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Wedding wobbles for Geri Halliwell

Picture: DAVE J HOGAN/Getty

THE COLOURFUL love life of Geri Halliwell has taken another twist as I disclose that her proposed wedding to motor racing boss Christian Horner has yet to be finalised due to an enduring rift with his parents. The former Spice girl and the Red Bull Racing Team principal announced their engagement at the end of last year after a whirlwind romance.

But Christian's parents still haven't forgiven him for dumping his long-term partner just six months after she gave birth to their baby daughter.

Beverley Allen lived with Horner for 14 years before he walked out of the Northamptonshire home they shared last March, leaving her and baby Olivia.

"Christian's parents are still devastated by Christian's callous behaviour towards Beverley, particularly as she had struggled for so long to have a baby," a family friend tells me.

"They are still very upset and have refused to go to the wedding but Christian really wants to patch things up before setting a date to marry."

Meanwhile Geri, 43, has been telling her chums they are planning "a fairytale wedding" to take place next month. With her penchant for referring to herself in the third person and doing yoga in business meetings, she can appear something of a fruitloop.

One ex-boyfriend, singer Robbie Williams, said after their break-up: "She turned into a demonic little girl playing with dolls and a tea set, and speaking like a psychotic child."

"It genuinely scared me."



PARENTAL PROBLEM: Race boss Christian Horner with fiancée Geri



★ Well-wishers lining the streets of Dunblane on Saturday to see the city's favourite son **Andy Murray** marry his partner of nine years, **Kim Sears**, may get more than they bargained for if the recent blustery weather doesn't die down. The tennis ace has warned that if he wears a kilt it will be in the traditional way, with no tighty whities to save his

blushes. His mother Judy, however, has other concerns. The reception, to be held at Andy's £1.8million Cromlix Hotel, will involve dancing. And as we know from her performance on the last series of *Strictly*, this is not one of her strengths. As she admits: "I like the kind of Scottish dances that you would do at weddings but that's always really been it. I've never been a disco or nightclub type of person. I had ballet lessons but was sent out for being disruptive."



★ As Vienna braces itself for the 60th Eurovision Song Contest next month, my thoughts turn to the winsome Welsh songstress **Mary Hopkin**, runner-up in 1970 with the catchy ditty *Knock Knock Who's There*.

Mary, now 64, last performed on stage in 1999 but is now sending her 38-year-old daughter out on the road to sing her songs.

Jessica Lee Morgan, from Mary's 10-year marriage to producer **Tony Visconti**, sang her mother's hit *Those Were The Days* at the Millennium Centre, Cardiff, just last month.

"I know how much *Those Were The Days* means to my mum," she mused. "It's a great honour to be able to sing it for her."

★ Soaking up Africa's spectacular scenery as it rolled past his train window proved a nifty nightmare for **Griff Rhys Jones**, who was riding the rails as presenter of the ITV series *Slow Train Through Africa*. Night trains were apparently the worst. "They were quite decrepit and every now and again, I would smell this incredible stench," sniffs Griff, 61.

The pongiest place was Morocco's Medina in Fez, where Griff learned to dye leather hides by trampling in vats of cows' urine and pigeon droppings. "Sinking waist-deep into a porridge of pigeon manure is more than enough experience of the world of leather for me," he concluded.

★ Actor **David Suchet** is hoping to resurrect his alter ego, **Hercule Poirot**, just 18 months after he performed the sleuth's death scene in the final ITV episode.

"It's only natural that we should miss good friends when they've gone – and I miss Poirot," sighs Suchet, who played Agatha Christie's Belgian detective for 25 years. "In many ways, it's like he became my best friend but he has gone and there are no more stories left."

"I would, however, consider playing him again in a movie. The *Big Four* is a wonderful story and would make a gripping film."

★ Anyone fancy giving the royal nick-nacks some spit and polish? **The Queen** is looking for a housekeeping assistant. The lucky recruit will be based at Buckingham Palace nine months of the year, then at Balmoral and Sandringham the rest of the time.

You will be expected to carry out general cleaning duties, look after guests, and undergo a Housekeeping Assistant training programme to learn to dust the Royal Collection treasures.

You won't clean up financially though. The pay is a miserly £14,513 a year. And although accommodation and meals are included, the ad warns there will be "a salary adjustment".

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Royal film revealed too much

WHY DOES the Queen still continue to block access to a BBC documentary on the Royal Family, which was a huge hit with viewers when it was televised around the world in 1969? Shortly after the film had aired the Queen ordered that the programme, along with 40 hours of unseen footage, should be withdrawn from circulation and it is now held in the Royal archives at Windsor Castle, unavailable to the eyes of historians... or indeed anyone.

Even now, the documentary remains a touchy subject with the monarch who, according to one senior courtier, felt she had been "bamboozled" into giving permission for a film crew to have full access to her private and official life.

From the start, the Queen had considerable reservations. She consulted her shrewd mother, who was vehemently opposed to the plan but it was Prince Philip's self-serving uncle Lord Mountbatten who talked the sovereign into it.

Mountbatten's son-in-law, the film producer Lord Brabourne, felt the royals would benefit if they were seen by the public as being more modern and



CANDID CAMERA: Windsors unmasked in 1969

informal. Yet even David Attenborough, then a BBC controller, had reservations, warning: "The whole royal institution depends on mystique and the tribal chief in his hut."

The documentary, entitled *Royal Family*, but mischievously rechristened *Corgi And Beth* by satirists, was screened to a worldwide audience of 40 million. The Queen was seen having breakfast and making banal small-talk with America's President Nixon: "World problems are so complex, aren't they now?"

Philip's use of the F-word (again) in relation to the Queen's corgis was edited out but not his comments on his father-in-law King George VI. "He had very odd habits," said Philip. "Sometimes I thought he was mad."

There were those who felt that the family did not emerge from the camera as entirely pleasant or sympathetic characters and others, previously loyal to the monarchy, who did not care for seeing them presented as bourgeois, middle-class bores.

No wonder HM remains implacably negative about the project.

★ **THAT luscious-lipped femme fatale ANGELINA JOLIE makes a point of not spoiling her ever-expanding litter of kiddywinkles (there are six, at the last count). But, nevertheless, the benevolent actress has decided to fork out a six-figure sum to decorate her brood with matching rings.**

The actress, who recently visited squalid muddy camps in Burma as chairwoman for the National League for Democracy, has tasked her best-loved trinket designer, Robert Procop (the former boss of Asprey), with creating a collection of bands for her children.

"Each one will be slightly different and unique," says my insider, "but the similarities will be the bonding, so the whole family are united with these rings."

According to the brief, the rings (which cost five figures a piece) are to bear each child's name, with "Brad and Angelina" engraved on the underside.

Procop is the man who created Brangelina's wedding and engagement rings. I am told: "They like to include their family in all commitments, as they did at their wedding, so Ange has been wanting bands for her kids for some while and it made sense that Procop does these as well."

