's** home.



Usually she prefers to keep away from the limelight, so it was good to see Lord Sugar's wife Ann (left) at Richard Desmond's party, keeping a wary eye on all the fans (especially the female ones) who wanted to chat to him about The Apprentice.

**Ann Sugar** concedes that **Ann** (who was a teenage trainee hairdresser when he swept her off on dates in his van) is "very nice, not demanding and respected by everyone".

The only shaky moment in their 43-year marriage was one year when he sent her a birthday card signing it: *Best Wishes, Sir Alan Sugar*. He recalls: "It was a busy day at the office. **Ann** was not a happy bunny. So I apologised and then ran through loads of things I could buy her to make up for my mistake."

"Do you want a new dress?" I asked.

"No."

"A new watch?"

"No."

"A car?"

"No."

"Okay, just tell me what I can get you. To which she angrily replied: 'A bloody divorce.'"

"I said, 'sorry, I wasn't thinking of spending that much.'"

The rave reviews he's received for his poised performance in *Comedy of Errors* at the National Theatre are plainly not enough for **Lenny Henry**, the ex-hubby of **Dawn French**, who has successfully diversified into **Shakespeare**.

The newly-slim **Lenny** was overheard at a **BBC** party moaning about how posterity will rate him.

"In future people won't remember me by saying 'good comic', or 'he cracked Shakespeare'; when I go the headlines will read 'Him off the Premier Inn ads dies.'"

No wonder **Ken Livingstone** became a lifelong Socialist. He recalls growing up in **South London** with an uncle, also called **Ken**, who "became more intolerant with age" and belonged to both the *Tory* party and the *National Front*. "He would go through the *Radio Times* and *TV Times* each week with a marker pen obliterating any programme listing that included black or Irish people, gays, lesbians or **David Frost**."

Despite his fame, **Rob Brydon** says he still feels a shy Welsh homeboy and has no great desire to frequent the capital's celebrity haunts. "I'm not a big going-out type of person," he told me at one of his rare forays to the West End, to see *The Ladykillers* at the *Gielgud Theatre*.

"Maybe it's because I'm getting old. I'm 46, but I'm very low-key. Plus, everyone seems to be taller than me when I go out to these things."



♥ Ever her fiancé Mike Tindal was surprised at **Zara Phillips's** choice of wedding venue. So why did the Queen's granddaughter opt for a service at Canongate Kirk in Edinburgh, with a reception at Holyroodhouse?

"Because she never goes with the flow," is the simple explanation from one of her girlfriends.

"Zara is feisty and was fed up with people – including certain members of the Royal Family – presuming she would get married at Windsor or Gatcombe. So once the idea of Scotland popped up, she went for it."

At least Zara is sticking with tradition when it comes to her nuptials on July 30. I hear that the girl who was so often labelled the royal rebel wants her service to be "very traditional".

So tongue studs should be removed before guests enter the church.

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# Adam Helliker

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The man who knows the people you'd like to know...



Picture: ALAN DAVIDSON



♥ Ever stronger grows the hold Wikeleaks weirdo Julian Assange has over heiress **Jemima Khan**. Not only has the 37-year-old socialite become preoccupied with the Australian's right to justice and attended all his court hearings, but her friends wonder if she may be developing a major crush on the man himself.

"Even my mother asked why I would stand surety for an alleged rapist," she declared, after writing a cheque for more than £100,000 towards his £240,000 bail, in a bid to assist his fight against extradition to Sweden where he faces rape charges.

Ms Khan's fixation on the lanky computer hacker does seem all-consuming. One imagines her lying in bed at her Richmond roost waiting for an email or tweet from Assange, 39, who occupies most of his time at his computer while incarcerated at the Suffolk mansion owned by his friend, Vaughan Smith.

It is ironic that the daughter of Sir James Goldsmith is going to such lengths to stand up for freedom and justice, since her father did all he could to stifle them through legal actions against the satirical magazine Private Eye.

"Jemima really has the bit between her teeth," a friend tells me. "She has never stuck her neck out for anyone and her friends are concerned about her obsession with him."

# Kate loses her vintage...

ATTEMPTS made by the parents of Kate Middleton to exert their influence over the choice of wedding car in which their daughter will make her last journey as a commoner have ended in disappointment.

Following the decision that Kate would break with tradition and not ride in a horse-drawn royal carriage to Westminster Abbey, her father Michael expressed a desire to sit alongside his daughter in a vintage Bentley that he wanted to pay for.

But now I understand that after politely declining the offer of one of the Rolls-Royces in the Queen's collection, the Middletons have been told that for security reasons, Kate and her father will have to ride in one from the Royal Mews.

Kate's parents Michael and Carol had been in talks with an old friend, Nick Mason, the former Pink Floyd drummer whose passion for cars led to him establishing a Wiltshire-based business, Ten Tents, which rents out vintage vehicles to the film and TV industry.

The affable Mason is also friends with the Duchess of Cornwall, whose counsel is valued by Kate as we saw last week when they lunched together at a London hotel. Mason has kept in touch with Camilla since he bought her former marital home, Middlewick House near Corsham, which she and her husband Andrew Parker Bowles sold when they divorced.

"Michael is disappointed," says a family friend. "But it's been taken out of his hands. He obviously understands that his daughter's security is paramount but he harboured a dream of riding with her in a vintage car with reasonably big windows that would have enabled people to see Kate properly but not too much of the dress."

In the past Ten Tents has rented out Mason's Thirties Bentley for weddings but now mainly specialises in hiring out action vehicles for showbusiness productions.



DREAM ENDED: Michael Middleton hoped to provide Kate's car



♥ When **Caroline Quentin** fell in love with Sam Farmer on the set of *Men Behaving Badly*, much was made of their differences. She was one of the stars of the series, recovering from a divorce from Paul Merton, while Farmer was a lowly runner, 11 years her junior.

But they married, had two children and Caroline, now 51, says of their age difference: "It's never mattered remotely to either of us. Sometimes I'm the grown-up, sometimes he is."

Of her union with Sam (who stays at their manor house in Devon looking after their son and daughter while Caroline brings home the bacon) she muses wistfully: "Maybe it takes a bit of maturity to get to know that what you think you need and what you actually need in a relationship are often two different things. But I was ready in my life to accept someone who would give me loyalty, warmth and kindness. And that's exactly what Sam has given me."



♥ Although she does not have a partner to share a Valentine's dinner tomorrow, former Countdown presenter **CAROL WORDERMAN** insists she is not looking for a consonant for a word beginning with D (Date).

Twice-divorced Carol, who turned 50 last month, says she's happy on her own after the end of her seven-year romance with journalist Des Kelly.

