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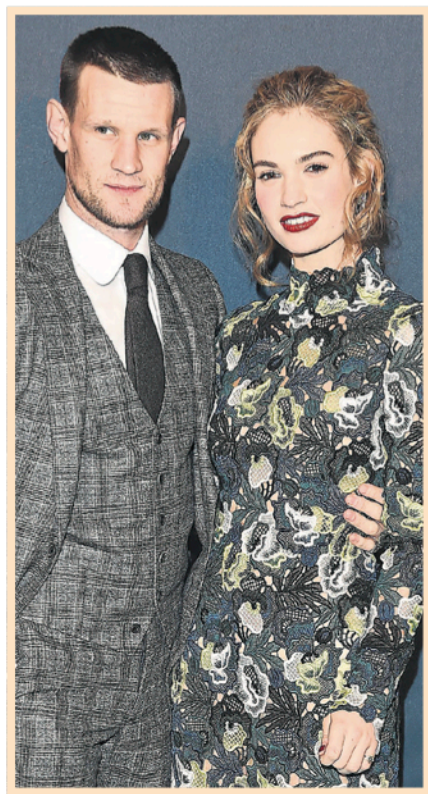
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Dashed royal hopes for dream reception

WHEN they announced their engagement, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle declared that they would be doing much of the wedding planning themselves. But the couple have already had to give way over a major detail: where their reception is to be held following the service at St George's Chapel.

I understand that the pair had suggested to courtiers they would like the party to be at Frogmore House, which is tucked away in Windsor Home Park and was the setting they chose for their engagement photographs.

The stately home, built in 1680, is set in 35 acres of beautiful gardens dotted with follies and a lake. It is just a mile away from Windsor Castle and is where the Queen often walks her corgis on Sundays.

It has special significance for the Royal Family, not only as a bolthole but as a burial ground. It is where



both Queen Victoria and Prince Albert have their graves, as do the Duke of Windsor and Wallis Simpson. The estate is off-limits to the public except for three days in June, when it opens for charity.

In 2008, the Queen gave permission for Peter Phillips to hold his reception at Frogmore after he married his Canadian bride Autumn Kelly (although he was later criticised for negotiating a £500,000 deal with a celebrity magazine which filled 60 pages with photographs of the royals and their families).

For Meghan, Frogmore has

already become a special place, as it is where she was taken by Harry for a romantic picnic during their courtship last summer.

But the couple's idea to use it for their reception has been gently vetoed by aides, who favour St George's Hall, next to the chapel at Windsor, as being a more suitable venue, both in size for the expected number of guests, and for ease of access after the service.

Says a senior royal source: "They would have loved Frogmore for the party, particularly Meghan who has called it 'dreamy', but they have been told St George's Hall is far more practical."

"One person who would have readily approved of their choice was the Queen, for whom Frogmore is a very special place."

"The Queen would also have loved the family to see what had been done at Frogmore: the house has just been renovated by a group of friends as a 70th wedding anniversary gift to her and Philip."



★ The lack of a Damehood for Petula Clark in the New Year honours list has prompted speculation among her fan club as to why the singer has once again been overlooked.

"The Queen doesn't like her... that's what I've always heard," says one admirer, while another posits a wacky conspiracy theory involving Princess Margaret's jealousy of the chemistry between the chanteuse and the princess's lover Roddy Llewellyn.

Whatever the reason, Petula's followers want recognition of her career, which goes back to the Second World War when, a child prodigy, she used to sing for the troops. She has sold some 70 million records, with hits such as *Downtown* and *Don't Sleep In The Subway*, and at 85 she is still touring.

A petition asking for Petula to be made a Dame was signed by thousands but came to nothing. When the subject was last raised, the Epsom-born star smiled: "Is there a reason to be made a Dame? It would be nice but honours really don't change your life." Quite so.

★ While many showbusiness unions buckle under the pressure of work commitments, the relationship between Lily James and Matt Smith is blossoming, despite the stellar couple being in such high demand professionally.

Former Doctor Who actor Matt, 35, first wowed his sonic screwdriver in Lily's direction at the Cannes Film Festival nearly three years ago and since then the couple have moved into a house in Primrose Hill, North London.

But their schedules have prevented them from sharing to many cosy evenings together. Matt has been abroad for the second series of *The Crown*, in which he plays Prince Philip, while Lily, 28, has spent the past few months in Croatia filming a sequel to *Mamma Mia!*

Friends of the pair wouldn't be at all surprised if there was an engagement soon, not least because Lily hinted that she was ready to settle down while being interviewed to promote the film *Darkest Hour*, in which she plays Churchill's wartime secretary.

"Oh yeah, definitely – a big one," she said when asked if she wanted a family. "I love children, I've always wanted to be a young mum."

★ Dame Vera Lynn, who will be 101 in March, still has excellent eyesight, enabling her to rediscover her favourite murder stories. "My sight is extremely good so I still read profitably," says the Forces Sweetheart. "Detective novels force you to think hard and puzzling things out is something I really enjoy. It's a bit like doing my knitting... if I go wrong, I have to work backwards to figure out what happened."

Dame Vera's favourite author remains Agatha Christie, closely followed by Colin Dexter, of whom she says: "Inspector Morse's irreverence makes me chuckle but it's the plots that really intrigue me."

★ Among Ringo Starr's lesser-known talents is knitting. It's a skill he picked up as a 13-year-old when he was stuck in hospital for two years after a bad cold turned to pleurisy.

"I learned to knit because you could do it in bed," says the newly knighted musician.

But he soon gave up the craft in favour of percussion when he was given a seven-inch snare drum, which he could also practise in bed – to the annoyance of other patients on his hospital ward in Liverpool.

★ Davina McCall is distracting herself from the pain of breaking up with her husband Matthew Robertson, with yet another exercise regime.

The 50-year-old presenter, who put aside her marital differences to spend Christmas Day with Matthew and their three children, has joined a class called Popteque near her home in Sussex.

She enthuses: "It's essentially like 'spin' but in the basement of the instructor's house. There's really loud music and we just go mad on our bikes for an hour, whooping away with neon lights flashing."

As for sticking to any New Year's resolutions, Davina declares: "I've spent my life giving up drink, drugs, sugar and goodness knows what else – so I don't want to give anything up. I just want to be 'me' and keep enjoying doing what I do."



★ Nigel Havers is comfortably off but he could have made a much more money had he been a bit more ambitious after his starring role in the hit 1981 film *Chariots Of Fire*, reflects the old smoothie.

"Over the years Chariots made me a million but it all went on three marriages and because I like to spend it. I'm a great believer in making money circulate."

"My accountant used to say to me, 'Can you please try to not spend it before you get it?' But I would spend it the day I got the job and then again when the cheque arrived."

The consummate charmer, 66, who began his career booking guests on Radio 2's *Jimmy Young Show*, admits he could have done more films had he been more aggressive but he sighs: "I'm just not ambitious enough. I'm a bit naughty – could never really be a boss."

"Anyway, does it matter if you become rich and famous or not? [I] had millions, it would just worry me. I'd just feel guilty about it. It would be a burden."

★ Alison Steadman can't bear to harm any living creature, from spiders (about which she wrote a book for children last year) or even the mice that invaded her unit room.

They nibbled their way through her new pair of Ugg boots, leading the sibling actress, 71, not to castigate the mice but to commend their good taste.

She says: "I have another pair of cheap boots I bought to trundle round the house in. They didn't touch them."

★ Janet Street-Porter is not planning any big changes to her lifestyle this year but aims to carry on her method of what she terms *Positive Ageing*: doing something new on a regular basis, no matter how small.

"I cook a new recipe once a week and I read a book by an author I've never heard of. If I find it hard going, I have no guilt about taking it to a charity shop or passing it to a friend."

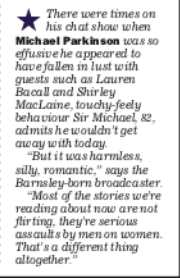
Adds the sprightly septuagenarian: "I'm used to sitting on my backside and ordering everything online. I go to a shop and talk to a person. And at any event, from a farmers' market to a jumble sale, I try to talk to someone younger than myself. They're going to tell me stuff I don't know."



★ There were times on his chat show when Michael Parkinson was so effusive he appeared to have fallen in lust with guests such as Lauren Bacall and Shirley MacLaine, touchy-feely behaviour Sir Michael, 82, admits he wouldn't get away with today.

"But it was harmless, silly, romantic," says the Barnsley-born broadcaster.

"Most of the stories were reading about now are not flirting, they're serious assaults by men on women. That's a different thing altogether."



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Picture: DAVID M BENETT/Getty

★ Ever since she was crowned queen of the Celebrity Jungle, **Georgia Toffolo** has been on a high – literally when it comes to her love life. The reality TV cutie is glowing after a romantic break in the Swiss mountains with a new beau, social jeweller Charles Goode.

Torquay-born Toff, 23, is also now being taken seriously by the Tory party, who see cruetier suits initially dismissed her offer of advice on using social media to attract younger voters (she has made a fortune as an “influencer” paid for her posts on Twitter and Instagram).

The idea that she could become some sort of poster girl for the Conservatives was rebuffed over concerns she was “too posh to win over Labour supporters”. But thanks to the PM’s reshuffle there are fresh faces at party HQ and last week Ben Bradley, the new vice-chairman for Youth, invited her to Westminster for talks.

As for her romance, Toff is relishing the attentions of Goode, 32, (who used to squire Chelsy Davy, Prince Harry’s ex). He whisked her to Verbier for a party held at the luxury chalet of Paddy McNally, who used to date Sarah Ferguson. When the going gets Toff...



My monogrammed sack was bulging with entries for the column’s annual quiz. There were many who had all the right answers but the first two to be drawn were: Sarah Beaumont, of Dover, and Grant Wesley from Derby. The champagne is on its way, you gossip-frenchie! Just make sure you raise a glass to this column’s wacky world of narcissistic actors, navel-revealing starlets and priapic politicians. This year I will continue the diabolists’ duty – to treat the frivolous things in life seriously and the serious things frivolously.