Picture: JON KOPALOFF/Getty



★ **Kate Moss** is seeking out pastures new(ish). The Croydon clothes hanger is house hunting amid her split from hubby Jamie Hince.

However, it seems she is eager not to stray too far from her old stomping ground, Primrose Hill, and last week viewed several properties in the area (one of which, I am told, was once inhabited by James Corden).

Thankfully, though, Ms Moss managed to find time to unwind with a manicure in nail salon Prim and lunch at the local Greek restaurant Lemonia in between viewings. Well, moving house is awfully wearing.

★ **There is no doubt that James Norton**, the Bafta-nominated star of *Happy Valley* and *Grantchester*, has what it takes to be a Hollywood hit. But the actor is already disillusioned by the entertainment industry in Los Angeles and, he tells me, is determined to stay put in Peckham.



"The problem I find with LA," he elucidates, "and I do go out there to do bits and pieces, is that the industry is just all about the business. Film-making here is an art form, in Hollywood it is a business."

Chatting at the Eco World Ballymore & English National Ballet special performance in London City Island's marketing suite, he goes on: "So when you read for a part here, it is like: 'Are you any good?' in LA they do care if you are any good but you can see them automatically thinking, 'So how much are you worth? How many Twitter followers do you have?' All those kinds of things come into it. I don't like that. And I love Peckham, I am really happy in that environment."

He has 17,400 Twitter followers, by the way.



★ While Princess Beatrice has enjoyed 17 holidays (and counting) this year, at least one member of the royal family is not afraid to knuckle down to some hard graft.

Flora Ogilvy (left), the grand-daughter of Princess Alexandra of Kent (who is the Queen's cousin) has landed a job working for Christie's auction house in Paris.

Ogilvy will follow in the footsteps of Princess Eugenie who spent six weeks in the company's employ back in 2010.

However, one hopes that this move does not mark the end of Flora's promising showbusiness career – the 20-year old, who is 45th in line to the throne, can be seen performing the role of an extra in series four of *Downton Abbey* with tremendous gravitas.

★ Now that the curtain has come down on **Bradley Cooper's** award-winning turn in *The Elephant Man*, spare a thought for the faraway family member who was unable to see the show.

Sweetie, Cooper's beloved bulldog, of whom the actor shares custody with his sister Holly, could not make it over from New York to see his master on stage but was, evidently, keen to do his homework on the dramatic personae.

Holly posted this photo of the pooch, engrossed in the show's programme alongside the caption: "Caught Sweetie the night checkin' out her Uncle Bradley Cooper's @ElephantMan London program." [sic]



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No encore for McCartney



STRUGGLE: Sir Paul McCartney and son James

CHOOSING to follow Sir Paul McCartney into the music business has not been an easy path for his son James, who is struggling to emulate the success enjoyed by the former Beatle. Last week James, 38, was met with a mediocre response from customers when he sang and played guitar at a small pub, The Islington, in north London.

Only a handful of the audience remained to see the end of his performance and there were certainly no calls for an encore.

A blonder, less confident version of Paul, James has found it hard to make his own name in the music business; he finds playing live on

stage difficult because of his shyness and friends say he is constantly aware of living in his father's shadow.

While his sisters Stella and Mary, have prospered from their father's fame, Sir Paul's only son often refused to tell new friends his surname when he worked as a waiter in Brighton. Like the rest of the family, he is a strict vegan but has had issues in the past with his weight.

James was 19 and an art student when his mother Linda was diagnosed with breast cancer. He found therapy in playing the guitar and, a month before Linda's death in 1998, he recorded a track with her, *The Light Comes From Within*. When she died, he slept in the

same room as his father for weeks as the two men struggled to get over their loss.

"After Linda's death James became a recluse and 'lost' most of his 20s through drugs until he went into rehab in Arizona," says a family friend. "He's very similar to his mother and he missed her terribly."

Like all of the McCartney children, James took instantly against Heather Mills when his father met the brassy blonde just 12 months after Linda's death. Now living in a £2million flat in Islington (bought for him by Paul) James gets on well with Paul's third wife Nancy, of whom he says: "She has been one of the biggest supporters of me having my own career. She makes Dad very happy."

★ Relations between **Kate Winslet** and Richard Branson's mother became frosty following conflicting versions of what happened in the fire that wrecked the tycoon's Caribbean roost four years ago.

After pictures were published of Ms Winslet carrying Eve out of the main house on Necker Island it was assumed she had rescued her. "But I was NOT saved by Kate!" declared the doughty nonagenarian. "She just picked me up and carried me down four steps." Branson, meanwhile, had fled naked, accidentally running into a cactus bush.

Now the whole clan is returning to the rebuilt house this Christmas, when the Virgin boss will preside over a family get-together - which will include Miss Winslet, who is married to Richard's nephew Ned. Fire drill is now compulsory on the island.



CAUTION: Patricia

★ One new face appearing in the final episode of *Downton Abbey* will be **Patricia Hodge**, who is playing the mother of Bertie Pelham, erstwhile suitor of Lady Edith Crawley.

She was asked by the series' creator, Julian Fellowes, to take on the role having been a friend since the days when she was in his film *Gosford Park*.

At 69 she chooses her work with caution. "There's an awful lot I won't do," says the actress who, despite her cut-glass pronunciation, was brought up in Grimsby. "I avoid what I call personality stuff. The danger of appearing as yourself is that viewers then can't lose themselves in the new character you're playing."

Patricia has personal reasons for planning her commitments carefully. Her husband Peter Owen suffers from dementia and is now in a care home. She adds: "Let's just say that the past few years have been difficult for our family."

★ A quirky nugget about **Noddy Holder**, who continues to rake in around £650,000 a year in royalties from Slade's 1973 hit *Merry Christmas Everybody*: the old rocker always travels with his very own tool kit.

"Even in the best hotel rooms, there'll be something broken," says the Brummie singer. "A drawer that doesn't close properly, a shower curtain hanging loose, a lamp that doesn't work."

"I can't be bothered to call housekeeping. I just get out my kit and fix it on the spot."

★ Comic **Tim Vine** just adores Christmas. "We go and stay with my parents and - I know it's embarrassing - but I still get a stocking," chirrups the younger brother of broadcaster Jeremy Vine. "I'm in my mid-40s and I can hear *Santa Claus shuffling into the room, and I keep my eyes tightly shut. It's still magic.*"

★ A tip from **Theo Paphites** for men struggling with gift ideas. He advises buying knickers and bras (unsurprisingly, given the fortune he has made through flogging ladies' underpinnings). "I think British men need to buy more lingerie," he told me at a Red Cross auction. "On the Continent the first port of call would be to go to a store and buy something romantic to wear for your partner. It helps increase a woman's sex drive."