"I've been lucky to have been in love a few times but I don't see relationships as for ever, which I think must be a consequence of my childhood," (her parents broke up three months after her birth). "I think I'm a bloke in my head. A lot of women look at a man and go, 'Is this The One?' Well, I don't think there is a Mr Right. They don't have to be perfect, they could be Very Good For That Time, which is how men think." Does she ever see someone across a crowded room and think, "Oh, he's nice"? "Of course! I am a woman, after all. I'll end up with someone, there's no question about that, but I don't worry about it. All in good time."

Viewers who were glued to **Charlie Dimmock's** bra-less appearances on the BBC series *Ground Force* will be glad to know that she still gets her bits in a wobble over water features.

The flame-haired gardener is worried that the ponds she encouraged people to create are in danger of being ruined by invasive water plants.

"They are like Japanese Knotweed and can clog up ponds in a trice," she says. "Only a tiny drop of water with the wrong spores in it will invade another waterway and cause a lot of damage. Do water features properly and they look marvellous, neglect them and you have problems," warns Miss Dimmock, who last year toured in a production of *Calendar Girls*. "I'd love to do that again; the show where there are no bras – type-casting or what?"

♥ The menu for **Prince William's** wedding breakfast at Buckingham Palace is still being decided but former royal chef Darren McGrady predicts that the Prince (for whom he used to cook at Kensington Palace) will want his favourite banana flan to be one of the pudding choices.

"The Princess of Wales used to say William and Harry could have what they wanted when they had guests in the dining room," says Darren.

"Creamy banana flan was William's favourite and she said two or even three slices were perfectly OK.

"It's the ultimate in comfort food, or 'nursery food' as the Queen would call it. In fact, the Queen herself used to love it as a child too."

♥ I hear that Kate Middleton has made two little girls squeal with excitement by confirming that she would like them to be her junior bridesmaids: **Lady Louise Windsor**, seven-year-old daughter of the Earl and Countess of Wessex, and **Margarita Armstrong-Jones**, eight, whose parents are Viscount and Viscountess Linley.

It will be the first big public appearance for Louise, who was



THRILLED: Louise and Margarita

born with the rare eye condition exotropia, which means one eye turns outward and affects her sight.

Margarita has long been a favourite of Prince William who, when she was four and staying at Sandringham, explained to her how to hand out flowers to the children who had gathered to get a glimpse of the Royal Family outside the church.

After my story last week about the Queen advertising for her first "eco-gardener" to undertake mending duties at Buckingham Palace, I hear she is bringing her newly found organic principles to bear on her motor vehicles at Balmoral.

To ferry guests between the castle and the nearest airport at Aberdeen, Her Majesty has bought two 670,000 Jaguar XF saloons which run on eco-friendly bio-fuel.



Thank goodness **Billie Piper** knew how to calm the nerves of former *EastEnders* hunk Paul Nicholls when he filmed steamy scenes with her for the latest series of *Secret Diary Of A Call Girl*.

Best known as Albert Square's Joe Wicks, Paul plays a policeman who falls for escort girl Billie and he says: "I was nervous doing things with her. When you have to grab people's bodies on camera, you always feel like apologising afterwards."

"That's a normal day on *Secret Diary*. But Billie made me feel very at ease. She kept on laughing and joking."

Not making fun of his part I hope...



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Pictures: XPOSURE, GETTY



# Has William had his wings clipped?

WHAT was meant to be one of the highlights of **Prince William's** wedding, a flypast of RAF helicopters over Buckingham Palace by his colleagues, has encountered turbulence because of defence cuts.

The officers with whom William serves in North Wales came up with the idea of giving Flight Lieutenant Wales and his bride an airborne tribute in the Sea King helicopters they use for rescue missions, alongside the more traditional display of fighter aircraft.

But the boys in blue have been told there are simply not enough helicopters available to make an impressive show, and they may have

to be restricted to just three because, as one MoD official observes, "the service is being stretched to its limits".

Ironic really since William, who flies Sea Kings at RAF Valley in Anglesey, took the opportunity to lobby Prime Minister David Cameron over defence cuts when the two joined David Beckham in Zurich on the UK's ill-fated bid to host the 2018 World Cup.

"Five years ago we used to have 33 Sea Kings but the fleet has been cut back and we are struggling to find enough craft which could be taken off duties for the wedding day," reports my man in the peaked cap, his moustache bristling with indignation.

"The lads are disappointed that they might

not be able to muster an impressive flypast. They are rightly proud that William has made Search and Rescue his chosen speciality and he loves the RAF."

Indeed William, who will be based for the next three years at the Welsh island of Anglesey (and will continue to live with Kate in a nearby farmhouse) has chosen to be married in his blue RAF uniform although he is also entitled to wear the officer's outfit of the Household Cavalry, with whom he did his cadet training at Sandhurst.

"We can't say exactly how many Sea Kings are in this country," says a Defence ministry spokesman, "and we cannot comment on any arrangements for a flypast."



TRIBUTE: RAF officers' hopes for Prince's day

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It has taken just a few weeks after her break-up from long-term boyfriend **Rupert Friend** for **KEIRA KNIGHTLEY** to start feeling frisky again. Shortly after she parted from actor **Rupert**, Teddington-born Keira told her agent she wanted to get out of London for a few months and that her ideal job would be working with *Twilight* star **Robert Pattinson**, above.

One who knows Miss Knightley tells me: "Keira's always had a little crush on Robert and used to wind up Rupert that he was the world's sexiest, best-dressed man. It was a source of teasing and a little tension between them."

Now Keira, 25, has irritated Rupert by sending him a message that she's going to Canada to spend a few months working with **Robert** on the film *Cosmopolis*.

Adds my source: "Robert is her idea of a very hunky man; being with him will work wonders to boost her confidence after she was dumped out of the blue by Rupert."

Her grandfather **Charles Forte** started a worldwide empire of hotels from a milk bar in Regent Street, while her daddy **Sir Rocco** now owns a £385million chain of luxury resorts, but **Lydia Forte** has started at the bottom of the trade waiting on tables.

"She's a waitress and I'm very proud of her," beamed her mother, the Italian-born **Lady Forte**, at a party at jewellers *Asprey's* last week.

Once considered a suitable girlfriend for **Prince Harry** (she's 25, blonde and rich) **Lydia** spends her time off from waitressing with Greek shipping heir **Dimitri Chandris**, whom she first met at Oxford University.

Adds **Lady Forte**: "Lydia is working her way up; she's determined to make her own career in restaurants."



WEDDING BELLE: **Clemmie today, left, and at five as Diana's youngest bridesmaid on the Palace balcony, above**

As **Kate Middleton** wrestles with the question of who she should include in her posse of bridal attendants, one of the Princess of Wales's bridesmaids, **Clemmie Hambro**, warns that when dealing with little girls things might not go smoothly on the big day.