THE ANSWERS: January 1c, 2c, 3b, 4b; February 1b, 2c, 3b; March 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a; April 1a, 2b, 3a, 4b; May 1a, 2a, 3c, 4a; June 1a, 2c, 3a, 4b; July 1a, 2a, 3a, 4b; August 1b, 2c, 3b, 4b; September 1b, 2b, 3c, 4b; October 1c, 2b, 3a; November 1b, 2b, 3a, 4b; December 1c, 2b, 3b.

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Tyceon backs Bea's matchmaker role

AS PRINCESS BEATRICE continues to make her tentative way in the commercial world – she has changed jobs several times since leaving university – the Queen’s granddaughter can now count on the patronage of a powerful mentor.

Bea, 29, has formed an alliance with Jimmy Wales, founder of the online reference site Wikipedia, who is keen to encourage the Princess in her new role as a “business matchmaker”, introducing fledgling companies to potential financial backers.

When the Princess, who is seventh in line to the throne, visits the World Economic Forum in Davos later this month, she will be able to count on the support of Alabama-born Jimmy, 51, who now lives in London with his third wife Kate, Tony Blair’s former diary secretary. He launched Wikipedia in



TANGLED WEB: Beatrice and Jimmy Wales

2001 and the internet encyclopaedia has sprouted into a global community of contributors who have produced some 45 million articles.

A spokesman for Beatrice says of her connection with Jimmy: “They have known each other for a while, Beatrice knows a lot of people. They are business associates.”

The Princess, who is single after breaking up from Dave Clark, her boyfriend of 10 years, worked briefly at Sandbridge, a venture capital firm in New York and for Afiniti, which makes software for call centres.

Jimmy is known to enjoy the annual economic gathering in Davos, describing the three-day alpine jamboree as “excellent, expensive and remote. It’s fundamentally about improving the state of the world.”

★ Thanks to her role as Sister Juliette in *Call The Midwife*, **Jenny Agutter** is recognised more widely by the public now than at any time in her 50-year showbusiness career.

She was already a star as a teenager thanks to playing Roberta in *The Railway Children* (who can forget her cry of “Daddy! My Daddy!” as she ran towards her father on the station platform).

Of her fiancé, the Taunton-born actress muses: “I’ve never given up travelling on public transport and I never know whether people are looking at me because they recognise me or because I look peculiar.

“People say, ‘Can I take a picture of you?’ and you look like ****”, but you don’t want to say no because then that person is going to tell everybody else how awful you are.

“I try to look my best, although when you’re in the supermarket and someone stops you with the swedes in your hand, you can look rather startled. I look better in a wimple than I do in Tesco with my hair all over the place.”

★ As she settles back into *EastEnders*, **Tamzin Outhwaite** will have found *Albert Square* an even more diverse community than when she left the series 16 years ago. Not that it will have faced the actress, who has a liberal outlook towards immigrants, thanks to the attitude of her parents during her early life in an Essex semi.

“My mum [an Italian] used to take people in and there was a time when a woman who’d fled from Lebanon stayed. She was meant to come for a little bit, but she ended up staying for a year. They made her a room in the garage, which was weird and random, but at the time was quite normal.”

Adds Tamzin, 47: “My mum and dad were kind people. They weren’t going to let her have nowhere to go but I’m not sure she was their responsibility. We used to fight over the remote control with her because she only wanted to watch the news. These were the days when there was only one TV in the house.”

★ At last **Nancy De’Olio** is to share the secrets of her success with an eager world: the seasoned seductress is writing a book about her favourite subject – men.

The Italian firecracker has certainly had plenty of experience. She was married to lawyer Giancarlo Mazza before embarking on a 10-year relationship with the former England football manager Sven-Goran Eriksson. Other admirers included theatre director Sir Trevor Nunn.

All of these mesmerised males were older than Nancy, now 56. But last summer the simmering saucy couple disclosed a romance with Flavio Nappi, an Italian bank 23 years her junior, about whom she purred: “Flavio and I were thrown together under the Ibiza sun and we began a sensual relationship. I still don’t believe in making the first move. Rather, I let it be known I was interested with a few long, lingering looks... and he paid attention.”

That encounter has now run its course but Nancy is always game for other liaisons. As she tells me: “Women are complex. I like to have a few flirtations on the go, to keep all my options open.”

And as for her book on men, she believes that never have both sexes needed more guidance on relationships than now.

“The lines of communication between men and women have become blurred and confused. I think it’s time to clarify the basic rules of engagement.”

One of the many matters on her agenda is the British male’s perceived ineptitude at flirting. She observes: “Like so many Italians, I consider flirting a way of life, an added joy to the day, as pleasurable to a woman as a glass of chilled champagne.”

Who better to guide us all in the art of love?

★ If **Meghan Markle** wants ideas for her *hen party* she need look no further than *Party Pieces*, the company run by the Duchess of Cambridge’s parents, Michael and Carole Middleton.

For the perfect girls’ night it’s selling a “Kiss The Stud” game, which you play by “putting on a blindfold and trying to place a kiss at the corner of the poster of a hot male.”

A sort of adult version of pin the tail on the donkey.

★ “Have you noticed how these days, nobody dies?” observes **Oytes Brandreth**. “They ‘pass away’ or – worse – they simply ‘pass’, as if they can’t think of an answer on Mastermind.”

“When Robert Mugabe goes, for example, I don’t want the newsreader to tell me he has passed away. I want to hear that he had popped his clogs at last, or fallen off the perch.

“Or better still, to use the euphemism I once heard broadcast about the death of another dictator: ‘He has assumed room temperature.’”



★ Expectant mother **Zara Phillips** had to cancel her flight back to England yesterday after being struck down by a stomach bug at the end of a three-week break on Australia’s Gold Coast.

Zara, 36, who is with husband Mike Tindall and their daughter Mia, had to miss making a presentation at the Magic Millions race day, a horse racing festival of which she has been patron for the past five years.

It was this time last year that she suffered a miscarriage.

Tindall said his wife was “guttled” that she could not attend. “She is a warrior and really wanted to come but she was told she needs to stay at home.”

Mike has also been struck down with the bug after a morning playing golf. “When I look at food and I don’t want to eat it I know there is something wrong with me,” he said.

Mia, three, has so far escaped but Tindall said he expected she would be hit and he had decided to postpone their flight back home.



★ The lovely **Zoe Wanamaker**, who married actor Gawn Grammer when she was 43, believes getting hitched later in life has its bonuses. "You learn that nobody is perfect," says Zoe, 68, currently playing a downtrodden Yorkshire woman in ITV's *Girlfriends* and a fierce Celtic warrior queen in Sky's *Britannia*. "We've both had other lives and that can come back and hit you or you can actually be open and that's a joy. There's a great richness."
When she married Gawn, Zoe became stepmother to his two children by a previous marriage, which could have been tricky – they were teenagers then – but she adds: "You can't replace the parent, you only want to be their friend. I got lucky with them – they were generous and open."

★ In recognition of all the miles he's travelled by train, **Michael Palin** had a locomotive named after him by the Greater Anglia line, although so far he has yet to take a journey on it. "But I have travelled on the one named after Delia Smith," he says. "So I can say that I have sat on Delia Smith all the way to Lowestoft."

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★ **EMILY BLUNT**, who plays *Mary Poppins* in the forthcoming Disney sequel to the 1964 film classic, is a joy to work with, not least because of her wonderful sense of humour, says her chum, the actor **Benicio Del Toro**. (The Roehampton-born actress, 34, is also well-connected: her father is a wealthy barrister, uncle **Crispin** is a Tory MP and her grandfather **Peter** was an Army general). **Benicio**, 50, recounts the story of how, as an infant, Emily was at a royal party to which her grandpa had been invited. He says: "Emily thrust her decaying stuffed toy animal under the Queen Mum's nose 'for a good smell'."
Equipped with a polite response for every social circumstance, **HM** replied, "Oh yes, I see that he is very well loved."

★ **Tracey Crouch**, the MP who has been appointed Minister for Loneliness, would do well to heed **Sir David Attenborough's** thoughts on why so many people feel isolated.
Says the great man: "Two hundred years ago in your village it didn't matter who you were, everybody knew who your parents were, and they knew what you did and saw whether you were good, bad or indifferent and if you walked down the street they would react to you in some meaningful way."
"These days everything is depersonalised and that means people have been downgraded into reacting like hermits, and that's denouncing. What people need is to be recognised when they walk out of the door just by someone saying 'Good morning', and caring whether they fell over or didn't."

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Queen's dream for Zimbabwe to return

WHEN asked by a diplomat at a party what her hopes were for this year, the Queen replied, wishing not for world peace, nor even Zimbabwe will rejoin the Commonwealth.
happiness for her own family but "that Zimbabwe will rejoin the Commonwealth."
This group of former British colonies has long been an entity close to the monarch's heart, and she was known to be upset when Zimbabwe was suspended from the organisation in 2003 after its leader, Robert Mugabe, had ignored repeated pleas over human rights abuse.
Mugabe's despotic reign saw the mineral-rich country spiral into chaos, with many of its people reduced to poverty. His 37-year rule of persecution and bloodshed ended two months ago and his successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa, has promised a return to democracy, with elections this summer.
And in welcome news for the Queen, Mnangagwa has made encouraging comments about the Commonwealth and also hailed Brexit as an opportunity to forge closer links with the UK.
He said: "I'll be happy to deal with joining. I have nothing against the Commonwealth club." And he added: "Britain will need us and we will make sure we become very close to them."
The Zimbabwe government is also said to be planning a tribunal that will determine compensation for the hundreds of white farmers who lost their land under Mugabe's rule.
Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has said that Britain could take steps to stabilise Zimbabwe's wildly fluctuating currency but this depended on "democratic progress".