Picture: DAVE J HOGAN/Getty

★ **ELLIE GOULDING** may have to hold back when her mother gives out second helpings of Christmas pudding at the family home in Herefordshire. The singer is having to watch what she eats after being diagnosed with a heart problem.

Her condition means that fitness fanatic **Ellie, 28**, has also had to give up any hard exercise. Having suffered panic attacks in the past, she now wears a heart monitor to track her stress levels.

Ellie told me there was also another downside to the huge success she's experienced in the past five years. "You can be vulnerable to getting depressed with the constant jet lag and tiredness."

At least the golden-voiced singer will be cosseted this Christmas by her mother Tracey, who used to work in a supermarket. She won't see her father Arthur, who left home when Ellie was five.

She probably knows where her presents will be coming from. She grins: "Boots was like the centre of the universe for teenagers in Hereford... so my family still get me Christmas presents from there."



★ **THE NEW** Absolutely Fabulous movie is released next year but there's one star involved who won't be watching.

Lulu (above) has filmed a segment for the movie but isn't keen on seeing her scenes because they depict her as clumsy.

"I fell down a lot in it," giggles the wee warbler. "There was an after-film party where they showed bits of it."

"They said, 'Did you see yourself?' And I said 'no, I don't want to.'"

★ Over a glass of champagne, **Sir Bruce Forsyth's** delightful wife **Winnie** tells me how they have remained happily married for 32 years.

"It's all about compromise," giggles the former Miss Puerto Rico. "For example, Bruce has had to learn to love garlic, as I put it in everything. And I'm untidy and Bruce is very tidy. The real secret to happiness is to sleep close together... in a very big bed."



★ Who says the Royal Family has airbrushed away the memory of **Diana**? At Sandringham the **Queen** likes to keep a jigsaw on a side table in which she slots the odd piece from time to time, and a visitor reports that the current one is a 1,000-piece puzzle called *Gibsons' Royal Babies*, which contains three charming pictures of the late Princess of Wales with William and Harry as babies.

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In memory of Jagger's lover



DONATION: Sir Mick Jagger with girlfriend L'Wren Scott

WHEN HIS long-term girlfriend committed suicide 11 months ago, Sir Mick Jagger was widely accused of insensitivity and of reverting to type by canoodling with the first nymphet he encountered. But, as this column reported at the time, the portrayal of the old rocker being indifferent to the death of fashion designer L'Wren Scott was plain wrong. In fact Jagger had sunk into a deep depression and, as one of his closest associates disclosed: "He's heartbroken. It will take him a long time to get over this."

L'Wren was 49 when she hanged herself in her Manhattan apartment last March amid rumours that she was worried about the finances of her design company.

Following her death Jagger has been considering how to commemorate her legacy. Now he has decided to donate a three-year scholarship to MA fashion students at the London design college Central St Martins.

Jagger's decision to offer a scholarship stems from L'Wren's friendship with one of the college's professors, Louise Wilson, whom she met at the British Fashion Awards. Sadly Professor Wilson also died last year.

Fabio Piras, course director at St Martin's, says: "I am very grateful to receive this extremely generous scholarship package, gifted by Mick Jagger in L'Wren Scott's name."



★ **Princess Madeleine of Sweden**, who is expecting her second baby, is moving to London. This is significant news.

Regular readers may recall that it was with a heavy heart that two years ago I reported the engagement of Madeleine, my former girlfriend (well, almost) to hedge fund manager Christopher O'Neill, who was born in London. Smoothie Christopher is 40 and has a degree from Boston University in "international relations" (certainly worked for him). Anyway, back to me.

When I first met Madeleine she was 25 and there was an instant frisson between us (could have been the vodka) but it came to nothing.

Just as well, as she's only fourth in line to the Swedish throne. And there was something unsettling about her father, King Carl Gustaf (he was later exposed for paying a series of strippers).

Anyway, it saved me from having to learn the lingo, unlike her fiancé, who is struggling with the Swedish language. Madeleine's loss.

★ It's a question of pub etiquette: if you are desperate to visit the lavatory and spot a handy hostelry, should you buy a drink in exchange for using the facilities? On his way to Chequers last weekend the **Prime Minister** was in urgent need of a loo and directed his driver to stop at the **Hobgoblin** in High Wycombe. "He came in asking if he could use the toilet quickly and we said, 'Yeah, that's fine,'" said manager **Charlie Capstick**. "He didn't get a drink but he did buy a packet of **Wotsits**."



★ Once the fuss over **Fifty Shades Of Grey** has died down **Jamie Dornan** will swap his handcuffs and silk ties for Army uniform for his next film **The Siege Of Jadotville** based on a battle in the Congo in 1961.

The film is being shot in South Africa, a location loved by Jamie's father obstetrician **Professor Jim Dornan** who goes there every year with a group of his chums.

"I've been there for the last 19 years, it's such a fabulous country," says Jim. "I'm

friends with six guys who meet up for a boys' scout week which we call **Pete's Gay Book Club**. But we're not gay and we're not a book club, it's just what we call ourselves.

"We fish and cook, ride bicycles and all that sort of thing. I'm pretty good at slumming it."

★ In past generations the only acceptable piercing for a young girl was through her ears. Now, to the puzzlement of many a parent or grandparent there's hardly any part of the body not considered a blank canvas for "body art" - from a tattoo on the bottom to a stud through the tongue.

Just what is the attraction, especially when the process can be quite painful? I asked **PIXIE GELDOF** as she showed me her latest adornment, a septum stud and proudly demonstrated its versatility by taking it in and out of her nose.

"I've had this for about six months and I love it," said **Bob Geldof's** tattooed daughter.

Asked to sum up the attraction of such embellishments, **Pixie, 24**, replied simply: "They're fun and different." So now you know.

★ **Sir David Jason** is fed up with having to turn off the television when he's watching with his 13-year-old daughter because he's embarrassed.

He protests that soaps like **EastEnders** make it impossible for people to watch them with their grandchildren because the language is so hostile and violent.

"I've been caught out many a time watching with my daughter **Sophie**," he says. "Before I know it, people have taken their clothes off or are swearing and I've been unable to get to the remote or cover her eyes. "Programmes such as **EastEnders** might not show sexual scenes but they're full of aggression with people shouting and being unkind to one another - all shown well before the watershed."

Sir David, who was 75 last week adds: "There are generations nostalgic for some of the old shows. You can sit there with a two-year-old or a 92-year-old and not have to worry about what might happen or what might be said."



PROTECTIVE: Sir David with his daughter Sophie



★ After the death of her husband **John Thaw** 13 years ago, **Sheila Hancock** (left) struggled to regain her equilibrium for a long time. But she's now happily reconciled to living without a man in her life. "I love being on my own," she told me at a party in South Kensington. "I'm very happy with my own company. I keep fit, don't eat much and love my writing and acting."

Miss Hancock, who will be 82 on Sunday, now spends more time at the holiday home she owns in Provence. "There's a lovely lido nearby where I go swimming and meet the same people every morning."