A one-time kindergarten pupil of **Diana**, **Clemmie** was aged five when she famously burst into tears after tripping on the 25ft train just as the Princess was about to emerge on the palace balcony.

"First I slipped in a corridor in Buckingham Palace and was picked up by the Queen, the new princess and several heads of state," recalls **Clemmie**. "Then I took another tumble as we were nearing the balcony. **Diana** asked me, 'Did you bump your bottom?'. 'No,' I said, 'I bumped my head!'"

One thing is for sure when it comes to **Kate Middleton's** wedding dress: it won't be as fluffy as the ivory taffeta and lace number worn by **Prince William's** mother at St Paul's Cathedral in 1981. At the same time **Kate's** own wedding takes place, **Diana's** elaborate creation, designed by **David and Elizabeth Emmanuel**, will be on display in a shopping mall in **Kansas City, Missouri**. It's on a tour of America arranged by **Earl Spencer**, who has loaned 150 items relating to his late sister from his Northamptonshire seat, **Althorp**. The People's Princess remains, of course, an "inspiration", as **Miss Middleton** so diplomatically called her in her television engagement interview.

The founder of **Habitat**, **Sir Terence Conran**, will be 80 later this year, but he has no intention of retiring to his designer bath chair and slippers.

In fact the multi-millionaire restaurant owner still wakes himself up in the middle of the night over little details.

"I usually open my eyes at three o'clock in the morning worrying about something like how a cabinet is jointed," he says.

"The older I get the more I seem to wake up early."

As for retirement, the cigar-chomping father-of-five snorts: "What, curl up and die? So many people die so soon after retirement."

"I think it's because the pace of their lives alters so much that they don't want anything else to wake up for."

**Education Secretary Michael Gove** looked a little startled when he was presented with a future vision of the classroom last week. My chat with **Mr Gove** at a mutual friends' party in *Mayfair* was interrupted by an executive from an online publishing company who tried to persuade him that the Government should provide all schoolchildren with Kindle devices on which they could study their reading matter.

"The textbook is dead, it's dead!" asserted the excitable businessman. "Not yet, I think," was the measured response of the Oxford-educated minister, who sends his own children to a C of E primary school in West London which has a library full of well-thumbed books.

**Mr Gove** says of his own reading habits: "My unerring rule of book-buying is simple. If it makes the top 10 bestsellers list you can safely give it a miss."



When Mike Tindall marries Zara Phillips next month, the beefy rugby player will be introducing his own quirky relation to the Royal Family. Uncle Stuart is not quite in the same league as Kate Middleton's naughty Uncle Gary but he's "interesting".

Well, interesting if you're into folk music, because Stuart plays in a group called The Tindalls. And he brings his family - wife Paula and teenage daughters Sarah and Kathryn - along to sing at gigs too.

Oxfordshire-based Stuart and his brood are popular at clubs and festivals but, so far, have not received a booking to play at Mike and Zara's wedding celebrations at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh.

Never mind, Stuart and the rest of Mike's family are sure to enjoy their big day on July 30. Maybe even share a joke with the Queen about the bridegroom's school days in Yorkshire when he worked in a van selling fish and chips. Tindall described it as "the worst job I ever had. It was just a lot of rowdy Northerners complaining about the size of the fish".

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It is only six months since the doe-eyed EMILIA FOX gave birth to her first child, a daughter, Rose, yet she's already keen to slip back into a maternity dress. "I want to have lots more babies," the Silent Witness actress told me at a dinner in aid of Eaves, a charity supporting women who have been trafficked into prostitution or suffered domestic violence. "Having a baby is definitely the best thing I've ever done, although it plays havoc with your sleep patterns," added Emilia, 36, who has been living with eco-worker Jeremy Gilley for the past two years. Not that the elfinish Emilia is in any hurry to get married to Jeremy, together above, after her first foray into matrimony to film director Jared Harris ended in divorce. "He's not on the agenda right now," she says. "We're both just too busy."

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**It's Mustique for the Middletons**

IN BUOYANT mood after the success of the Royal Wedding, and with profits from their Party Pieces business rising high, Michael and Carole Middleton are considering splashing out on the ultimate accessory of the wealthy, a villa in Mustique.

I hear that the Middletons, pictured, who have frequently rented holiday homes on the Caribbean island, want to buy a property that can be used by all their family, including their daughter Kate, and the grandchildren they may have when the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge become parents.

Mike and Carole's aspirations to join the Mustique elite emerged at a party last week held at their favourite London watering hole, The Goring, Belgrave, where they were reunited with Basil Charles, who runs the island's famed beach bar and is recreating it in the hotel's back garden.

At the party they enjoyed Basil's lethal cocktails while chatting to John and Belle Robinson, owners of the clothing chain Jigsaw, where Kate worked briefly. The Robinsons own a magnificent villa on Mustique, which William and Kate have rented twice.

The Middletons already have a wide circle of friends on Mustique,

several of whom they invited to Kate's wedding, including tennis coach Richard Schaffer, equestrian centre manager Liz Saint, and Roger Pritchard, head of the Mustique Company that owns the 1,400-acre island.

"They've always rented villas there before but feel the amount they have spent could have bought them their own place. And now that they've got plenty of cash, why not invest it?" reports a family friend.

"They want somewhere for themselves and also that they can make available to Kate and William, who love the island, as do Pippa

and James. Eventually it would be the ideal holiday home for the grandchildren they hope will come along."

Paddy Dring, partner of Knight Frank's International division, which represents the Mustique Company, says it's "an ideal time" to buy. "There are only 100 properties there and we have eight for sale, from £2million for a four-bedroom villa, up to £10million for a seven-bedroom one with 20 acres."

Mustique's reputation as a rarified playground was enhanced by Princess Margaret, who was given a villa as a wedding present by Lord Glenconner, the eccentric peer who bought the island for £45,000 in the Fifties. The Princess felt liberated enough to conduct much of her affair there with gardener Roddy Llewellyn, and the island quickly attracted such villa owners as Mick Jagger, Tommy Hilfinger and David Bowie.

"Mustique is now a great family destination," adds Mr Dring. "It's safe and secluded, with a riding school, tennis academy, beach sports and wonderful flora and fauna. "Property owners can also benefit from a good rental income, which usually covers the running costs. (The Robinsons charge £8,000 a week for their home!)"

In the absence of another reunion tour, what's a Spice Girl to do? Of course.

Hence the whispers that Geri Halliwell, who will turn 39 this August, wants to squeeze in (or rather, out) a little brother or sister for her five-year-old daughter Bluebell Madonna.

Geri's broody pangs have probably been triggered by the productive activity of her fellow band members: Emma Bunton has just had her second child, a son called Tate, while Victoria Beckham is doing her breathing exercises in readiness for the arrival of child number four next month.