BEFORE THE BREAK: Mugabe during a state visit to London in 1994

★ **Sir Michael Caine** says life can be quite tricky when one is, as he puts it modestly, "very famous".
But the shrewd star, 84, has found his own way of avoiding all those pesky fans and selfie-seekers when he strolls around London.
"I love to walk four or five miles a day but when I'm on the streets, I want to disappear. So I wear all black, with sunglasses and a baseball hat. If you walk fast, no one will stop you."
Now we know how to spot the old darling.

★ **Griff Rhys Jones** has revealed that he's scared of shadows. "I'm very wary of them," says the comic actor, 64. "I can be working in the garden and then see a shadow out of the corner of my eye and think someone has sneaked up on me."
"Aagh! I'll cry with a start and then realise it's only a tree."
He adds with a chuckle: "I've always had a rather fanciful imagination – my friends think I'm a coward."

★ **What excites Jamie Dornan** about all the female attention he gets from his kinky performances in the *Fifty Shades Of Grey* films is not the admiration of his pert pectorals but the pride he takes in boosting the nation's fertility.
The Irish actor, 35, says he is often flattered by women for helping them to start a family. "A woman cornered me in a lift and told me she and her husband had trouble conceiving. Then they watched the first film and it all sort of clicked into place and they had a baby."
Jamie's role in smoothing the passage, so to speak, of conception will please his father **Jim**, who is an obstetrician, while his stepmother **Samina** is a gynaecologist.

★ **With another year gone**, and still no knighthood for **Nicholas Parsons**, his fans will be hoping the actor an entertainer may finally be successful next time, in the Queen's birthday honours.
The dear old thing is wary of jinxing the process by being thought too keen, whispering: "I'm not going to ask for it. I wouldn't dream of it. I push for jobs in my profession because I want to keep working. But I would never push for a knighthood."
Yet I suspect the 94-year-old smoothie may be rehearsing in case he soon receives the gentle tap of *Her Majesty's* sword on his shoulder.
"I have bought a special kneeler," he tells me. "I use it when I'm gardening. It makes it much easier getting up and down."

★ Thanks to her role as **Winston Churchill's** secretary in the film *Darkest Hour*, **Iily James** is now adept at touch-typing, a skill of which she is rather proud.
Miss James, 28, learned to use an old Imperial typewriter after instruction from a tutor at a Pitman secretarial training centre.
"I did six weeks of typing class with a great teacher," says the former *Downton Abbey* star. "I wanted to type properly so I could feel the same urgency to get it right as Churchill's secretary felt when he was giving her dictation."



★ After completing a mammoth tour of her one-woman show, **Jenny Eclair**, 57, has been reflecting on her audience's response.
"During the performance I have a section where the audience write down what really gets their goat on a piece of bunting. After hundreds of shows, I now have miles of bunting – and I can reveal that the 50-somethings' pet peeve, beating self-service tills and drivers who don't indicate, is the cardboard loo roll tube left on top of the cistern."
"There might be bigger performance in the world but when it comes to pushing us over the edge, sometimes it's just the little things."



★ Should the roles ever dry up for **Brenda Blethyn** she could always be a plumber. "I've done a lot of DIY in my time," says the 71-year-old actress, who is in her eighth series of playing the determined detective Vera on ITV.
"I've put up shelves, laid a floor, taken out a fireplace and plumbed in a toilet and basin." She learned the basics of plumbing by asking questions.
"I'm a bit like Vera in that respect, I bet she'd be capable of installing a loo. I wouldn't do it now, though. Not when I can avoid someone else to do it and I can criticise them."

★ **Rubie Coltrane** shudders at the idea he might be thought of as a national treasure for his many roles, including Hagrid in the *Harry Potter* films and the criminal psychologist *Cracker*. Not to mention a TV series actually – though ironically – called *National Treasure*.
"If they call you that it usually means that you've gone soft," scoffs the actor, 67. "You've lost your edge and I will never do anything challenging again. Despite my age I still like to be thought of as edgy and rude."

Sucking up to royals



Celia Imrie has mixed with plenty of big names during her career but the Guildford-born actress, 65, admits the only time she was starstruck was meeting Bill Clinton.

"I'd said in a magazine article that I'd love to meet him. Then a charity that had invited him to a fundraising evening called to ask if I'd like to come. I told him I thought he was much more handsome in real life, which I think he loved."

A happier result than when she was presented to a member of the Royal Family (she won't say who). "In the line-up we were issued not with hand gel, to shake hands, but a peppermint. Clearly it's some sort of royal protocol but I found it rather appalling."

★ **Ed Miliband** (remember him?) is not pleased that President Trump's visit to the UK may be going ahead this summer. He declares: "We should have the biggest protest that the country's ever seen to make clear what people think of him."

Adds the former Labour leader: "Theresa May made a terrible mistake [in inviting Trump] from the start. Because we were leaving the EU she decided that the right thing was to cosy up to him and buy his chlorinated chicken. That was the wrong strategy. Angela Merkel isn't falling over herself to welcome him to Berlin."



★ *The flourishing friendship which began amid the creepy-crawlies in I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!* could certainly prove rewarding for **Georgia Toffolo** and **Stanley Johnson**.

Stanley says his people have been deep in discussions with Toff's people over maximising the commercial possibilities of the pair's on-screen chemistry.

The septuagenarian smoothie tells me: "Toff is a truly delightful girl. Not least because she refers to me as being on the upper edge of middle

age. In the jungle nothing daunted her; she was constantly cheerful."

For her part, Georgia, 23, gushes that she is "utterly enamoured" by Stanley and is hoping for a lunch invitation to his house to meet Boris (an alluring prospect, albeit one not without risk, given the frisky nature of both father and son).

The first of the Stan 'n' Toff ventures may be presenting a current affairs show for ITV. "They think we're a natural TV duo," preens Stanley. "I have a really good feeling about it." So does his agent.

★ **Timothy Spall** is rather particular about the way he likes his cup of tea. "If I'm feeling particularly recherché, I'll mix two bags of Tetley and one bag of Earl Grey – strong enough to stand the spoon in," says the actor. "It's got to have that slight taste of old pennies about it. You know, when you've been messing around with change in your pockets and then accidentally taste your fingers? That's how I like my tea."



★ **Hugh Grant** likes to boast of his "bonding" with the Queen over one of the downsides of fame – being followed by photographers. The mercenary Grant, 57, who has a long history of skirmishes with the paparazzi, recounts a conversation he had with the Monarch about how she dealt with being constantly in the spotlight.

"I was introduced to the Queen at a party," says Hugh. "She was charming and I said 'I was a bit drunk – Do you ever get annoyed by paparazzi? Do you ever get tempted to whack them with your bag?' And she said, 'No, I don't, but don't tell Harry'."

"Because, of course, Prince Harry felt the same way as I do about paps and often used to want to give them a whack."

★ Why do some people relentlessly pursue fame, ponders **Lulu**, who has spent some 50 years in the public eye (she was 15 when she had her first hit with Shout)?

"The thing about fame is that it's not anything like you think it's going to be," muses the Glaswegian warbler.

"Having a bit of money can make life comfortable but it doesn't solve all your problems and it doesn't make you impervious to sadness."

"I was frightened of being famous and can still remember crying myself to sleep at night. That's why I'm shocked by how many kids tell me that they want to be 'famous'. Yeah, but what do you want to be famous for? And how hard are you prepared to work for it?"

★ *The cult of celebrity is getting out of hand, according to Ricky Gervais, who observes: "There's a new profession called 'being famous'. Soon we'll run out of doctors, because they all want to quit and be singers." The downside of the comic actor's own star status is that people believe he's richer than he is.*

"They think I've got billions so they try to catch you out by asking 'How much is a pint of milk?' I always say, 'I don't know, mate, but here's a grand. Go buy one – and keep the change.'"

★ Say what you like about **Jeffrey Archer** but at least the egotistical peer, 77, cares about good manners.

"I went on the London Underground a couple of days ago and there were two young boys sitting in a packed carriage. A pregnant woman got on and they remained seated. I actually wanted to throw them on the tracks. I got so angry with them."

"I was brought up by a mother who was very polite and I come from a family where you stand up when a lady comes into the room. My sons stare at me in disbelief when I still do it."

Adam Helliker

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Quote by **John Cleese**, who is getting more like the irascible Basil Fawlty as each day passes the 78: "Comedians often play the person they fear becoming."

Pictures: GETTY, IRE, WIREIMAGE



The model husband for a legal eagle

DAVID GANDY continues to be the highest-paid male supermodel, earning some £4million last year but is the handsome chap about to lose his status as the country's premier bachelor?

Since an on-off romance with singer Mollie King finally fizzled out two years ago, Gandy has been stepping out with lawyer Stephanie Mendoros, who has now moved her knickknacks into his Fulham home, leading to chatter among the couple's chums of impending matrimony.

Miss Mendoros is a criminal barrister, a contrast to David's work as a model, thrusting his nether regions before the eyes of admiring women and envious chaps, with his fine form looming out, wily-nilly from magazines and billboards. Besides modelling his own range of underwear for Marks & Spencer, his earnings now come from the endorsement of such products as Wellman vitamins. As he has observed: "Models are seen as brainless idiots, paid a fortune to do very little. I don't want to be known just as 'the man in the pants'."

Indeed Bilericav-born David, who will be 38 next month,

has now stepped back from modelling to run his business empire from home and to spend more time with Dora, a rescue dog who arrived shortly after Stephanie moved in.

"Having Dora is a big change; dogs are very grounding," he says. "Before, I was a way a lot. Now we have responsibilities and I'm ready to accept them."

There are limits though. He says that she (Dora, not Stephanie) is not allowed into his bedroom until 1am.

While Gandy avoids questions about impending wedding bells, he confirms that the couple are house-hunting in West Sussex so he can be near Goodwood, where he races his collection of classic cars. "I grew up in the country and Stephanie is from Yorkshire. The countryside is definitely where I see myself, surrounded by dogs," he says.



PECS APPEAL: Gandy in model mode and with Stephanie

★ Fans who relished **Suranne Jones's** role as the vengeful wife in *Doctor Foster* will be delighted to learn that the drama will be back for a third series, although not for at least another year.