Both Sheila's husbands (she was first married to actor **Alec Ross**) died of oesophageal cancer. She wrote a book about her life with **Thaw**, and a second, **Just Me**, about coming to terms with widowhood.

"Both my husbands died before they should have done. It wasn't fair," she reflects. "But it would be an absolute betrayal of them if I spent the rest of my life grizzling."

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Eugenie's fears for father

PRINCESS EUGENIE is so concerned about the maelstrom of scandal surrounding her father, the beleaguered Duke of York, that she is considering returning to England from New York where she has been working for an auction house.

There is chatter that Eugenie, 24, who is particularly close to Prince Andrew, would like a break from her job at Paddle8, an online art auction firm, so that she can offer her father support over allegations made by Virginia Roberts, who claims she was paid to sleep with the prince as a teenage "sex slave".

"This whole business has really taken its toll on Andrew; more than most people realise," confides a friend close to the Yorks. "Eugenie is very worried about him. She cannot bear to see him go through this. She wants to be there to hug him and cheer him up."

Eugenie, who is an arts graduate from Newcastle University, always knew she wanted to pursue a career in the art world. What started out as a three-year internship with Paddle8 turned into full-time employment last year and she has moved into an apartment in Manhattan.

But now I understand Eugenie is considering asking her employer for some leave so she can return to Royal Lodge in Windsor, where she and her older sister Princess Beatrice still have rooms; as indeed does their mother, the Duchess of York.

If she does return she will also be able to see more of her boyfriend Jack Brooksbank, 28, the accountant's son whom she has been dating for the past five years and who manages the Mayfair bar Mahiki, which was set up by Guy Pelly, Prince Harry's "court jester".

★ The Swiss watchmaker TAG Heuer warned everyone to be on standby for the "very exciting" announcement of the identity of its new ambassador. Then she was revealed as – **Cara Delevingne**. "Like TAG Heuer, Cara takes risks, breaks the rules, and never cracks under pressure," trumpeted the company.

Couldn't they come up with someone more original than this bisexual flibbertigibbet?

Or are the suits in Switzerland so desperate to appeal to a younger market they don't mind lavishing cash on a gal who was caught dropping a tiny bag of white powder on her doorstep?

Of course, it could have just been flour to make the world's smallest cupcake.



CLOSE: Princess Eugenie cannot bear to be away from her dad, the Duke of York, at this difficult time

Eugenie is very worried about him. She cannot bear to see him go through this. She wants to be there to hug him and cheer him up.

But now I understand Eugenie is considering asking her employer



Picture: XPOSURE

★ **MATT SMITH** and **LILY JAMES** have made a pact not to talk about their budding romance but it hasn't stopped them canoodling passionately in public. Given the enthusiastic embrace the former Doctor Who gave the Downton actress at a showbusiness party last week – even stroking her breast quite openly – there can be no doubting the intensity of their relationship.

"They were all over each other," cackles a fellow canapé-muncher. "They were behaving as though they were in a private hotel room. In fact a room is what they plainly needed."

Matt, 32, first waved his sonic screwdriver in Lily's direction at the Cannes Film Festival last May and within a few months they were spotted house hunting in Primrose Hill.

At least Lily, 25, now has a man to rub some liniment into her sensitive areas after filming her part as Lady Rose.

"I adore the costumes in Downton," she has observed. "But I have to wear a bra that flattens my chest and really hurts."



★ Most members of the Royal Family have had their protection beefed up in response to terrorist threats, but **Princess Anne** will not need too much extra muscle for one engagement next month. She will be at the 70th anniversary dinner of the Special Forces Club, whose members include past and present members of the SAS, the SBS and senior spooks.

Anne is respected by the club's stalwarts, having been in the firing line herself. In 1974 she was being driven along Pall Mall when her Rolls was blocked by another car, from which Ian Ball appeared and fired six shots.

The Princess's detective fired at Ball but was wounded, as was the chauffeur. A journalist, Brian McConnell, who was nearby, also intervened, and got shot in the chest. Ball approached Anne's car and told her he intended to kidnap her. She replied: "Not bloody likely!" Not wise to argue with Anne on a dark night.

★ As the nation prepares to mark the 50th anniversary of the death of **Winston Churchill**, here's a little-known fact about his birthplace, Blenheim Palace. The trees leading down to Churchill's grave at nearby Bladon church are constantly trimmed so the church steeple is always visible from the palace. But the main reason for lopping the treetops was, as the late Duke of Marlborough once told me: "So that Winston can always see Blenheim."

★ As regular readers will already know, **Carole Middleton** is to celebrate her 60th birthday on the Caribbean island of Mustique. She and Michael are flying there today to join Kate and William, plus Pippa and James Middleton, who arrived earlier at the rented Villa Rosina. To help look after them they are taking the daily cleaner who "does" for them in Bucklebury, Basil Charles, proprietor of Basil's Bar, is to host a party for Mrs M, where he will serve her with his Mustique Whammy (champagne, rum, fresh orange, lemon and Grenadine syrup) plus a Mother's Mocktail for the pregnant Kate.

★ **Ant and Dec** assured me that there were no hard feelings from X Factor presenter Dermot O'Leary after beating him to TV's Best Entertainment Award.

"We honestly thought Dermot might get it this year," said Ant. "But ha! He didn't!" The duo won the award for the 14th year running. "We let Dermot touch it at the party afterwards," said Dec. "And he held the award as well," giggled Ant.

★ The languid **Jude Law** is no fan of Twitter, a medium about which he says: "I have no interest. I use any excuse available to not pick up my phone. I've no interest in holding this bloody object all the time. I'd much rather be doing stuff with real people. When I get free time I'm more inclined to listen to music, read or put my feet up." Or, more likely, rest his feet on some pert popsy he's just met.

★ The move to legalise cannabis in Jamaica reminds me of young **Jacob Marley**, grandson of Bob Marley. According to a former pupil at the private boys' school in South London which Jacob used to attend, he was always falling asleep during lessons.

"Jacob was a real Rasta with dreads and used to wear a hat made for him in the school colours," the pupil reveals. "Trouble was that he would spend most of the lessons asleep."

"Teachers joked he had spent all night smoking ganja. One suggested he was going to put a bed for him at the back of the class. Jacob was a lovely chap but not very clever."



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Queen is hot on weather



TALK: Carol Kirkwood

JUST like the rest of us, our sunny Sovereign takes a keen interest in the weather, reveals BBC forecaster Carol Kirkwood, who was asked to give a talk to the Sandringham Women's Institute, and found the Queen was in the audience. "I was amazed when the Queen asked several questions. She wanted to know how the green screen behind us works," says Scottish Carol, 53. "I asked if anyone knew where the lowest temperature recorded in the UK was and the Queen knew the answer. She said it was in Braemar, Aberdeenshire (-27.2C), but also that the record is shared with Altnaharra in Sutherland. I was very impressed. She's a very lovely lady and really funny as well. "Weather presenters used to work with magnetic symbols that fell off the map. There's a clip of one poor presenter spelling out FOG, the F falling off and him saying, 'I'm sorry about the F in FOG!' The Queen laughed at that story."