The question is, while Ginger Spice may be keen to get down to the process of conception, who will volunteer to provide the male input (so to speak).

In Bluebell's case, the honour of paternity was granted to Sacha Gervasi, a scriptwriter with whom Geri had a brief fling. Not that she seemed to appreciate his services as an Italian stallion; she threw away the flowers the bewildered chap had sent her and refused to let him see his daughter when he flew to England shortly after the birth.

So it looks as if it is up to Henry Beckwith, together right, to gird his loins and give Geri what she really, really wants. Smooth Henry, the Old Etonian son of a property developer, has been stepping out with Miss Halliwell for the past two years, but his pouting eye has caused blips in their relationship. So is he up for the task? "Not quite yet," is the guarded reply from one of his circle.



He's a real charmer, that David Attenborough. A lady was doing her shopping at Tesco in the Cotswolds town of Slow-on-the-Wold last week and was reaching up trying to get the last bag of new potatoes, when a man behind her offered to help.

"Thank you, they don't make it easy for shorties, do they," said local resident Tana Johnson, before turning round to see that the mellifluous voice belonged to Sir David. "Never mind," soothed the distinguished wildlife expert, gazing into her eyes as the two faced each other in the fruit and veg section. "They don't make diamonds the size of bricks."

This is a conversation Clare Balding had in a restaurant last week:

Waitress: "You look so like that woman who presents sport."  
Clare: "Really?"  
Waitress: "Do you get that a lot?"  
Clare: "Yes."  
Her: "You poor thing."



Prolific peer Julian Fellowes is firmly against the idea of celebrities rushing to their lawyers to seek super-injunctions when they've been caught with their trousers down. "If you're caught transgressing you should face the music, weather the storm for as long as it takes to blow over, and get on with your life," decrees Lord Fellowes over lunch at Searcy's restaurant at the top of the Gherkin building in the City.

Julian is, of course, the scriptwriter of Downton Abbey, the Edwardian drama headed by the Earl of Grantham who would doubtless be appalled by the loose morals of today's celebrities who keep their barristers, along with their floosies, on speed dial.



For most of her guests, if not her neighbours, the music will be a treat when Kate Moss marries guitarist Jamie Hince at her Cotswolds home in two weeks' time. For three days the converted barn

in the grounds of Miss Moss's farmhouse will reverberate to the rhythms of Snoo Dog, Foo Fighters and the Kings of Leon.

Those invited, who include Naomi Campbell, Jude Law and Sienna McCartney, were to have had the extra pleasure of listening to Simon Le Bon, but a throat infection (which has caused the cancellation of several Duran Duran concerts) now means he might have to restrict himself to polite chit-chat at the reception.

Kate has warned her 300 guests to "expect a riot" and to bring their swimwear so they can enjoy the pool, which has just been refurbished.

Given that the bride likes a spot of skinny-dipping, the proceedings are likely to be wet and wild. "Kate intends to go out with a bang," predicts one model who is on the guest list.



After starring in the five-part ITV drama Injustice, James Purefoy thinks the thriller's title could apply equally to his acting opportunities.

Invariably cast in serious roles, Purefoy longs to lighten up and move into Hugh Grant territory.

"I'm rather jealous of Hugh; I'd love the opportunity to play a foppish cad in a romcom," says the actor, who left Sherborne, his Dorset public school, with one O level but later went to night school to gain 11 more.

Whispers among her chums that the Duchess of Cambridge may be planning to take flying lessons might not go down too well with Palace courtiers. They recall that when she was the new Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson also learned to fly so that she could understand her husband's military training better. The downside? Gaining her pilot's licence inspired Fergie to write her greatest contribution to the canon of Royal literature, a children's book about Budgie the Helicopter.

How Gordon Brown must miss the deference he was accorded during his spell as Prime Minister. During those heady days, whenever he flew between London and his Scottish constituency, Kirkcaldy, British Airways would give him the best seat on the plane, either 1A or 1B. But last week, on boarding a flight from Heathrow to Edinburgh, Gordon looked surprised to see those seats occupied by a blonde girl and her friend. Muttering "Where am I going to sit then?" to his police protection officer, he was shown to his allotted seat by a stewardess. It was in the middle of the crowded plane, next to a hyperactive toddler.



After becoming something of an expert on stammering for his role in *The King's Speech*, **Colin Firth** can empathise with those who have a fear of public speaking.

The urbane actor was faced with such a situation just last week when he and his wife Livia were looking around a private school near their home in Chiswick for their eldest son, nine-year-old Luca.

After the couple entered a class, the teacher seemed to freeze at the sight of his VIP visitors. "His hands began to shake and he couldn't speak," reports a pupil. "After a few words he apologised, said he wasn't feeling well and left the classroom."

The lecturer composed himself and returned a few minutes later to complete his talk.

"It was so embarrassing," the poor chap told me later. "I do have a problem speaking in public and this was my worst fear realised. The only difference was that Mr Firth won an Oscar for his performance and I got a class of sniggering schoolboys. He seemed very sympathetic though and asked if I was all right."

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**MOVERS AND SHAKERS:** Danielle with husband Gary Lineker  
Picture: IAN WEST/PA



If Gary Lineker thought he could look forward to putting down roots with his young wife, lingerie model DANIELLE, he will find he has been kicked into touch. The curvaceous brunette doesn't want to stay long in the new home they have bought in Barnes, south-west London. "I want to move every two years," she declares. "I used to buy old wrecks and do them up before I met Gary."

Gary, who has four children from his first marriage to childhood sweetheart Michelle, has told Danielle he wants to remain where they are for a little longer but she says defiantly: "Once I've done a job I want to move on to the next challenge."

## Pressure grows for Kate's mother

IT'S a stressful role at the best of times but being the mother of the bride is proving particularly tense for **Carole Middleton**. The former air stewardess is usually calm under pressure but I hear that lately there have been uncharacteristic outbursts and raised voices at Kate Middleton's family home in Berkshire.

"The moment you walk in the door you can cut the tension with a knife," reports a regular visitor. "Carole is very on edge and paranoid about putting a foot wrong before April 29."

"She's been taking on too much. She's not been sleeping well and has been on a strict diet which may explain some of her uncharacteristic mood swings. She seems to have become neurotic about how her family are going to be perceived on the big day."

Builder's daughter Carole has always been the driving force behind the family's success. She started their firm in 1987, selling party paraphernalia from her kitchen table, and usually displays a pragmatic, no-nonsense approach to life (although two years ago, in a rare moment of introspection, she was quoted as saying: "I feel very vulnerable about everything. I'm not a celebrity and don't want to be one. I haven't asked for all this").