Manchester-born Suranne, 39, is looking forward to reprising the role of the wronged GP Gemma, a character of whom she says: "Everyone knows someone like her, her life was obtainable yet aspirational – until it blew up."

"And we all know what it feels like to be in a room with an ex. All those thoughts you have, the uncomfortable feelings... of not being in a relationship yourself but your ex is."

Thankfully Suranne is herself settled with **Laurence Aikens** (pictured with her above), the editor of a photographic magazine, whom she married two years ago after a whirlwind romance.

Indeed shortly before meeting Laurence, Suranne had said in an interview that she was living alone with her Jack Russell, Baxter, and that she was still looking for Mr Right: "I don't want to be single for ever but I won't settle for second best."

Suranne's previous romance was with half-Italian plumber Lorenzo Glove. When he moved out of her house in Manchester she joked to one chum: "He never did fix the bathroom."

★ **Jilly Cooper** thinks that she would have had a raunchier time if she was a young woman now.

"If I'd known at 18 that I couldn't have children, I'd have enjoyed a far wilder time," sighs the saucy cop.

"With no Pill, my generation constantly panicked about getting pregnant. I would also remind myself to always splash cold water on my breasts after a hot bath. At 18, I read in a magazine this stopped them drooping. Even at 80, mine still point upwards."



★ Anyone fancy a job with lots of fresh air and a cosy cottage on the Queen's Highland estate? HM is seeking a gardener at Balmoral, where she wants a worker to tend the vegetable garden and the fruit cages (where there's a special type of late-flowering raspberry which is grown to be perfectly ripe for HM's summer break).

My man with the crested trowel says the ideal candidate will have to withstand the stern tutelage of **Prince Philip**, whose own horticultural projects have included the creation of a water garden at Balmoral.

"Philip may be getting on but he still takes a very keen interest; nothing gets past him. And he can be most forthright," he says with a wry smile.

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★ Fans of *Cold Feet* will be delighted to hear that filming is about to start on the eighth series. Not that one of the ITV show's stars, **Hermione Norris**, will be watching when it is done. "I find it incredibly hard to watch myself. It's why I've never seen any of the original series. All I know is I was there," says Hermione, 50. She will be filming *Cold Feet* in Manchester, returning at weekends to Bruton, the Somerset village where she lives with husband Simon Wheeler, whose father is General Sir Roger Wheeler, a former chief of the general staff and their son Will, 13, and daughter Hero, 10. Hermione has now learned to deal with being recognised, unlike after the first series in 1997 when she was still single. "I couldn't quite cope with the attention. When we weren't filming I'd disappear and go travelling. I went all over India and Asia. No one knew who I was, I didn't have a phone, I was completely away from it all and I loved it."



★ **Penny Smith** would like to see more opportunities for women over 50 on television and in life generally. Not surprising really, as the perky presenter is herself of a certain age (59). "I think there's an appetite in this country for older people of a little more experience doing pretty much anything," Penny told me at the *Costa Book Awards*. "It's a bit like how I approach B&Q. I love going into the store and asking the oldest person in there about how to fix something and they can actually tell me because they've done it themselves." Between her bouts of *DIY*, Penny has resolved to concentrate on writing another book. It's likely to be sensual – in her first novel she memorably described the effects on her heroine of using a self-pleasuring device called a *Rampant Rabbit*. Happily, Penny has her own rabbit in the form of actor **Vince Leigh**, who has long shared her duvet. She still feels passionate about Vince, especially his hirsute back. She purrs: "I love the way the hair goes up my nose when I rub against it."



Fame at a price for Whitehall

WHILE Jack Whitehall may be enjoying success as one of the country's foremost young comedians (he's on *Desert Island Discs* today and will host the Brit Awards later this month), fame has come at a price for his family. His mother Hilary says she was unprepared for the effect that Jack becoming a celebrity would have on their family, even though his father Michael moved in showbusiness circles, having been an agent for stars such as Judi Dench and Colin Firth. Mrs Whitehall, herself a former thespian, tells me: "It is fine for the person who wants to be famous but there should be a handbook about the effects of fame on the rest of the children. "For example Barnaby, who is the youngest (he's 25), finds it hard to know who actually wants to be his friend and who just wants to know him because he's Jack's brother." Jack has himself been responsible

for embarrassing his younger sister Molly, 28, who works in PR. Three years ago she was "mortified" to learn that while he was at a ceremony presenting an award to TV executive Paul Weiland, Jack had announced that Paul's son Max had "deflowered" his sister. However Jack's father Michael seems to positively bank in his son's fame and relishes his TV appearances with him. He admits: "I enjoy the occasions I'm recognised but I'm only famous because I'm Jack Whitehall's dad." Michael confirms that Jack, 29, who rose to fame in *Fresh Meat* and *Bad Education*, is "back on the market" after breaking up with his girlfriend of six years, Humans actress Gemma Chan, who has moved out of the comedian's Notting Hill home. Known as the posh boy of comedy, Jack admits to nurturing a passion for Pippa Middleton, who was two years above him at Marlborough College. He used to sneak off to watch her play hockey ("powerful thighs", he recalls fondly).



ALL IN THE FAMILY: Jack with showbusiness parents Hilary and Michael

I will be heard

I was sexually abused as a child. Sharing my experience will help protect children in the future. In the past, I was let down by organisations I trusted, who questioned and doubted me. That's why the Truth Project was set up. It's part of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, which aims to learn from the past, to help create a safer place for children. It was a difficult decision for me to get in touch, but I did some research and felt assured that whatever I shared, it would be in confidence and heard without judgement.

If you were sexually abused as a child, the Truth Project would like to hear from you. Because getting a better picture of the past will help build a safer place for children in the future. visit www.truthproject.org.uk call 0800 917 1000 weekdays from 9am to 5pm.



INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Adam Heliker

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Picture: TONY SV BACKGID

★ Any single males free to step out with **Emily Atack**? The alluring actress, 28, has broken up with her boyfriend and has tentatively begun to dip her dusty toe into the dating pool. For five years she went out with model Jack Vacher, who caught her eye when he was working in a bakery in her home town of Luton. But Emily, best-known as the busy Charlotte in *The Inbetweeners*, says they've parted amicably. She tells me: "When you are with someone for a long time it's hard not to be heartbroken. But we know we weren't right for each other now. So for the first time I'm going on dates."

So what is she looking for in a man? "Kindness and humour," she says firmly. And the future? "For me, being in love, getting married and having children are the most important things." As for her role in *The Inbetweeners*, she hopes there may be a third film but adds: "I'd forgotten how rude I was until I saw a repeat recently. I'm proud of the work but it's a relief when people recognise me as Emily rather than Charlotte Big Jugs."

★ A fond farewell to **John Bickersteth**, the former Bishop of Bath and Wells, who has died at 96. The Queen held him in high regard, appointing him to the rather arcane position of Clerk of the Closet. "It was he who defended her last year after Peter Morgan, writer of the Netflix series *The Crown*, declared his belief that the monarch was a woman of "limited intelligence" who would have preferred to spend her life in the countryside rather than dealing with matters of state. Bickersteth declared that the Queen's knowledge of the world was "unrivalled" because of the sheer extent of her travels and her access to people pre-eminent in their fields. "She has met so many millions of people and has known some of them really well."

One of his royal duties was, intriguingly, to vet the sovereign's reading material, although he said: "Actually she's not much of a reader as she doesn't have the time." Added Bickersteth: "The Bishop who confirmed me, incidentally. Her job must be so boring, she has to sign her signature endlessly."



★ **Barry Cryer**, who will be 83 next month, quite cheerfully admits he could die at any moment. Indeed, quips his chum **Gyles Brandreth**: "Barry says he doesn't like to commit to anything in case he might pop off. He won't even buy a green banana." Happily, Barry assures me once lunch at the *Oldie of the Year* awards that he intends to keep on cracking jokes to the end. And his favourite? "It's one I heard in 1955 and I've loved it ever since. A man was driving down a country lane and ran over a cockerel. He knocked on the farmhouse door and a woman answered. 'I appear to have killed your cockerel', he said. 'I'd like to replace it.' "Please your self", said the woman. 'The hens are round the back.'"

★ Hearing certain songs can make **Gerri Horner** dreamy about old boyfriends (and old Ginger Spice has certainly had a few). "Music is like perfume – you know when you smell a small and it reminds you of your ex? It is the same with a song," sighs the Watford-born chanteuse, 45. "I can suddenly transport you back to a time where you felt love for someone. Or something like that."



★ Here's a top tip for any women (or men, or transenders – we cover all bases here) wanting to get close to **Colin Firth**, just express an interest in Disney films. The much-admired Mr Darcy, 57, says he's a sucker for sentimental children's movies: "Dumbo gets me every time. The scene where he visits his mum who's locked in the cage and holds him in her trunk through the bars... I choke up and I'm a mess."

★ Former trade secretary **Peter Lilley**, 74, looks set to miss out on the peerage he may have been expecting following a *Channel 4* investigation that implicated him in a lobbying sting. Not that his wife Gail will be too concerned. When I asked her last year whether she was disappointed that Peter had not been automatically ennobled on stepping down after 34 years as an MP, she replied: "Not really. I would have become Lady Lilley, which sounds like a geisha girl."

★ **Joanna Lumley** can well remember the bad old days when actresses were routinely asked to bare all by unsavory producers. Says Miss Lumley, 71, who was a model for three years before she took up acting: "You had to take your top off. If you didn't, you were a fraud they would say you weren't serious about your profession. "So off came my bra. We had to. Diana Rigg did it, Julie Christie did it. If you were a glamour model you didn't wear much and were photographed by older gentlemen." A low point for Joanna was making a seedy "adult comedy" film called *Games That Lovers Play* in 1970. "It was about two brothels competing about who had the best tarts," she recalls with a shudder. "And of course I had to take my top off."