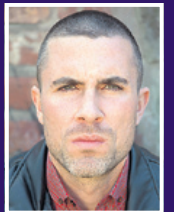
Prince Charles is more generous than his mother when it comes to staff pay, with the Queen's flunkies often grumbling about their meagre wages whenever the rival royal households meet over a Duchy Original oat biscuit. Now Charles has raised the bar even higher, in advertising for a gardener at Highgrove, with green-fingered hopefuls being invited to name their own "salary expectations". Whatever sum the successful applicant achieves, he or she will be expected to adhere to organic principles. On no account must they ever express a preference for any plant with orange flowers. It's the colour HRH deplores most in a garden.

The hand-wringing by Buckingham Palace aides over the need for building repairs would have cut little ice with the **Queen Mother**. Staff at the Castle of Mey recall her sangfroid when, shortly after she'd vacated her bathroom one morning, huge chunks of plaster thundered down from the stucco ceiling, crushing her lavatory. "Imagine if that had happened a minute earlier?" mused a flustered footman who had rushed to the QM's quarters. "Yes," came the waspish reply from senior flunkey William Tallon, "All that would have been left of her would have been a copy of the Sporting Life and an empty glass of gin and Dubonnet."



★ While John Noakes is safe and recovering after going missing in Majorca, his **Blue Peter** co-star **Valerie Singleton** is enjoying entertaining a more mature audience than the kiddywinks she once used to amuse with *Fairy Liquid* bottles. I learn that she is a regular at the *Abbey View* care home in Sherborne, Dorset, where her late father was once a resident. "I have a good collection of my travel pieces on DVD and I intersperse them with readings," says Val, 78. "I wallow in memories and then have a nice lunch with everyone." In the unlikely event that she should find her ageing audience nodding off, Val could liven them up with tales of her love life. For years she endured speculation about her sexuality, finally silencing rumours she was a lesbian with admissions of duvet-rumplings with her BBC colleague Peter Purves and actor Albert Finney. Of her time with Purves, she has previously recalled: "It was one of those impulsive experiences but more a friendship thing. Sleeping with people you work with is generally not advisable, so we didn't want to pursue it." A few more tales like that should keep the old dears awake.

★ In the absence of the man whom she would ideally like to be sharing her sunbed, **SHERIDAN SMITH** is taking the next best thing with her on holiday – a gay male friend. The Lincolnshire-born actress had hoped that her lover **Greg Wood** (right) would be the one rubbing cream into her back but he's detained elsewhere, due to the little matter of still being married (although he is getting divorced). Miss Smith, 34, has been smitten with Greg for the past eight months; indeed their love has been sealed with matching tattoos, hers saying *Gregory's Girl* and his *My Sheri Amour*. Such taste! Anyway, not wishing to travel alone, Sheridan has invited Duncan James, formerly of boy band *Blue*, with whom she became chums after they appeared in *Legally Blonde* five years ago. But is the camp Duncan that safe? On stage he had to smooch with Sheridan every night and he later admitted: "I always slipped my tongue in when we kissed on stage and so did she. We used to have a cheeky drunken snog."



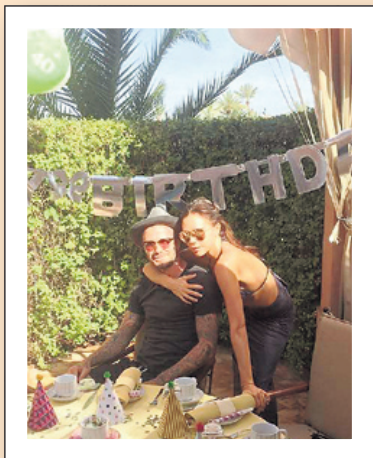
Picture: DAVID M BENETT/ Getty Images

★ **Dame Diana Rigg**, whose role in *Game Of Thrones* has introduced the Avengers star to a new generation, has viewed critics with some sensitivity since a nude stage appearance in *Abelard And Héloïse* led an American hack to describe her as "built like a brick mausoleum with insufficient flying buttresses". Now she has got her own back with a solo show entitled *No Turn Unstoned*, recounting quotations from critics. "Reviews can be very hurtful at the time," sniffs Diana. "Actors mostly say they don't read them but if you do, they affect you."

★ **Top advice from Sir Richard Branson** on how to manage employees: "People are no different from flowers. If you water them, they flourish; if you're not nice to them, they shrivel up. Treat those around you with respect and dignity, and they'll thrive and use their time productively. One of the most important phrases a leader can say is, 'I don't know. What do you think?'"



★ **Carol Vorderman** parted from her last boyfriend because he wanted more of a commitment than she did. Now the presenter has transferred all her desires to a sleek beauty named *Mildred*. The presenter's legions of male admirers will be relieved to hear that *Mildred* is not a Sapphic squeeze but the name Carol has given the plane in which she plans to make a 29,000-mile world trip next year. "She is named after Mildred Bruce who, in 1930, flew solo around the world, but her biplane couldn't traverse oceans so I'm hoping I can finish the job for her," Carol told me at a *Wellbeing Of Women* cricket match at *Sir Victor Blake's* Oxfordshire home. "She's my heroine: a pilot, a racing driver and the first woman to get a speeding fine."



★ **David Beckham** was a late convert to Instagram but when he finally joined the picture-sharing site he notched up a staggering seven million followers. Now I learn that his cyber success is down to the man he employs as his social media manager, **Joseph O'Connor**. This web expert, the grandson of comedian **Tom O'Connor**, is responsible for making sure the Beckham family's tender moments, such as David's 40th birthday in Marrakech (above) and a day out punting in Cambridge, are all beautifully presented on Instagram. In a recent picture David showed he's a regular guy by tucking into "Cockles, whelks & Guinness" and in another snap he's helping daughter Harper, three, ride a bike, with the proud caption: "Look at my big girl on Day One – no stabilisers!"

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Father's warning for Ella

Picture: DAVID M BENETT/Getty



LOOKING GOOD: Emma Bunton has just bought spectacles for elder son Beau

★ **Dominique Strauss-Kahn** didn't look very happy as he left a French court even though he had just been cleared of "aggravated pimping". Could it be the realisation that he is now committed to a pledge he made to his girlfriend Myriam L'Aoufir that he would make her his wife (his fourth) *immEDIATEMENT*, if he was acquitted? Indeed there are whispers in Marrakech that the "libertine" former IMF chief may have a wedding there within days. Like Myriam, the old goat was born in Morocco and he likes to frolic at the Mamounia Hotel in the suite once favoured by his hero Winston Churchill.