**TENSION:** Michael and Carole Middleton

Fortunately, her affable husband Michael is coping well with the pre-wedding pressure and seems unfazed at the prospect of being on display in front of a worldwide television audience as he becomes Prince William's father-in-law.

I'm told: "When it all gets too much, with Carole sounding off about some petty detail, Michael calmly reaches for the dog's lead and

slips out for a walk in the fields behind the house."

Neighbours in Bucklebury, who have always enjoyed cordial relations with the Middletons, were treated to an example of Carole's tense demeanour the other day when she upbraided John Haley, the landlord of local pub The Old Boot, for displaying posters featuring William and Kate to advertise a £15-a-head party on royal wedding day.

"He's only doing what plenty of pubs in the country are doing to celebrate," comments one resident. "We think it's a bit rich for Carole to start laying down the law, especially when Party Pieces has been cashing in on the wedding by selling royal-related stuff on its website."

When William and Kate tie the knot they will follow a little-known tradition for royal couples marrying in Westminster Abbey. At the Queen's wedding to Philip in 1947 her bouquet of white orchids with a sprig of myrtle was returned to the Abbey the next day and laid on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a tradition started by the Queen Mother. The same will now happen with Kate's flowers.



Perish the thought that the new Detective Chief Inspector John Barnaby, of *Midsomer Murders* fame, should have even the faintest bluish on his record but **Neil Dudgeon** confesses that, as a lad, he wasn't strictly honest when he tried to get into football matches.

Doncaster-born Neil (above left) has been a life-long fan of his home town's Rovers. He tells me: "They used to play at a stadium called Belle Vue and as kids we'd go down to see their weekly matches. But cash was a bit tight, although it only used to cost two old pence for children to get in."

We'd find the money and one of us would pay at the turnstile. And then whoever got inside the ground would find a spot to pass the ticket over the wall and so on until all of us nippers were inside. "It certainly made the games seem more exciting."

Remember all the fuss about whether the Queen had enjoyed watching herself being portrayed by Dame Helen Mirren in the eponymous film? At the time of its release five years ago, the producers of the movie *The Queen* promoted the rumour that Her Majesty had watched it at a private screening at Sandringham.

Now, intriguingly, I learn from a very senior source at Buckingham Palace that Her Majesty has still NOT seen the opus which won Dame Helen an Oscar for her role as an intransigent monarch who failed to acknowledge the public's outpouring of grief following the Princess of Wales's death. "A DVD was sent to her but she declined to view it," confides the royal source. "HM said she had no wish to see someone else's interpretation of what happened. She doesn't need to watch herself on screen; she knows who she is."



Out of all the films she has watched, it's the *Seventies* disaster movie *The Towering Inferno* which still gives **Claudia Winkleman** the shakes.

The orange-faced television presenter was a child when she first watched the 1974 film about a blaze breaking out in an American skyscraper. She recalls: "My parents weren't into babysitters, so I was taken to grown-up films when I was little, given an apple and told to 'shush!'."

This film blew my mind and meant that my mum couldn't cook anything on the hob for years because I was so scared of an open flame. Even now I have smoke alarms all over my house. There are 18 in my kitchen alone."

As the flowers at Highgrove burst into bloom (after a good talking to from **Prince Charles**) so the burgeoning friendship continues to blossom between the Prince and actress **Imogen Stubbs**.

Whenever Charles feels like unburdening himself from the cares of the world, he knows he can rely on the soothing manner of the Rapunzel-haired Imogen, 49, whose counsel he values so highly that he made her a Prince's Trust Ambassador.

This august appointment means that Miss Stubbs is granted smooth access to Charles - bypassing the usual barriers created by protective royal aides - should she also have an urgent desire to discuss world poverty or global warming with the heir to the throne.

The daughter of a retired naval commander, Imogen is not only a fine classical actress but, armed with a double first from Oxford and an enquiring mind, is well able to match the Prince's quest for a deeper understanding of life.

Naturally her husband Sir Trevor Nunn, the theatre director who is 21 years her senior, is proud of Imogen's friendship with the Prince and is only too pleased to know that his adored wife is so regally occupied when theatrical commitments take him away.



**GOOD FRIENDS:** Imogen Stubbs and Prince Charles



Blonde businesswoman Belle Robinson, owner of the fashion chain Jigsaw, showed every kindness to Kate Middleton when she gave her what was her first (and only) proper job. So she won't be best pleased to learn she is being portrayed as a harridan in the forthcoming American film of the royal romance.

In William and Kate, which is to be released shortly before the wedding, Berkshire-born actress **Laura Waddell** plays Belle, who employed Miss Middleton as an accessories buyer (and also lent Kate her family villa on Mustique).

From Los Angeles, where filming has just ended, Laura tells me: "My character is rather snide and tries to make Kate feel inadequate."

"She's resentful of Kate's royal connections. Of course it's part fictional so I hope Belle will understand."

As to early reports that the film is more cheery than a lorry load of Leerdammer, Laura replies: "It's just a very sweet love story."

That Latino love god **Antonio Banderas**, who is now 51 but looks a decade younger, hasn't always been such a handsome heartthrob, he assures me. "I don't know whether I ought to be telling you this," whispers the star, who has been married to actress Melanie Griffith for 15 years, "but when I was about seven years old growing up in Malaga, I was given a nickname by my classmates. I had really sticky-out ears so, inevitably, they called me 'Dumbo', after the Disney character. A bit unfortunate because I always fancied myself as someone like Peter Pan, who was my hero. Not because he never grew up, but because I wanted to be incredibly outrageous like him."

Did he have a little nip and tuck on his ears? "No way", he insisted, as we chatted in Claridges at a party for his latest film, *Puss in Boots*, along with his Mexican co-star, **Salma Hayek** (pictured here). "I don't know what happened, but somehow they flattened themselves. It was all down to nature, not surgery".  
"Salma and I were talking about nicknames the other day. She told me that when she was at school, puberty hit all the other girls long before her... they were all developing fast, and she wasn't."  
"So the boys used a Spanish expression that translates as 'Nothing in front, and nothing behind'. As we can all see, she's changed a LOT since then!"



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The man who knows the people you'd like to know...



It's a sentiment that would get the *Downton* Countess of Grantham reaching for her smelling salts, but **Dan Stevens**, the handsome heir presumptive to *Downton Abbey*, backs the protesters camping outside St Paul's Cathedral. Declares Dan: "They're bringing the debate into the public sphere and forcing people to address the issues. Someone needs to be held to account and that hasn't happened yet." Yet then the actor, 29, does have previous form with protests: while at Cambridge he joined the *May Day* riots and describes himself as "quite naive and angry" at the time. No wonder Dan suspects *Downton's* creator, Julian Fellowes, thinks of him as a "pinko leftie".