★ In a move that may not be met by a universal outpouring of grief, **Diane Abbott** has signalled that she may one day leave Westminster. "I don't want to be an MP for ever," declares Diane, 64. Indeed the former breakfast TV researcher is already dreaming of how she will utilise her considerable intellect outside politics. "My greatest regret is not learning to play the piano, so one day I'll do my grades."

I want to write novels too," says this forthright daughter of a Jamaican welder. Hopefully she will also find time for her memoirs. The lusty Diane has recalled her "finest half-hour" as being when she romped with a naked man in a Cotswolds field in the 1970s. At the time she was the lover of Jeremy Corbyn, who was known as the Sexpot Trot. Bet that's put you off your breakfast.



★ Mention of **Paul Nicholas** brings a warm blush to the cheeks of those ladies who fancied the smooth devil from his days as *Itihario* Vince in the TV series *Just Good Friends*. The 1980s show followed the tricky romance between Vince and girlfriend Penny (Jan Francis) whom he had previously jilted at the altar. Even before the series made him a household name, the actor already had a faithful following as a singer, with hits such as *Dancing With The Captain* and *Grandma's Party*. Now 73 and with 12 grandchildren, he is still working and stars in the Ronald Harwood play *Quartet*, which is on a nine-week regional tour, starting this Thursday at the Victoria Theatre in Cheltenham. So, I ask Paul, does he expect a gaggle of ladies of a certain age besieging the stage door? "I'm hoping," he chuckles, adding: "Actually I do have one fan, who is not quite a stalker, but she's very persistent. The ladies who follow me these days tend not to run. I have to slow my pace too so they can catch me!"



HOT COUPLE: Blanc and Natalia

★ According to a survey on romance, men are twice as likely to propose on Valentine's Day, so could this be the time **Raymond Blanc** leaves his stove for just a moment to pop the question to his girlfriend, **Natalia Traxel**? Otherwise might this willowy Russian very well go off the boil?

The answer, apparently, is no. Although Miss Traxel is sharing a house with the twinkly-eyed chef near his Oxfordshire hot d, Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons, and was once very keen to become Mrs Blanc, a wedding is not on the menu. The Michelin-starred monsieur feels that, at 68, he has "done" marriage, having tried it twice before.

Although Ray and may no longer be keen on matrimony, romance is in his Gallic genes. The gourmand wooed Natalia by calling

her and saying things like: "I have to see you now, I found a beautiful leaf on the Champs-Élysées and I want to give it to you" ("passez le sac à vomir – pass the sick bag, Ed). No wonder he was once so keen: Natalia, 45, has brains as well as beauty, she qualified as a doctor in Germany and now helps run Raymond's cookery school while he is busy expanding his empire – he plans to open 24 pubs and restaurants over the next five years.

She certainly knows how to keep Blanc's ego in check. As she says: "I turned down Silvio Berlusconi three times when I lived next door to him. You can still mention the name Berlusconi and everyone knows who he is but when you mention Raymond Blanc nobody knows him."

"I remind Raymond of this – when he gets too big for his boots."

Picture: DAVE BENNETT/Getty



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Meghan on her way to be a model citizen



TESTING TIME: But Meghan passed

WHEN Meghan Markle began her romance with Prince Harry she faced the test of being accepted by both the Royal Family and the public. Then, after her engagement it was announced by Kensington Palace that Meghan, who was born in Los Angeles, would be "compliant with immigration requirements at all times" as she began the process of applying for British citizenship.

While studying for her test it would, of course, have been handy for Meghan to have the benefit of Harry's knowledge to guide her through the history of her adopted country.

Not least because so many of the

questions are related to the Royal Family. Such as: How old was Mary Stuart when she became Queen of Scotland? (answer: six days) and What was the symbol of the House of Tudor? (a rose). Or Who became King when Queen Anne died in 1714? (George II).

This wasn't the first time Meghan has been tested on her credentials. In 2016, while on a visit to London promoting her TV series *Suits*, she was filmed answering a quiz about Britishness.

She was flummoxed by the questions, which included whether Hoptimus Prime or Fursty Ferret were genuine names of real ales, or whether Sandy Balls or Crotch Crescent were real British place names.

(They all are.)

Where does the Queen find all that energy of 91? Maybe it's down to the sugar-rush she gets from chocolate. As her former chef Darren McGrady notes: "Her Majesty is a chocoholic – she loves it but only dark, not milk."

Indeed, each year Cadbury's makes boxes of a special "royal recipe" at its factory in Bournville to send to the munching monarch. It contains more cocoa solids than others and is not available to the public.

But the nibbles that really get the sovereign salivating are *Benidicks Bittermints*. "They're her real favourite for snacking," discloses Darren.

★ The creators of *Big Brother* are looking for bluebloods to take part in a reality series being made for MTV called *The Royal Show*. "It will follow some of the most privileged young people in the country, a sort of *regal Made In Chelsea*," says a TV source. Sounds like the perfect opportunity for *Beatrice and Eugenie*. But then Channel 4's *The Windsors* has already caricatured this career-challenged pair of princesses perfectly.

★ **Debbie McGee** is tickled to bits with all the attention she has been getting since she gets from chocolate. As her former chef Darren McGrady notes: "Her Majesty is a chocoholic – she loves it but only dark, not milk."

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But the nibbles that really get the sovereign salivating are *Benidicks Bittermints*. "They're her real favourite for snacking," discloses Darren.



★ In-between wedding her scalpel on yet another inert body on Silent Witness, the forensic pathologist Dr Nikki Alexander has, at last, enjoyed a satisfying canoodle with an American diplomat.

Which is more than can be said of **Emilia Fox**, who will not be exactly suffused with romance this Valentine's Day. She remains single following the end of her tricky time with the mercurial Marco Pierre White.

The actress, 43, is sanguine about the duvet at her London home remaining untrilled by a lover, while acknowledging that, like Nikki, she is ready for another relationship.

She says: "When the time is right for someone else to be in my life it will happen. I'd definitely like a significant other."

As for how she will meet someone, she shudders at the prospect of internet dating. "And I've never been on a blind date. My friends would never set me up on one – I'm very shy!"

Prospective suitors would have to be vetted by her daughter Rose, seven, and adjust to Emilia's domestic routines.

"I'm weirdly obsessed with cleaning products and vintage furniture," she says. "I find painting the garden furniture is so satisfying."



★ **Gary Oldman**, who will turn 60 next month, is feeling his age. Hot favourite to win an Oscar for his Churchillian performance in *Darkest Hour*, the South London-born actor says: "The eyes are starting to go and the knees are a little dodgy. I'm like those old men sounds when I get up from chairs – my wife asks me if I'm all right and I say 'yep, I'm just standing up'."



★ **Veteran politician Shirley Williams**, 87, sees much to be positive about in growing old. "One of the best things is that young people are far nicer to you than they used to be," muses the co-founder of the SDP.

"I travel almost entirely by public transport and what amazes me is that I don't need to stand for more than one minute without somebody saying "Can I carry your suitcase? And they also talk to you; they don't dismiss you. They used to but they don't now."

★ Asked what she felt she had achieved so far this year, **Clare Balding** says: "I have re-organised my socks so that all my different socks are in shoe boxes. Sports socks are in one, walking socks in another, thin black ones and so on. It's given me so much pleasure not to have to search for the right pair or the random odd one."

★ **Nigella Laws** on is tech-savvy, with hundreds of followers on social media, but she declines to read what's written about her online, describing much of it as "sanctioned unkindness." "I prefer not to get involved with all of that stuff," she declares loftily. "I don't let it taint me because it makes things difficult and life is already full of complications. I like the quote 'what other people think of you is none of your business.'"

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★ Former Strictly Come Dancing judge **Arlene Phillips** has chatted openly to me about the sexual harassment she suffered during her career as a dancer.

Arlene became a household name in British dance troupe *Hot Gossip*, which she formed and choreographed in 1974. The female-led group were regulars on the *Kenny Everett Video Show*.

Arlene, now 74, who was dropped from Strictly's judging panel in 2009, blames parents and teachers for not helping women stand up for themselves.

She reveals: "Men put their hands all over me in the 60s and 70s. We need to teach our girls strength."

"Parents were not saying to girls to stand on your feet, don't let anyone touch you. Don't let anyone take advantage of you."

The mother-of-two adds: "I was in a girls' grammar school and we were humiliated. The way we were treated by the teachers, it's no wonder you don't stand up for yourself. Education at the time was everything. I don't approve of it was, 'Sit down, sit straight, exams', you were not given any strength or power."

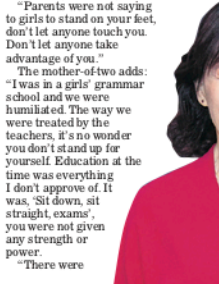
"There were

people who would come up to you as a dancer and put their hands all over you. It was probably politically incorrect but the reason I started *Hot Gossip* was the fact that I was 5ft 6in, had a strong body and I didn't get TV gigs because it was always 5ft 6in blondes. I was picked by the dancers but not the producers. No wonder people like me felt we were lacking in something."

"I was short, strong, feisty, didn't have long skinny legs, a high bum and big breasts. When we started *Hot Gossip* it was to throw out that image. It was saying, 'Be sexy on your own terms. Be wild, be sexy, tease those men then walk away.'"

Arlene now thinks there's scope to revive *Hot Gossip* using its original stars. And she points to mature women such as Debbie McGee, 59, who recently made her mark in *Strictly Come Dancing*, as great mature role models.

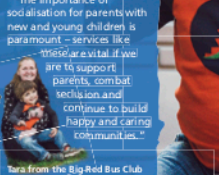
"You should see *Hot Gossip* now. I'm hot, Debbie McGee's hot. Let's lead by example," says the choreographer who has created videos for pop royalty from Sir Elton John to Tina Turner.



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★ **Dame Esther Rantzen** is celebrating more than 50 years in broadcasting with a number of *UK* live shows, with her presenter and journalist daughter Rebecca Wilcox in the interviewer's chair.