★ *Fame is a strange mistress, muses David Hasselhoff.* "I've had some very odd experiences with fans, some of them have tattoos of me in bizarre places. Having your face on the side of a guy's bottom will always feel a little weird."

★ **A touching reason behind Meera Syal's CBE.** The actress and writer says: "The main reason I said yes to it was for my parents. They grew up under the British Empire and then did that epic journey of coming over here, trying to carve out a new life, wondering if the sacrifices were worth it. Well for them that medal is a validation. My father was a refugee at 13 in a camp, with nothing but the clothes he stood up in. It makes me teary because it's true."

★ **Quote from Dame Maggie Smith** on the fame she achieved from playing Professor McGonagall in the Harry Potter films: "Children still come up to me and ask if I can turn them into a cat. Unfortunately it's a very tricky thing to do."



★ **Alan Sugar's** former sidekick on *The Apprentice*, **Nick Hewer** (above), has ambitions that extend beyond his current job on *Countdown*. At 71 he's embarking on a new career as a comedian in a double act with the father of Jack Whitehall. "Nick and I are great friends and he's a very funny man. We're going to do a pilot and position ourselves as the new Morecambe and Wise," Michael Whitehall told me at the launch party for *Today Tix*, a mobile ticket app for West End shows. So what of Backchat, the TV show which former theatrical agent Michael performs with son Jack? "We've done two series and I think there's only one more series in us. Besides, Jack's so busy. He even has a Hollywood agent now. We must all move on."

THE ENORMOUS success of Ella Woodward, whose recipes are followed by hordes of foodies, may only last for so long, cautions her father, former MP Shaun Woodward. "I've warned her that she needs to be prepared for problems and a media backlash in three years' time and I should know," says Sean, 55, who encountered much criticism when he decided to cross the floor of the Commons.

The former Conservative MP for Witney shocked constituents when he defected to Labour just two years after winning his seat in 1997. He went on to fight the Lancashire seat of St Helens South and won a majority of 14,000, eventually becoming Northern Ireland Secretary under Gordon Brown.

The Tory Turncoat, as he was nicknamed at the time, was judged to be the richest politician in Westminster through his marriage to supermarket heiress Camilla Sainsbury.

Their properties included a £24million Cotswolds estate, a London house which Woodward sold for £5.7million, a villa in Mustique and other homes in New York and France. Indeed at one point the former Bristol grammar schoolboy had two butlers.

Ella (right), who addressed the Oxford Union last week, started her blog *Deliciously Ella* after she was diagnosed with a nervous disorder. She suffered constant headaches and needed to sleep 16 hours a day until she discovered that her health improved when she changed her diet. The 23-year-old now has a hugely popular app, has published a cookbook and is training as a naturopathic nutritionist.

"I'm extremely proud of her," beamed Shaun when we met at a party at the Serpentine Gallery. After starting out as a researcher on the TV programme *That's Life* and ending a 17-year career in the Commons, Woodward is now raising money for a new building for the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

And the butlers? "It's been a long time since I've had a butler," he chuckles. "Interestingly the last one ended up producing a musical on Broadway."



★ **Look out, laydeez! Boris Becker** wants more children to add to the four he already has by three different women. Will the former Wimbledon champion start auditioning potential mothers over romantic suppers at Nobu (the *Mayfair* restaurant where a fumble in the broom cupboard with a Russian model resulted in the birth of his daughter Anna, now 15)? Unlikely

given that the priapic pundit is still married to Dutch model Lilly Kerssenberg ("I call her my last wife. I'm not going to marry again," he says drolly). "Lilly wants another two at least but I say let's start with one more," says Becker, 47, whom I met at the launch of his book *Wimbledon: My Life And Career At The All England Club*. He now lives a tennis ball's throw away from the club, with

Lilly (right) and their five-year-old son Amadeus. As coach to Novak Djokovic, Boris will have to concentrate on tennis rather than baby-making with the Wimbledon championships just two weeks away. He predicts it could be a final between Andy Murray and Djokovic: "Having said that I wouldn't rule Roger Federer out yet. But I think Murray and Djokovic are the ones to beat."



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Clarkson's girl knows size matters

WHILE Jeremy Clarkson appears resigned to his enforced exit from Top Gear, daughter Emily has taken over the driving seat when it comes to sounding off about issues of the day.

Although she is only 20, Emily has adopted the cause of larger women who feel stigmatised by the fashion industry. A friend of Miss Clarkson says that like



SPEAKING UP: Jeremy Clarkson with his figure-conscious daughter Emily

many of her generation, she has had "concerns" with her weight and decided to write a blog about how women are often made to feel guilty about their appearance.

Says Emily: "I hate knowing that I cannot buy a bra on the high street because they won't fit, that Karen Millen and Zara have such narrow sizes and I really hate that any girl would go to a shop only to find that nothing fits her, and have to leave without anything except bad self-esteem.

"I've suffered the humiliation in high-street shops. The changing rooms are panic inducing, there's an assistant patronisingly telling the girl in the cubicle next door that they don't stock a bigger size. Often, and sadly, girls put on more weight than they intend to and then find it hard to lose. They comfort eat."

Emily, who works as a marketing consultant and has been dating singer Alex Andrew, has had to cope with the break-up of her parents' 21-year marriage - her father is now with former masseuse Phillipa Sage.

She adds: "We are also, a lot of us, unhappy. Rejection, heartbreak, loss, can all make a girl feel out of control. So what does she do? She tries to find some.

"But she can't control school or her parents or where she lives so she controls the one thing she can, what she puts into her body. Food."

★ Disappointing news for the band of goggle-eyed maidens who cling to his trouser legs but that prapric goat **Russell Brand** has decided to give up sex. Far from working himself up into a frenzy of fornication in the Jacuzzi at his new home in California, the grubby Brand, who turns 40 this week, has declared he has had "enough" women. "You can't carry on like I was for ever," admits the Leftie lothario whose conquests include *Jemima Khan*. But his vow of celibacy may not last. The toxic troubadour is taking his one-man show to Australia and leers: "I've had mad experiences there before; there's so many good-looking people there it's insane."

★ After a bit of a lull in her career, **Natalie Imbruglia** (right), who last had a hit with her cover version of Torn in 1997, is back in London and looking for action; preferably in the form of a man with whom she can make babies. "I definitely want children," declares Australian Natalie, 40. The trouble is that she reckons few men can match up to her fame (although a few household names have tried - she had romantic episodes with *Friends* actor David Schwimmer, *Coldplay*'s Chris Martin and even a date with Prince Harry). "I've had exes who have been very successful," she says. "Yet they told me that being 'Mr Imbruglia' was an issue for them." So she's on the prowl, gentlemen, and she's feeling bullish. "I want people to know I'm really proud to be 40," she asserts. "When you are in Hollywood and you say your age they shush you. I think that's disgusting."