The boys in Belsize Park had better smarten up as a Hollywood scorcher has moved into their North London neighbourhood. It's **Cameron Diaz** and she's hot to trot with a nice English boyfriend.

The star of *There's Something About Mary* and *My Best Friend's Wedding* fell in love with London after falling out of love with American baseball player Alex Rodriguez, her squeeze for two years; and there's talk that she's now looking for a true Brit to assist her with her press-ups.

"She's so excited about being in London and just loves English guys," chirrups a chum. "She thinks the accent is so cool and hopes to meet a real gentleman, especially one who likes yoga." (This may be a problem. There are few gents left and even fewer who can put their right foot over their left ear.)

It may well be true that while Miss Diaz is also keeping her apartment in New York, she has had enough of American men, after dating commitment-shy boys such as Matt Dillon and Justin Timberlake. So she will have to rely on her new neighbours in North London, such as **Jude Law** (with whom she starred in the rom-com *Holiday*), to introduce her to a fine, upstanding Englishman.

Of course she had her chance several years ago, when she shared a margarita with me at the post-Oscars Vanity Fair party at Morton's in Los Angeles.

I thought she had enjoyed herself but, strangely, there was no second date. Her loss. Obviously.



Picture: CARLOS ALVAREZ/Getty Images

# Pippa wants her boyfriend back

ALL THE fuss over Pippa Middleton being on the singles market and looking for a new man is premature. I can disclose that the Duchess of Cambridge's younger sister considers her break from banker Alex Loudon to be temporary and hopes the couple will be reconciled "before too long".

Pippa's relationship with the former professional cricketer (which was first revealed here) began 18 months ago, before the royal wedding and her pert posterior propelled her into the artificial bubble of celebrity, a world somewhat alien to the quiet Alex, who works in corporate finance for the brewers SABMiller.

His difficulty in dealing with the "circus" of photographers and hangers-on who now follow Pippa's every step prompted Old Etonian Alex to suggest they have some "breathing space", getting together in January (when they still plan to go skiing) to see whether their commitment to each other is strong enough.

Pippa, 28, has told friends that her love for Alex has not wavered, and that she fully hopes they will be back together in the New Year. In the meantime she does not intend to rock the boat by being seen out with other potential suitors.

The supposition that she will rekindle a previous romance with George Percy, the



ON A BREAK: But Pippa still loves Alex

eligible heir to the Duke of Northumberland, whom she briefly dated while both were at Edinburgh University, has been widely touted, but is way off the mark, as one of her circle explains: "She and George were never a big item and what they've got now is a really great friendship. He's a great support and thinks that in the long term, she and Alex will get back together."

As for reports that Alex's parents, financier James Loudon and his wife Jane, were "lukewarm" about their son's relationship with Pippa and did not see her as "wife material", the opposite seems to be true, and they have always warmly welcomed her at their Georgian home in Kent, Orlingh Towers.

"I'm told: 'The Loudons are a lovely family but they have been made out to be crashing snobs who think Pippa is not good enough for Alex. It's quite wrong: they love her and, like the rest of us, want them to get back together and, hopefully, get married.'"

Meanwhile, while Alex uses his "time out" to consider his prospects with the sister of the future Queen, Pippa intends to see more of Kate, who will be on her own when William starts his deployment in the Falklands. One thing Pippa will not be using her time for is writing a book on party planning, as has been reported. Her friend says: "She was approached by an agent but has no wish to be seen cashing in on her position."



The dark humour characterised by his best creation, the hapless hotelier Basil Fawlty, is all down to his late mother and her lifelong battle with depression, believes **John Cleese**.

Recalling his childhood in Weston-super-Mare, the comic actor says: "I don't mean it nastily but my mother Muriel was a very nervous and depressed person and astonishingly self-centred. She was a five foot, slightly tubby housewife who kept the house spotless, cooked well and always made sure I was smartly dressed, but the universe didn't exist if it was more than six feet away from her."

"One day when she was telling me all the reasons she didn't want to go on living I said, 'Well look Mum, if you're still feeling this way next week I know a little man in Fulham and I could give him a call and he could come down and kill you'."

"There was this startled silence and then she cackled with laughter and it was a total breakthrough. From then on any time she got depressed I'd say, 'Shall I call that man in Fulham?' and she'd laugh and it would change her mood."

Plans are being kept under wraps for now, but I hear the **Queen** has given the go-ahead for an outdoor concert at Balmoral so her Scottish neighbours can celebrate her *Diamond Jubilee*. The only time there's been one before was to mark her 80th birthday in 2006 when Katherine Jenkins performed and insect repellent was laid on for guests to counter the pesky Highland midges.

There are many women who envy **Lisa Snowdon** (left), the model from Welwyn Garden City who had a five-year romance (of sorts) with the country's sexiest actor, but she's had quite enough of being known as George Clooney's ex. "I do get fed-up with that constant tagline. I think I'm going to take that label to the grave with me, it might even be on my tombstone," sighs leggy Lisa, whose modelling career began at 19 when she was spotted pole dancing by a talent scout.

Indeed Lisa gets particularly irritated when girls start probing about George. "They always ask me what he was like in bed. It's usually after a few drinks have made them brave. I never tell."

After her on-off relationship with George finally ended six years ago, Lisa struggled to forge her own identity (even being filmed having colonic irrigation "to get people talking about something other than him"). She's single again, after her liaison with England footballer Jay Byroady fizzled out and, at 39 she's worried that she may never marry and have children.

"I find it hard to meet new people and I'm really, really fussy," she explains. After Georgeous George, who can blame her?



SUPPORT: Demi with daughter Rumer

It isn't just **Demi Moore** who has been rocked by the end of her marriage to the cheating Ashton Kutcher, other members of her family have been badly affected too.

Rumer, at 23 the eldest of Demi's daughters from her union with Bruce Willis, has lost weight because of the upset, and is almost looking as thin as her actress mother.

With her emotions still raw, Demi has been comforted by her girls and yesterday was with them in Paris, where her youngest, Tallulah, 17, was preparing to make her debut at the Debutantes Ball at the Hotel de Crillon.

The 49-year-old Ghost star has been particularly reliant on support from Rumer (named after Demi's favourite British novelist Rumer Godden).

"Rumer had warned her mother repeatedly of Ashton's suspicious disappearances and she, rightly, thought he was being unfaithful," says a source.

**Sir Ian Botham** says that his grandson James is not impressed with his legendary cricketing prowess, which he's scorned considerably since he retired 18 years ago (Beefy Botham hasn't played a proper game of cricket since then but does bat occasionally after family barbecues in the garden).

Recounts the former England captain: "After one barbecue James, who was about eight, was messing around throwing the ball to me and I think I hit about one in eight."