But Esther won't let Rebecca, 38, delve into her taboo topics... "I've told her she is banned from asking me about two subjects," Esther, 77, informs me. "Sex and Brexit aren't allowed but she can ask me about anything else."

★ One female actor who will be wearing black to tonight's Bafta ceremony is Australian actress **MARGOT ROBBIE**.

Movie stars have been urged to ditch colour at the awards to show solidarity with victims of sexual abuse in the film industry.

Speaking at the premiere of her new film *I, Tonya*, Margot, 27, said: "Wearing black is an amazing show of solidarity. It's nice to have the focus on bigger issues rather than fashion. It's nice to find a bit of perspective and put our priorities in order sometimes."

She turned 67 on Thursday but **Jane Seymour** says she won't be slowing down any time soon.

She has a new role in US sitcom *Let's Get Physical* in which she stars as Janet Force, the matriarch of a once-mighty fitness dynasty established by her late husband.

Asked retirement was a consideration Jane says: "No, not a hope in hell. I'm always moving forward. I've got a bunch of movies waiting to come out and I am producing as well."

The former Bond girl adds: "I never think of numbers in terms of the age. I just think what can I do today that will be fun, that I can make happen? So I am not counting anything else."

★ **Great British Bake Off** winner **Candice Brown** has revealed she will be recruiting her former *Dancing On Ice* partner Matt Evers and her two dogs to be part of her wedding day.

Candice, 33, who won *Bake Off* in 2016, is to marry tree surgeon Liam Macavay later this year and her professional partner on the ITV series will play a key role.

"I am going to show Matt the dresses and Liam asked him to be an usher."

But she fears her dogs, Pomeranian Sybil and pug Dennis, may not be so well behaved.

"The dogs will have a part for sure but I can't promise that Dennis won't eat the ring or Sybil won't leg it."



★ **He is one of the world's most celebrated actors, with credits on stage, screen and TV. So it might come as a surprise that Star Trek and X-Men star Sir Patrick Stewart says he is happy to just be "raincoat dressing".**

The multi-award-winning actor is thrilled to be the arm candy of his talented songstress wife Sunny Ozell.

Sir Patrick, 77, and third wife, Sunny, 39, were attending the UK Americana music act at a concert in London when he said: "I am just here for window dressing. Sunny provides that role so when in our life, it gives me a lot of pleasure to be simply tagging along."

While the plans for a *Downton Abbey* film are still to be finalised **TV** newsman and friend of the stars **Alastair Stewart** explained the dilemma being faced by the writer who brought the characters and the dazzling Highclere Castle setting to the world's small screens.

Keen smoker Alastair was on hand at the official start and finish line for Rehab's Parliamentary Pancake Race, held with more of a drizzle of rain than drizzle of lemon on Shrove Tuesday in Westminster's Victoria Tower Garden. The charity fundraising toss saw a generous serving of MPs - as well as Anthony St John, 2nd Baron St John of Bletso - left battered by their opponents, a tough team of media executives. Alastair, 65, announced:

Adam Helliker

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Joanna promises a truly fab Bafta bash



BRIGHT NIGHT: Joanna won't be in black

HOWBUSINESS veteran Joanna Lumley has vowed to put some fun into tonight's Bafta Awards by ditching the political rantings that have dogged US gong ceremonies.

The Absolutely Fabulous star says she refuses to jump on the Hollywood handwagon by wearing black, cracking jokes about President Trump or launching into a heated diatribe over the Harvey Weinstein sex scandal.

Joanna, who turns 72 in May, says: "I'm not really going to do any heavy political commentary. For people who do come up and have something to say, it's absolutely up to them."

"It's their night, not mine. My part is to be quite dignified but if everyone else wants to put their pants

on their head and scream, that's fine by me.

"But I'm not a stand-up comic. I'm not a satirist. I'm not a political commentator. People know me because I've been banging around the block for 100 years, so why would I be someone completely different?"

Stars at US awards shows, including the Grammys and Golden Globes, have been wearing black in support of the #MeToo movement, which backs victims of sexual harassment in the entertainment world and other industries.

However, Joanna says she will not wear black.

"I don't think so. But let's put it like this: I won't be wearing shocking pink. I want to look like a dignified host. But I do think I'm going to look pretty fab, not showy," reveals

the activist and former model. And she aims to keep anything she does say short and sweet after a pep talk from her predecessor, Stephen Fry.

Joanna reveals: "He said something terribly funny but very true; nobody has ever complained that an awards ceremony is too short."

"He also told me to remember that our job is to host. We're not the main entertainment. We're the silken strands that join people together."

Asked about her Ab Fab alter ego, she added: "Well, I know I won't be allowed a glass of Bollo onstage but sometimes Patsy creeps through."

"She doesn't mean to but sometimes she just has to have a word. I'll try to keep her under control for the night."

"I'll just do my best to be a mad and make everyone welcome."

★ **Muse rocker Matt Bellamy** said backstage at the NME Awards that he had a particularly racy education in what makes a woman a tick.

The British singer, who has dated some of the world's most beautiful women (including actor Kate Hudson, with whom he has a son, Bing) said he honed his romantic skills by watching the TV show *Sex And The City*.

"I watched the whole lot and I learned everything I know about women from that show," he told me.

★ **Sex And The City** inspired the beams on the antics of four women living in New York.

Let's hope that Matt, 39, learned enough to impress his latest muse, US model **Elle Evans**, 28 (pictured).

"I've run the race twice so it's a badge of honour to be at the starter line... I smoke, I'm in my sixties so I am not naturally in training for it but it's excellent, in current climates where people are so divided over politics, to bury all that and do something for Rehab."

He also spoke a little about the predicament of his friend, *Downton Abbey* writer Julian Fellowes.

"The real challenge for Julian and the producers will be 'when do you see it?' Do you rerun as per the television series and start back at the sinking of the Titanic or do you go to the war?"

"I am 99.9 per cent sure the film will go ahead and it will be 95 minutes of absolute genius, and I will be at the front of the queue to see it."



★ Being a celebrity isn't always glamorous. **Dakota Blue Richards**, 23, who plays WPC Shirley Temple in ITV's *Endeavour*, found wearing the replica 1960s police uniforms very uncomfortable.

"The clothes are hot, they are heavy and I can't really move my arms," she laughed.

At least they're more practical than the tight-fitting outfits some TV detectives used to wear, such as the leather-clad glamourpuss Diana Rigg in *The Avengers*.



★ Queen guitarist **Brian May** has well and truly left the rock 'n' roll lifestyle behind.

The impressively buffoned rocker says: "These days, I watch what I eat, exercise for an hour every morning, hot and cold shower, and finish off with a bit of meditation. I'm finally paying attention to my body."

"I sometimes look back at the amazing things I did and wonder if I really enjoyed it as much as I should have. Did I miss out on years' worth of fun?"

"I'm 70 and I'm busier than I have been in a long, long time. I still have the hunger, the desire to create and investigate. To get out there and experience beauty. The immense beauty that's all around us."

Queen were well-known in the industry for their outrageous shindigs. One urban myth involves a lunch party in New Orleans in 1978 which reportedly featured nude waiters and waitresses, and dwarves with trays of cocaine on their heads.



Edited by JULIA KUTTNER

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★ **Sir Paul McCartney** is making another album, which means the former Beatle is likely to be planning another world tour to promote its release later this year. As with all his performances there will be a vegetarian-only policy for the backstage caterers. Sir Paul, 75, also has anything with animal fur, either real or fake, from his dressing room, and travels only in limousines without leather seats. He says: "We provide wholesome, meat-free food. It's a style of life that I like and it's always done me good. And a bunch of animals good too."

★ **Tradition dictated that Prince Michael of Kent** packed off his offspring, Lord Frederick and Lady Gabriella Windsor, to board at prep schools before they continued their education (Eton for Freddie, Downe House for Ella). But their Czech-born mother Marie Christine, now 73, was unenthusiastic about the English upper-class custom of dispatching children at the age of eight. "No mother likes her babies going to school for the first time, because you miss them," sighs Princess Michael. "It's a terrible thing for a mother to have to send her child to boarding school. But that's the way it is - so you shut it out and think of the next time they're coming home."



UNIFORMLY HAPPY: Vanessa and Callum met while filming post-war drama Queen & Country

★ **Vanessa Kirby** was quick to dismiss showbiz chatter that she was being secretly wooed by Tom Cruise while the two were filming in London for Mission: Impossible 6. Indeed the Wimbledon-born actress, 29, who plays Princess Margaret in The Crown, is at pains to point out that she has had a steady boyfriend for two years. "He's the best thing ever, he makes me so happy," she says dreamily, while steadfastly refusing to name the lucky chap. In fact, he is Callum Turner, a former Next model who took up acting and met Vanessa while both were working on John Boorman's film Queen & Country. Happily Callum, 28, shares with Vanessa an "obsession" for movies, which he has said stretches back to watching childhood favourites such as Free Willy over and over again with his mother, a single parent, who brought him up in a west London council flat.

★ **Fern Britton** is fond of her food (handily she's married to chef Phil Vickery) and is thrilled with her latest snack combinations. "I've recently discovered two!" squeals the perky TV presenter, 60. "One is a banana and Branston pickle sandwich, and the other is avocado omelette with mint jelly - eaten straight from the avocado shell."

★ **What does Ruby Wax most like to do outdoors?** "I'm a great water-skier. It's like flying but without leaving the ground. I was going to do it professionally but my mother said there was no future in it!"

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Picture: WIREIMAGE

★ It has often been whispered that **Kirstie Ailsopp** and **Phil Spencer** are so close that they must be canoodling off-camera. They even bicker like a married couple on their TV property shows. And just like a grumpy hubby, Phil, 48, moans that Kirstie, 46, drives him mad because she can't recall what she has said. "She doesn't have a censor button and just says it how she sees it." But a while later you'll go back and say she said or felt that and she totally denies it," huffs Phil, a former head boy at Uppingham School. As for any hint of a romance, he says, rather ungallantly, that he's not attracted to Kirstie physically. "My wife is very tall, slim and blonde and Kirstie is the polar opposite."