Picture: FRAZER HARRISON/Getty

★ Congratulations to *Homeland* heart-throb **RAZA JAFFREY** and the actress **LARA PULVER** who have quietly married after first falling for each other three years ago.

Both have *Spooks* in common - lofty Lara played an MI5 agent in the TV series, as did Raza, which is where he met his first wife *Miranda Raison*. Southend-born Lara, 34, is best remembered for her nude scenes opposite *Benedict Cumberbatch* in *Sherlock*.

But no sooner have these two lovebirds returned from a honeymoon on the Pacific island of Bora Bora, than they're facing a year apart.

While Lara is busy taking her clothes off again, as a stripper in the West End musical *Gypsy*, Raza is in Los Angeles where he's in a medical drama, *Code Black*. "He'll be filming there until June 2016," says his agent.

★ Stirred, perhaps, by criticism of how little the public has seen of **Prince George**, William and Kate may allow him a Buckingham Palace balcony appearance after *Trooping the Colour* on June 13. Traditionally, the extended Royal Family, even the Kents and Gloucesters, join the Queen for the flypast in honour of her unofficial birthday.

William was allowed to join the other royals when he was almost two in 1984 and his mother was expecting Harry.

If Diana could cope with her mischievous son while poised to produce another, surely Kate can manage George?

★ At the Royal Bath and West Show, writer **Julian Fellowes** was treated to a vision of what his creation, *Downton Abbey*, might look like in 2015.

"It would now be a hotel, run by Lord Grantham with *Rocco Forté*," predicted a tweed suit from the Country Landowners Association. "There would be a woodchip boiler to provide electricity for the house, making it so warm *Lady Grantham* would swan around in a bikini."

Just imagine the reaction of Carson's eyebrows to that.

★ **Sir Michael Gambon** is relishing being Churchill twice, first in an ITV drama, then in a spy film called *Target Churchill*. And not just because playing the wartime PM is a great role.

"It will give me the opportunity to smoke on set," smiles the actor who, as his nicotine-stained fingers attest, likes to puff away on cigarettes and *Romeo y Julieta* cigars (Winston's favourite).

These Churchillian commitments will, however, necessitate absences from his two residences - one in Kent, where his long-suffering wife Anne lives, and his other in Chiswick where the amorous knight spends rather more time with his companion *Philippa Hart* and their two young sons Tom and Will.

When he does have time off Sir Michael, 74, will speed between the two women in his life in his black Audi R8, which the old devil calls his "dose of Teutonic Viagra".



★ After the success of the two *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* films, **Ronald Pickup** is waiting to hear whether there will be a third. If so, then Ronald, 74, who played an ageing lothario trying to recapture his youth, will be taking precautions to avoid the tummy troubles that beset some of the cast while filming in Rajasthan. He told me at the first night of *Jim Dale's* show at the *Vaudeville Theatre*: "I have two survival tips: Always brush your teeth with bottled water, and avoid salads."

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Pippa on hand for Clarkson

IN THESE testing times for Jeremy Clarkson, the priapic presenter can continue to rely on the comforting support, and sensitive touch, of his loyal travelling companion Phillipa Sage. Unfortunately Pippa, 43, was not by his side when the "food fracas" took place at a hotel in North Yorkshire, otherwise she might have been able to calm him down a

little. Now employed by Brand Events, the firm behind Top Gear, Pippa used to work as a masseuse, and her soothing fingers have frequently proved a blessing when Clarkson needs pacifying.

Jeremy, who will be 55 next month, remains close to the blonde, despite their on-off affair being said to have ended last year. They have been spotted enjoying a drink together in a pub in the Cotswolds village of Kingham, just six miles from the house he shares at weekends with his long-suffering wife Frances and their three children. During the week he lives in a flat in Chelsea.

The broadcaster has previously insisted he is still together with Frances, who has stuck by him despite his affair being exposed in 2011, when he admitted he had taken his mistress on a series of hotel breaks while his wife continued to manage his career.

Not long ago I noted that Clarkson and Pippa were entwined at another watering hole, this time in Warwickshire. My man finishing his pint at the Hollybush Inn in the village of Priors Marston reported that Clarkson was nibbling Pippa's ear.

The couple were then joined by the former Wham! singer Andrew Ridgeley who had a brief, unsuccessful career as a Formula 3 racing driver in the 1980s.

"A bizarre threesome," my observer drily noted, adding intriguingly that Clarkson had been looking at houses in the area. With his marriage, and his career with the BBC, stalling like a wheezing jalopy, is the old bruiser looking for a fresh start?



ON-OFF AFFAIR: Jeremy and Phillipa

★ **NOW** that bra boss **Michelle Mone** (inset) has got lots of emotional baggage off her chest, so to speak, via an autobiography which detailed her messy marriage break-up (such tasteful tales about scratching her hubby's Porsche and putting laxatives in his coffee!) she feels she is ready to entertain men again. "I've been dating, just a little," Michelle, 43, told me at her book launch party in Belgravia. "I feel I'm ready for a relationship again, now that I've dealt with all my issues." And boy,



were there issues for Miss Mone, who rose from a penniless childhood in Glasgow to become the Ultimo uplift queen.

Suffice to say that unlike her bras, her book didn't need much padding by the time she had recounted her weight battles, depression, skin cancer treatment, fights with her husband...

No matter, she's in a much better place now (literally, having just moved into a penthouse overlooking Tower Bridge). "I've done a lot of crying," she reflects, "but I think I'm the strongest I've ever been."



Picture: KEVIN WINTER/Getty

★ **WHILE** Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow are enjoying a civilised separation since they "consciously uncoupled" after 10 years of marriage, there has been a slight blip in the nascent relationship between the Coldplay singer and American star **JENNIFER LAWRENCE** (above).

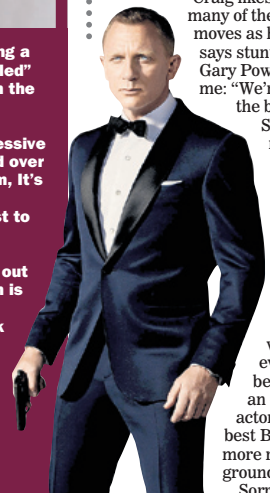
The Devon-born warbler, 37, has begun to show a possessive streak over Miss Lawrence, 24, and the pair have clashed over her acceptance of the lead part in a Steven Spielberg film, *It's What I Do: A Photographer's Life Of Love And War*.

The movie will involve Jennifer filming in the Middle East to depict the story of Lynsey Addario, a photojournalist who covered the lives of rape victims in war zones.

A source close to the pair says: "Chris tried to talk her out of it because it's a dark, harrowing role and he knows Jen is prone to getting very involved emotionally."

"For her research she's going to the Middle East to talk to women who've been raped as a weapon of war. It's a lot for her to take on and he's just very protective of her."