"The next day he asked my wife Kath 'Was Grandad really good at cricket?'. She replied 'Yes' and James went 'well he's really crap now'."



**Scots businessman Duncan Bannatyne** is worth about £200million but he still likes a bargain. Spotted taking a £60 flight back from his holiday home in France last week, the former Dragons' Den bruiser responded robustly to followers on Twitter who made comments about him being able to afford to upgrade from budget airlines, saying: "I'm surprised how many of you think I should use a private jet. Ruin the kids bringing them up like that."



Bored with traipsing up and down the catwalk, **Agyness Deyn** (left) is making the transition from model to actress. She will, literally, be dispensing with her clothes, playing a stripper in a film being made in Shoreditch, her old East London stomping ground. The lanky-limbed Agyness (who changed her name from what she considered the less exotic Laura Hollins) has been twirling her bra and removing her knickers as she rehearses being the lap-dancing girlfriend of a drug dealer in a gritty movie called Pusher. "This is her big break and she's so excited!" gushes one of her chums. "She's been wanting to leave fashion behind and move into films for ages." Miss Deyn, 28, who has been single since parting from musician Miles Kane, is frightfully stoic about her new career challenge, declaring: "Everything in life has a beginning, middle and end. That's how I get through difficult times, like the end of an relationship or everyday frustrations."

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# A Fawltly show for John Cleese

IT'S NOT only the poor reviews that are casting shadows over the first performances of **John Cleese's** one-man show, which opened in Cambridge last week. The lofty humourist has begun a two-month trapeze around Britain with his Alimony Tour, which he says he needs to perform to raise the £12million his third wife, Alyce-Faye Eichelberger, claimed in their divorce settlement. His show is littered with acidic references to Alyce, a psychotherapist to whom an American court awarded the £12million in finance and assets, including £600,000 a year for seven years. But while the audience may have laughed at his jokes, I can disclose that the smile was wiped off Cleese's face when he learned, after the third show, that his ex-wife's lawyers had been watching. "Good God, I have just been told Alyce's people are on the prowl," he told a friend, plainly worried over dealing with a further legal tussle, this time with the possibility of involving the English laws of libel and slander. The former star of TV classics Monty Python and Fawltly Towers has made no

secret of his annoyance at having to take to the stage again at the age of 71 to "feed the beast". His show begins by flashing up a picture of Alyce-Faye at a cashpoint machine, "helping herself to some of my money". He goes on to describe his ex-wife as "the spiritual godchild of Blackbeard the pirate and Heather Mills", adding that the divorce settlement could have been even higher "had she contributed anything to the marriage, if she'd had children or even a two-way conversation". Meanwhile, while he's in Cambridge, Cleese has been using his time off stage to show the sights of the university where, ironically, he read law to his girlfriend, jewellery designer Jennifer Wade. He is keen to marry Miss Wade, herself a divorcee - but one who has already assured Cleese she would remain financially independent should they marry. She boasts: "After I divorced, my lawyer said to me he wanted to put up a photograph of me in his office with a sign above it saying, 'The woman who took nothing.' John jokes that he will put up a picture of Alyce with a sign saying, 'The woman who took everything.'"



NO DESIGNS: Jennifer Wade with Cleese

Although **ROSIE HUNTINGTON-WHITELEY** used to have something of a reputation for changing her boyfriends as frequently as she dropped her Victoria's Secrets lingerie, her present beau, British actor Jason Statham, has now lasted the course for a year. The Devon-born supermodel, 24, is sharing her duvet in Los Angeles with Jason and the extent of the pair's affection for each other was on display last week at a fashion ball in New York where they smooched and canoodled most of the evening. Jason, who was himself working as a model when he was talent spotted by Guy Ritchie who put him in Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels and Snatch, will no doubt be proud that his willowy squeeze has just been voted the world's sexiest woman by the slivering readers of a British lady's mag. While Jason's career is taking off in Hollywood, after he was cast in The Expendables alongside Sylvester Stallone and Mickey Rourke, Rosie is also doing so well with her modelling that she's been dubbed "the new Kate Moss" (as if we need another one).



He's known in court circles to be the Queen's favourite politician, certainly not due to his nationalist beliefs but because he's so knowledgeable about racehorses. Now Scotland's First Minister reveals that Her Majesty's love of a different kind of horsepower almost killed him when she was at the wheel of a Land Rover. "I always talk horses with the Queen but I remember once she was driving me through Balmoral - it was just like the movie The Queen with Helen Mirren," recounts **Alex Salmond**. "She was doing about 70mph on this narrow road when she turns to say 'you have the worst handwriting of all my ministers'." "I was terrified we'd crash, so I just said, 'I'll try to do better Ma'am' and hoped she'd turn her eyes back to the road."

That poser **Jeremy Irons** is rubbish. Well, his next performance will be: the actor is making a documentary on how the world deals with its refuse. Irons has been on a three-month global tour of rubbish dumps for his film, entitled Trashed, which is sponsored by Robert Redford's production company. "He was very shocked by what he saw, particularly when we went to Vietnam and he saw children who had been born with defects due to dioxin poisoning created by that country's war with America," reports my movie source. "It's made him want to enlighten everyone about pollution, particularly the problem of disposing of plastics." Hopefully the Oscar-winning star of Reversal Of Fortune and The French Lieutenant's Woman was careful during his travelling about where he deposited his own source of rubbish: his cigarette butts. Irons puts his slim physique down to his 40-a-day habit.



A charming view on royalty from **Michael Parkinson**: "Queen Elizabeth is head of a dysfunctional family. If she lived on a council estate in Sheffield, she'd probably be in council care." This from a man who has received both a CBE and a knighthood. Why did she bother?



Naughty **Andrew Morton**, chiefly remembered for his biography of the late Princess of Wales, has upset Prince William's aides by overstepping the mark with his new book on the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Anxious to present any new titbits on the pair, the Dewsbury-born rascal has included an aerial picture of the farmhouse where William and Kate are living in Anglesey. "All the media had complied with a request not to identify the couple's residence to ensure their peace and security," harrumphs a courtier. "Except of course the man who modestly describes himself as 'the world's leading authority on celebrity.'"

The furor resulting from **Lady Annabel Goldsmith** not receiving an invitation to the royal wedding is not quite what it seems. The society matriarch is adamant that she does not think, as has been suggested, that the Duchess of Cornwall deleted her name from the guest list. Camilla continues to be a bosom friend (a considerable compliment, given the size of Lady Annabel's décolletage) maintains the wealthy widow, who tells me that chatter about a rift is "ridiculous and absolutely untrue". And twice-married Annabel dismisses her reported "grief" at not being at Westminster Abbey. She's not particularly fond of weddings anyway, saying: "Nowadays marriage seems less relevant, couples are just as happy living together."