CLOSE: Phil and Kirstie are just friends



★ **Probably just as well** that actor **Max Irons** never got involved with **Mario Testino**, the photographer who is now facing a string of allegations of sexual misbehaviour. Max, 32, son of Jeremy Irons and Sinead Cusack, recalls: "I was walking with my girlfriend and we were having an argument. Then a big SUV pulled up and this guy got out and said I'm a photographer. I'd like you to come and work with me. I just assumed it was a massive creep. He drove off and I was bemused. Then my girlfriend said 'That was Mario Testino!'"



★ Any prospect of late-blooming love gets short shrift from **Sherrie Hewson**, who claims to be immune to romance thanks to the emotional end of her 28-year marriage. "It's too late for all that," sighs Sherrie, 67, who plays hotel manager Joyce Temple-Savage in the TV sitcom Benidorm. "What happened has made me quite insular. Nobody is coming near me ever again, except my family."

★ As she approaches her 50th birthday later this year, **Kate Humble** has dismissed the prospect of any cosmetic enhancement to deal with the wrinkles that have been advancing on her visage. "More of them seem to pop up every day," muses the wildlife presenter. "I wondered whether I should have surgery because you start asking yourself, 'Is anybody going to want to watch this face?'" "But I know so many people who've had terrible health problems through no fault of their own, so I tell myself, 'You've stayed healthy and happy, so if your eyes are sagging a bit - just live with it.'" "These days I don't get so screwed up about what people think; I'm so much more comfortable in my skin."



★ **Not long to go now** before the next series of Poldark, and admirers of one of its pulchritudinous stars, **Gabriella Wilde**, will be gratified to learn that the blonde actor will have more time on screen as she develops her role of heiress Caroline Penvenen. Gabriella is giving little away about what happens to Caroline (who in the last series married Dr Dwight Enys) although she discloses: "Things get quite heavy for her. She goes through moments of being frightened and vulnerable."



★ **David Tennant** can now afford the finest tailoring but when he first began his career he relied on charity shops for clothes. The former Doctor Who, 46, recalls that one of his best purchases was a boatac tie bought "probably to emulate Bono or Jim Kerr" which he wore with a bolero jacket. His eclectic acquisitions made him stand out from the crowd a little too much. He remembers being at a nightclub in Scotland "among a sea of shell suits" when he was smacked in the face. "Just for being a little bit dapper."

Angela fixes a royal treat



SURPRISE: The Queen with Anna Wintour and, right, Angela Kelly

WHO persuaded the Queen to make that surprise visit to London Fashion Week? Step forward her chief dresser, Angela Kelly, also perched in the front row, one seat away from the monarch. It was Miss Kelly who first raised the prospect of the Queen making the visit in talks with Caroline Rush, the chief executive of the British Fashion Council. If anyone can sway the sovereign it's Angela, who has formed a bond with HM that goes well beyond advising - and designing - what she wears. Indeed Liverpoolian divorcee Angela, 65, is often referred to as the Queen's gatekeeper. She has been rewarded for her loyalty with a cottage in the grounds of Windsor Castle (where the Queen often pops in for tea) and in her only interview she said of her royal boss: "I would never overstep the mark but she has allowed me to become closer to her over the years... She has a wicked sense of humour and she can do all accents, including mine."

But Angela acknowledges that she has made enemies at the Palace, where others are jealous of her influence. She says: "I know people make up all sorts of stories about me. I don't have room for any more knives in my back."

★ **Lesley Manville** worries that today's young actors spend too much time wanting to become celebrities. The Brighton-born actor, 61, who was married to Gary Oldman and has been Oscar-nominated for the Daniel Day-Lewis film Phantom Thread, is proud of the fact that while her face is recognisable she's not a household name. "People don't know my name and I like anonymity but that's good because I want them to see the characters I play," she says. "Young actors seem to think they need to be famous as themselves - and that's not going to be helpful to them." "I pity them, the pressure is on to self-promote, to get on Instagram and Twitter or get on the front cover of this or that. They've forgotten that what it's all about is, very simply, the work."



Starring in alphabetical order
MICHAEL BALL
ALEXANDRA BURKE
MURRAY HEAD
TIM HOWAR
CASSIDY JANSON

CHESS
 Benny Andersson • Tim Rice • Björn Ulvåus
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★ **Julie Walters** feels in pretty good condition, having just turned 68, although the Birmingham-born treasure admits to an unhealthy relationship with sugar. "I stayed in a lovely hotel when we were filming *Paddington 2* and each evening there would be four chocolate bars in the fridge. And I'd eat every single one of them. Eventually, I had to ask them to stop leaving them there because I knew I'd just eat them all."



★ In his new sitcom, *Hold The Sunset*, **John Cleese** is taking his time to seal the romantic deal with Alison Steadman. In real life Cleese has not been so slow when it comes to rumpling the drapes of women he has pursued between his four marriages. A lady of my acquaintance who used to canoe with the tortured beanpole at his Kensington home recalls that his snores "felt as if the Earth itself was moving... and not in a good way". She also remembers his other nocturnal habit: head banging. "At peak moments of passion he got so excited he used to bash his head on the wall," she giggles. "One time he went straight through the plaster."

★ The other day **Jamie Oliver**, 42, sat next to a young boy on a plane who talked to him about being dyslexic. "I explained how you can overcome certain things," says the chef, who left school at 16 with GCSEs in art and geology. "I said 'Look, dude, I used to have a dictaphone and I used to read all my recipes into it. And then I'd give the cassette to a secretary and she would type it up.' And he asks me 'What's a dictaphone? What's a cassette?' I felt so old."

Picture: PHILIP MASSEY/Getty



★ Having adjusted to newly single life, **VICTORIA SMURFIT** is ready to try dating again. Potential suitors may wish to know that Victoria, who is currently in the ITV series *Marcella*, comes from one of Ireland's wealthiest families – her uncle is packing in billions as Sir Michael Smurfit. Vicky, 43, says her last relationship, with film-maker Alistair Ramsden, came to "a natural conclusion," but that the pair have remained friends. Adds the former *Ballykissangel* star, who has three children by her ex-husband Doug Baxter: "I could write a book on how to stay friends with your exes. I'm brilliant at it." Would-be boyfriends should also be aware that Miss Smurfit is very proud of her double-jointed elbows. She boasts: "Not only can I twist my elbow inside out but it means when I'm driving in a hot country I can get a tan on the inside of my arms." Such talent!

★ If **Tom Watson** returns the £540,000 that tainted tycoon Max Mosley paid towards the running of his Commons office, it will not be the only big thing the deputy Labour leader has lost. Well-padded Watson, 37, has shed fat by following a low-calorie diet. Avoiding doughnuts has been a tall order for a chap who is so fond of his tucker. But maybe better than being whipped into shape by strict disciplinary Max.

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Lady C hits out over Diana plays clash



INCENSED: Campbell

AN OLD rivalry has been revived between the two authors who claim to have been the first to publish the most revealing biographies of the Princess of Wales. This time their differences are over plays not books but the subject of contention is once again Diana.

Lady Colin Campbell, whose book *Diana In Private* was based on secret conversations with the Princess, has written a play including some of what she says are "very sensitive matters" which were not included in her 1992 book. But she has been incensed to discover that another play, based on the story of how royal reporter Andrew Morton was sent tapes by the Princess which formed his book, *Diana: Her True Story*, is also to be staged in the same month as her own.

But she has been incensed to discover that another play, based on the story of how royal reporter Andrew Morton was sent tapes by the Princess which formed his book, *Diana: Her True Story*, is also to be staged in the same month as her own.

Fumes Lady Colin, 68, who is known as Georgie: "Yet again, Morton follows in my wake. My play has been in the pipeline for three years."

In fact although both plays are about the same subject – how two authors gained extraordinary insights into Diana's unhappiness and the breakdown of her marriage – the play based on Morton

has not been written by him. The author of *The Diana Tapes* is James Clements, actor son of Newswright's Kirsty Wark, who will also star as Morton when the production opens in New York in May, transferring to London the following month.

Clements sent the script to Morton and hopes he will be at its first night.

Meanwhile Georgie, who was castigated when her own book came out – with her descriptions of Diana's unhappiness being initially dismissed – is holding the premiere of her play at her castle in Sussex, and hopes for a West End transfer.

She maintains that her book was based on secret meetings with Diana held at a mutual friend's house in Belgravia.

"I was left with some deep conversations that never made it into the book which I have used for the play," she says. "It's hard-hitting because the rawness of her words will show she was not so much a sacrificial lamb as first depicted."

Both plays are timed to be staged to coincide with Prince Harry's wedding. Morton, who made some £3million from his Diana book, and is now writing a biography of Meghan Markle, has declined to comment.



INSIGHTS: Morton

★ Although **Amanda Redman** has been miles away in Sri Lanka filming the ITV series *The Good Karma Hospital*, she's been thinking about how she can spread her own benevolent karma back in Britain. "I've discovered a love for volunteering," says Brighton-born Amanda, 60, who has signed up to help fill sandbags in a flood or take supplies to people in snowstorms.

"During the London terrorist attacks and the Grenfell fire, I saw British Red Cross volunteers on the news, and realised they do so much."

"I'd like to help but thought my life was too hectic to make a commitment. However, I've discovered its community reserve volunteers programme. You sign up online (redcross.org.uk/reserve) and then if there's a crisis in your area, they'll send you a text asking for help."

"You'll be asked to do things like sort donations, fill sandbags or whatever. There's no obligation but if you have time and want to help you can."



★ **Dominic West's** wife Catherine has a robust attitude to viewing her hubby's gymastic sex scenes in the American TV series *The Affair*.

Says Dominic: "She has watched little bits and said, 'Very well done and marvellous, and I don't need to see any more!'"