Never mind, I'm sure the soothing tones of Sherborne-educated Chris will help her through it. As Miss Lawrence has said previously of her admiration for British men: "They have these wonderful manners and everything they say is funnier just because of the accent."



★ **DAVID Cameron** will be thrilled to learn he has been endorsed by Madonna who, while admitting her knowledge of British politics is sketchy, declares her approval of the PM. Says Madge: "I had dinner with him and his wife once when Guy [her then husband, film director Guy Ritchie] was keen on meeting him. He came to our house; I liked him."

★ **SHOCK horror!** The lovely **Jenny Agutter** who plays a sensitive nun in *Call The Midwife* can be prone to road rage. Jenny, 62, who first found fame as a teenager in *The Railway Children*, admits: "I'm a very impatient person. Recently I started shouting at a bad driver. He wound down his window laughing and saying, 'It's Roberta from *The Railway Children!*' I drove away sheepishly."

★ **TO HELP** make up for the absence on Mother's Day of her son Tom Parker-Bowles (he flew to Australia yesterday to take part in a TV series on food) the **Duchess of Cornwall** received a thoughtful present from Prince Charles. He has given Camilla an \$895 silk-lined, cashmere dressing gown in dove grey from Johnstons of Elgin, a family-run wool mill from which he has previously bought cashmere jumpers for Prince George.

★ **AFTER** a delay while **Daniel Craig** recovered from a knee injury, director Sam Mendes is racing to get the next James Bond film, *Spectre*, finished in time for its release in November (although Roger Moore has quipped he's "available" to step in if needed).

Next week the crew moves from Rome to Mexico, where Craig will perform his most testing stunts yet, as he leaps between buildings during a huge crowd scene, for which 7,000 extras have been booked.

Craig likes to do as many of the dangerous moves as he's allowed, says stunt co-ordinator Gary Powell, who tells me: "We're pushing the boundaries in *Spectre* with more daring situations."

"Daniel has a strong will of his own but safety comes first. He's confident in his abilities which he has every right to be because he's an excellent actor. Daniel's my best Bond, he's more real, more grounded." Sorry Roger.

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Bond's brother, a fetish pin-up



LICENSED TO CHILL? Harry in gothic mode with partner Princess Sleaze

WHILE Daniel Craig is now the highest-paid James Bond in history, earning a record £39million for Spectre, his younger half-brother Harry is happy earning a pittance.

Harry, 24, serves in the bar at Chester Racecourse but until recently worked as a £15-an-hour model for "alternative" publications featuring nude and fetish images.

He has no desire to share the limelight with his brother, telling me: "I like to remain as private as I can and prefer to leave all the Bond stuff to him. I try to let Daniel talk for himself."

For two years the privately educated Harry sought assignments as a model, with his agency profile advertising him as "specialising in

gothic and horror but looking to add fetish, erotic and fantasy stuff."

Punk rocker Harry says of his modelling: "When I first started out doing it I didn't think I'd get very far but it's gone pretty well." He jokes: "My parents think I'm a freak and my brother thinks I'm a weirdo."

While Daniel lives with actress wife Rachel Weisz between London and New York, Harry has a girlfriend nicknamed Princess Sleaze (who shares his love of piercings and tattoos) and lives with his and Daniel's father Tim, a former publican, near Oswestry in Shropshire.

Over the festive season Harry will be earning extra cash by serving Cheshire's Orsom cheese on a stall at Chester Christmas market.



★ The temperature is hotting up between KATE MOSS and her young companion Count Nikolai Von Bismarck. Last week the two were wrapped up at London's Winter Wonderland but they've made plans to escape any more cold by renting a villa on the Caribbean island of Mustique.

With her four-year marriage to musician Jamie Hince in freefall, Miss Moss has been snuggling up with her Teutonic toyboy, who is 13 years her junior. Nikolai, the great-great-grandson of Prince Otto von Bismarck, the 19th-century Iron Chancellor of Prussia, has, conveniently, moved into the basement of her London home.

Kate, 41, was first introduced to Nikolai (below) by his mother, Countess Debonnaire von Bismarck, who



owns a fashion boutique in Knightsbridge.

Last month the pair holidayed in Turkey and now I learn they will be enjoying more sun together on Mustique after booking Toucan Hill, a Moorish-style hideaway with two infinity pools.

"Kate has got the place for a long booking, so they can fly in and out and use it when they want. She is planning to spend plenty of time with Nikolai. He's just the tonic she needs right now," discloses a friend, adding cryptically: "They've both got big appetites."

Looking at the svelte Kate, I don't think that necessarily means food.

★ Brian Blessed is no fan of exams and says he would ban them for young children. "The pressure the education system puts on our children is ridiculous. Exams stunt imagination and instil a sense of fear and inadequacy," booms Brian, who was at the St James's Fayre, in London's Piccadilly, sponsored by the Quintessentially Foundation.

So what's the actor's solution? "Let's have teachers with vision who fight against exams. I walked out of my 11-plus all those years ago but only after I'd covered the paper with drawings of dinosaurs."

★ Downton Abbey creator Julian Fellowes admits to a less than aristocratic tantrum at the dining table when he was growing up.

He recalls: "I once became so sick of the regimen that I stood up during dinner, snatched a vegetable dish and threw it against the wall, where it fell in pieces to the floor, followed by long, slow dollops of cabbage. For a moment there was complete silence and then my father started to make a low, rumbling noise which developed into the roar of a lion with toothache.

"So I fled the room, running through the house until he caught me in the hall, snatched up a riding crop and set about me."

Although Fellowes, 66, is not in favour of corporal punishment, he adds: "I have to concede that I never did anything of the sort again."

★ Karren Brady (right) considers herself to be a pragmatic woman not given to frumpieries but she does have a weakness... for scented candles.

"Why do I part with £25 upwards for a glass full of wax?" muses the Tory peeress. "The truth is I can't live in a house without them. One of the first things I do when I get home is light a candle, one that reflects my mood."

"Candles are like fresh cut flowers: beautiful to look at but not long-lasting. My husband can't fathom why I spend money on an object with such a fleeting life."



★ Sir Elton John's little boys are being encouraged to appreciate art from an early age. Zachary, four, and two-year-old Elijah live amid the huge collection of photographic works at the singer's pile near Windsor. "The children are surrounded by art. We have over 8,000 pieces collected from all over the world," Elton's hubby David Furnish told me at a Mayfair auction in aid of Boris Johnson's Mayor's Fund.

At least these esoteric exhibits are interspersed with more personal items. "There are also endless portraits of the boys round the house," added David, "all very nicely framed."

★ Christopher Biggins confesses that he has turned down Strictly Come Dancing several times... because he's too heavy. "They offer it to me nearly every year but I won't do it because I'd have to be partnered with a JCB digger and if I went down on my knees I would never get up again."

Picture: DAVE M BENNETT/Getty