Even though **President Obama** and his wife Michelle were disappointed not to get an invitation to the royal wedding, the couple will be excited to learn that the bedroom in Buckingham Palace they will use during their state visit later this month will be the same one that Prince William and Catherine occupied during their first night as husband and wife. Not that they should expect to find a surfeit of luxury when they are shown into the Belgian suite on the ground floor, supposedly the best accommodation in the palace. "It's actually rather tired," says a royal flunkie. "It's got one of those artificial gas log fires and the silk bedspread is worn. And like all the bedrooms in the palace, the plumbing is noisy and the lighting is dim."

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Sassy businesswoman **Karren Brady** was happy to share the limelight with her daughter **Sophia** at a celebrity cricket match last week, losing no time in introducing her to me by saying: "This is Sophia the new face of Lippy." Sophia, 15, already has an impressive CV, listing modelling for the Lippy fashion label, acting and doing work experience with Talk Back Television and Topshop. She is also due to join her school netball team on a tour of Trinidad. "But I really want to be an actress," she told me. "I am at the same stage school as Lord Sugar's grandson." The Salthill School student, who has inherited her dark looks from her handsome footballer father Paul Peschisolido and steely resolve from her mother (Lord Sugar's side kick on *The Apprentice*), doesn't feel comfortable on the set of the TV show when the Amstrad boss is about. "Lord Sugar is quite scary," whispered Sophia.

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Picture: JULIE KIRK/COULDIS/Rex



# Agent rocked as Rowling defects

**A** NOTABLE absentee from last week's London premiere of the final Harry Potter film was JK Rowling's literary agent Christopher Little. The amiable Yorkshireman, who has represented the writer for 16 years, was instead at his estate in Hampshire trying to come to terms with the shock news that Ms Rowling had dumped him and "run off" with his business partner Neil Blair. Members of literary circles have been reeling at the sudden defection of the Harry Potter creator from the man who discovered and nurtured her, particularly as Little, 71, is battling serious illness. "Chris is devastated," confided a friend of Little's, the man who is credited with turning the Potter franchise into a multi-million-



£58million since the first Potter manuscript arrived on his desk in 1996, said he was "surprised" and "disappointed" at Rowling's decision. And I can disclose there will be a sequel to this story because Little is registered as a co-owner of Rowling's digital media company Pottermore, due to launch in October. "Things could turn very nasty," the friend says. "Jo will have to buy Chris out of Pottermore if she wants rid of him completely, while he is considering taking legal action over the whole business. He feels terribly hurt. He has travelled the world with Jo and never missed a film premiere before." A spokesman for the author said: "Ms Rowling's decision was not taken without good reason, and finally became unavoidable."

What seemed a romantic gesture when **Prince William** sprung a surprise on his new bride last week with a visit to a remote island in the Canadian wilderness was in fact a ruse to celebrate his late mother's birthday. The couple dispensed with their detectives and entourage to row to Eagle Island midway through their nine-day tour of Canada. "William wanted to remember his mother on the actual day she would have turned 50," a royal aide who was on the tour told me. "He chose to mark the occasion on the island because Diana is buried on an island at Althorp and it made him feel closer to her. It was a very private and personal visit. He also took some letters that Diana had written so he could share them with Kate and they could remember her together."

Delegates at the Festival of Education held at Wellington College in Berkshire, were treated to **Rod Little**, the scruffy former editor of Radio 4's Today programme, discussing the merits of private schools with Tony Little, the headmaster of Eton. "The reason I didn't send my children to one," pronounced roistering Rod, "was because I was worried that they might turn out like AA Gill."

Former Antiques Road Show host **Hugh Scully** can't understand why other veteran television personalities don't behave like him and put their feet up. After a run of 20 years which ended abruptly in 2000 when Michael Aspel took over as the programme's host Scully, 68, is now enjoying his retirement in his Helford roost in Cornwall where he has no interest in becoming a collector's item. "I don't do any guest appearances," he declares. "I have never understood why the likes of Michael Parkinson and Terry Wogan go on and on. They certainly don't need the money so why don't they just get out and enjoy themselves like me?"



It is encouraging to see **Samantha Cameron** continuing to apply cost-cutting measures when shopping for Downing Street nick-nacks. While hunting for a lamp to put beside her £99 Ikea bookcase in the open plan kitchen/sitting room, she resisted splashing out £1,250 on an original Italian-designed classic lamp with a marble base. Instead she opted for a reproduction version she found at a knock-down £250. "Mrs Cameron called us to place the order and we were delighted to send it to Downing Street," gushed David Gutfreund, head of Iconic Lights, adding excitedly: "She is our most famous customer to date."

Sharing a few cocktails in London's fashionable restaurant The Ivy was how former editor of the Sun **Stuart Higgins** chose to wish his troubled chum Andy Coulson well before his arrest on Friday. "We had a social drink and catch up," Higgy told me. "We are mates." But when I asked whether he might be offering his mate a job in his PR company, his reply was swift. "No."

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Despite the turbulence surrounding **Gordon and Tana Ramsay** which reached boiling point last month when it was revealed that Tana's father had been having a long-running affair, the recipe for a harmonious family life at their 10-bedroom home in Wandswoth is separate rooms. As a mother of a child who attends the same school as the Ramsays' 11-year-old twins reveals: "He is tidy and she is messy. So they live on different floors and different rooms in the same house. "Tana doesn't go anywhere near Gordon's kitchen which he has on the first floor because she has no idea how to work any of the gadgets or his fancy cooker. Instead she prefers to create havoc with her pots and pans in the basement where she has her own separate kitchen and bog standard cooker. "Every room to do with Gordon is spick and span whereas the children's playroom has stains on the carpet and drawings on the walls," the mother adds. "Tana is quite at home with the children's untidy bedrooms but she always shuts the doors so Gordon can see how messy they are."

Wedding presents for the **Duke and Duchess of Cambridge** have been pouring into Clarence House despite the couple requesting donations to charity. But instead of clogging up the corridors they are being labelled and placed in a store-room. "A great deal of cataloguing is going on," reports my man with the crested pen. "We have to list all the gifts." This new practice has been adopted to avert any accusations, as there were in 2003, when an official report revealed that Michael Faucett, Prince Charles's toothpaste-squeezer-in-chief, had profited from the sale of trinkets given to his boss.

Sharing a few cocktails in London's fashionable restaurant The Ivy was how former editor of the Sun **Stuart Higgins** chose to wish his troubled chum Andy Coulson well before his arrest on Friday. "We had a social drink and catch up," Higgy told me. "We are mates." But when I asked whether he might be offering his mate a job in his PR company, his reply was swift. "No."

EDITED BY JANE SLADE