The Old Etonian actor, 48, admits it would be a different matter if it was Catherine who was being filmed writhing on a bed, instead of him. "If she was in something like that, I would not be happy."

★ The Queen's former private secretary **Sir Kenneth Scott**, who has died at 87, liked to keep the monarch amused. After a picnic at a log cabin at Balmoral, when HM cleaned up afterwards, he suggested there should be a plaque saying "QUEEN ELIZABETH SWEPT HERE".

And he recalled another time when she walked into a shop in Balmoral, a customer eyed her closely and exclaimed: "You look just like the Queen." HM replied drily: "How very reassuring."

★ Don't expect **Sharon Osbourne** to be among the visitors to Glastonbury when the Somerset music festival returns next summer.

"It's gone too far from the music now for me, with all those ****ing posers wearing wellies," the 65-year-old luminares.

"It's full of middle-aged models and has-been rock stars." Such as her grizzled old hubby, the bat-biting heavy metallist Ozzy.



There was a time in her prime as the working member of the Royal Family when a birthday would have meant a party for the **Duchess of Kent** but the Queen's cousin has turned 85 with no fanfare. Public glimpses of the duchess are rare since she bowed out of most royal duties over a decade ago. She now prefers to be known simply by her first name, Katharine, and leads a separate life from her husband.

Having converted to Catholicism after a stillbirth triggered deep depression, she refuses to contemplate a formal separation from the worthy but emotionally distant Duke.

She still lives at Kensington Palace but rents a studio flat nearby, where until recently she taught piano to paying students. She continues to support worthy causes, many of them with a musical bias, such as an appeal for a new organ at a church in Pimlico.

The last time I spoke to her, as she was waiting for a bus in Gloucester Road, she chatted happily about how much music meant to her and how she enjoyed her "simple life". A delightful woman.



In a materialistic world, how heartening to learn that the **Queen** continues to espouse frugality in her royal households. HM is continuing to get good use from the bedspreads she rescued from the former Royal Yacht Britannia when the ship was decommissioned in 1997.

"The Britannia bedspreads were salvaged to be used in all the main bedrooms at Balmoral," whispers a royal factotum. "They've lasted really well but the Queen has ordered that any which get too moth-eaten are cut up and made into cushion covers."

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Has the Queen morphed into a corporate CEO? Her Majesty is looking for a works manager at Windsor Castle, advertising the post as: "A vital interface, working closely with colleagues and contractors, you'll ensure your projects consider the needs of a diverse range of internal stakeholders."



He has happy memories of Murray's Club in Soho but **Prince Philip** won't be revisiting the huckle watering hole where he spent languid hours in the Sixties amid some dubious company. Philip's fondness for the cabaret club, where patrons were served by scantily-clad waitresses (who at one time included Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies) prompted rumours of problems in his marriage to the Queen. It was there that he began a friendship with showgirl Pat Kirkwood which became the subject of much gossip. Now the Prince, 96, has been invited by vintage art dealer Charlie Jeffreys to an exhibition of club memorabilia, including illustrations of the burlesque outfits which so amused the royal eye. "I got a lovely letter back from Buckingham Palace saying that, sadly, the Duke is out of London on March 22 but sends us his very best wishes," says Charlie. "We shall raise a glass to him on the night."

In all Gloria Hunniford's years of interviewing celebrities, there was only one man who inspired her to frissons of friskiness. "It was Omar Sharif," she recalls dreamily. "His eyes were so amazing, like dark pools."



PICTURE: VALERIE MASON/GETTY

★ The last time I had the pleasure of sharing a cocktail with Jennifer Lawrence, the Hollywood actor told me how much she loved Englishmen. "It's the humour, the manners, the playful eyes," she twinkled. Sadly she wasn't referring to me; instead she began babbling on about Nicholas Hoult (inset below). This actor was, she giggled, the chap who knew her "inside out" and the one with whom she liked to snuggle up watching "junk Brit TV programmes".

Nicholas was then still living with his parents in Wokingham, Berkshire, but moved to Los Angeles to be with Jennifer, and the two were a couple for four years.

Since then the Kentucky-born actor, 27, has been out with another Englishman, Coldplay's Chris Martin and, until recently, the US director Darren Aronofsky.

Now there is chatter that she has once again been snuggling up with Nicholas, 28, whose career took off after playing the Beast in the X-Men films (alongside Jennifer herself).

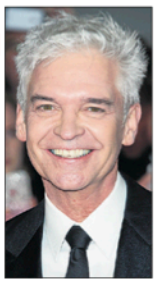
If the pair are an item again, it would be a case of better the devil you know for Jen, not least because she admitted, in a rather frank exchange last week, that she hasn't had sex for "a very long time" because she's terrified of catching diseases. She even hates hugs for fear of catching bugs. She explained: "I'm all bark and no bite. I talk about sex but I don't really do it. I'm a germaphobe so all of my boyfriends had to be checked out by a doctor beforehand so I don't catch anything. I would like to have a relationship but it's hard out there."

At least she knows where Nicholas has been.



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MP getting hitched rather than lynched

CABINET minister Esther McVey has suffered more than most from hostile personal attacks by her political opponents with, at one low point, the shadow chancellor John McDonnell repeating a comedian's joke that she deserved to be "lynched". Although she outwardly refused to be cowed, friends of the Work and Pensions Secretary have said she felt deeply hurt by such comments.

Some have noted that it was worse for Merseyside-born Miss McVey as she had no marital partner to whom she could turn for support in the face of such antipathy. But that is about to change... Esther, 50, has been discussing marriage with Philip Davies, 46, the Tory MP for Shipley, West Yorkshire, with whom she has had an on-off relationship for five years.

Yes, it is something that probably will happen, when we get round to it," Esther told me at a party hosted by Jonathan Shalit to launch his InterTalent showbusiness agency.

The blonde former GMTV presenter acknowledges that knowing she had Philip's solid support when she was being publicly barracked brought the pair closer together.

"Having someone you can rely on when things are down, as well as being there for you when things are good, makes you really appreciate them."

As for setting a wedding date, when I ask Philip - a politician known for his stance against political correctness - he nods in Esther's direction, murmuring meekly: "It will be up to the boss to decide."



CONSERVATIVE CANOODLERS: Philip and Esther

★ Ed Milliband reflects on the change in his life since he relinquished the post of Leader of the Opposition in 2015. "You're going at 100mph, every minute of the day - and then you crash."

To think he could have been a Labour PM, rather than returning to the backbenches as the MP for Doncaster North was, he admits a "quite painful" for the first year or two. I felt regretful and would've ruminated but now it bounces off me."

When asked about any regrets of his leadership, Ed, 48, grins: "The bacon sandwich."

★ The inequality of women's pay is something that continues to bug writer Kathy Lette, 59, who notes: "We still don't have equal pay in Britain and get concussion hitting our heads on the glass ceiling... And we've expected to clean it while we're up there."

★ No matter how much he may be in demand, Philip Schofield tries his best to remain grounded. "I never forget how lucky I am," says Phillip, 55, whose first foray into broadcasting was on hospital radio in Plymouth. "There was a time, after I'd been in Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at the Palladium in the 90s, that I couldn't get back on TV. That taught me to never be anything for granted. It doesn't matter how good you think you are, no one is irreplaceable. "You keep doing your best but you're never that far away from someone saying, 'He's had his day now'."

★ The idea of a spring clean appeals to Sir Mick Jagger, 74, who is definitely not a hoarder. "I throw everything away," declares the old hip-swinger. "I buy a lot of shirts and I went into my cupboard the other day and thought, I just can't get any more in there!" "So I keep like one nice one and then I send all the rest to the charity shop."

★ Sir Michael Caine is feeling a trifle sorry for himself, as he recovers from breaking his ankle while slipping over at home last weekend. "The movie veteran usually has a sunny disposition, although he's occasionally prone to melancholic musanderings about his mortality. "I'd dearly love to think there was life after death," says the 84-year-old star. "And I think that I have all bases covered. My dad was a Catholic, Mum was a protestant, I was educated by Jews and I married a Muslim."

★ Observation of the day, from witty Connelly: "I worry about ridiculous things, you know, how does a guy who drives a snoughplough get to work in the morning... that can keep me awake for days."

★ Anne Robinson dismisses protests about men's boorish behaviour at such events as that tarnished President's Club dinner. She observes: "Several women Ocado customers cancelled their account in disgust when they discovered that Tim Steiner, its boss, had attended. "There was no evidence he had been caught behaving badly. However, two years ago, the very same Tim Steiner left his wife and four children and took up with a Polish lingerie model. No Ocado customers were reported to have objected. "David Walliams was at the same dinner and there was a mae to get his children's books banned. How long before women need proof of clean living from any man they see on television or hear on radio, or whose company they give business to?"



★ No wonder Zara Phillips sometimes pulls a lemon face - she has to put up with Mike Tindall's annoying habits in the bedroom. "He's the worst roommate," reveals Lee Mears, a hooker who often shared a berth with Tindall (that's a hooker in rugby, rather than a lady of the night). It's not snoring or excessive wind that made Tindall, 39, such an annoying bedfellow on rugby tours but his obsession with his favourite playing: online gaming. "He loves gadgets and got me hooked on a video game, World of Warcraft, which is so addictive," says Lee, also 39. "After one tour my missus finally drew the line when I got into bed with her and then got out to play a game with Mike online."

★ After five significant relationships with men, including two marriages, Carol Vorderman is sanguine about her romantic history. "Rather than looking back and thinking something has to last for ever, I appreciate it for what it was at the time," muses the former Countdown presenter, 57. "I call the different parts of my life 'chapters' and you have to make the most of every one. Some are shorter and others longer but just because one chapter comes to an end it doesn't negate what you did in it."

Carol's first marriage, at 24 to naval officer Chris Mather, ended after just a year. She later wed Patrick King, with whom she had her two children Katie, 25, and Cameron, 20.

She went on to have a seven-year romance with sports journalist Des Kelly. As for the future, the perky Carol trills: "I'm happily single, freely independent and doing my own thing."



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