

Harry Mount

Editor, The Oldie

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today, I'm joined down the line by Harry Mount, the author and editor of The Oldie magazine and regular contributor to newspapers, including the Daily Mail and The Telegraph. Harry took over the reins of all these six years ago, leading the magazine for the young in spirit to continued circulation success, a former leader writer and New York correspondent at The Daily Telegraph. He's the author of the Summer Madness: How Brexit Split the Tories, Destroyed Labour and Divided the Country as well as the best-selling primer for Latin students, The Wit and Wisdom of Boris Johnson, which runs it says here to 208 pages. Harry, thank you for joining me.

Pleasure to be here.

Who is the Wit and Wisdom of Boris Johnson saying? Uh, it's a book you've already tried to update once. I don't agree with a lot of his policies, but I, I still remain a closet fan of Boris because he's, he's just, he's uniquely a sort of British coach. He wouldn't get someone like him anywhere else. Would you? Not?

No, it's right. The first edition came out in 2016 before he was prime minister, obviously, and that did quite well. And then, uh, they brought up a number 10 edition in 2019. It became prime minister that did okay. But uh, now haven't checked the figures. I can't imagine it's selling at all while it's funny. Um, he's still making the jokes, but they're not going down very well. Because you know, people are having a seriously difficult time at home with the economy and um, you know, he's, he's on the ropes generally. And so those jokes just don't land in the same way.

I think he did obviously didn't expect to be prime minister in something like the pandemic where although life and li risk, it is just a kind of tedious, bureaucratic thing of getting the vaccines. I was kind of the opposite of the showmanship of, of like

being mayor. I, I thought he would've enjoyed being there and thought he would enjoy being prime minister, but I don't think he is.

Uh, I think he, I think you are right. And actually when he, uh, gave those first broadcasts, when COVID first struck, he wasn't very good at being serious. He stopped the jokes because he just hadn't had enough practice of it. But at the same time, you must remember that. Uh, uh, he loves it when there's good news about him, but he prefer to have even bad news about him than no news at all. He, he loves being the center of retention. So I think even when things aren't going well, he's very happy to be behind the door of number 10.

I mean, I'd love to be, you know, behind the door number 10, but that's just cause I want the power, you know, I want to crush my enemies and then achieve global domination as indeed he does.

Exactly, exactly the same. Yeah.

Let's move on from Boris if we can, because I mean you here to talk about The Oldie. It's 30 years old, it's kind of getting a bit of an oldie itself, is it not?

That's right. Yeah. So set up in 1992 by the great rigid Ingrams, who of course didn't quite found private eye. He was its second editor after Christopher Booker, but he was there at the beginning and uh, from 19 three to 1986, he to private eye and he tired of that and he, he retired handed it over to in his lot. He was obviously still there and he obviously got a bit bored cuz in 1992 together with, uh, Auburn war and Alexander chancellor, who was the editor between me and Richard and several other people, he came up with the idea of the oldie and the, the idea then as it is now is that, uh, the media advertising is always appealing to the youth audience because, um, they're the ones who are gonna be around for longest, but actually as, um, Richard Ingrams, uh, said in 1992, the people with the money and indeed the spare time to read magazines are oldies. And so that was the general intention to have a sort of, uh, jokey funny cynical magazine, not entirely aimed at old people, but at the same time advertising, uh, was aimed more at old people. And um, it, it has done, it's done very well, uh, for the last 30 years. And, um, circulation is held up during the pandemic as has appetite.

It must be a joy to edit because it's all about fun and great reads. There must be people like me, I'm 46, but I've read the LD for years because it's just a joy to read.

Uh, well that's right. I mean, I read it when it came out and when I was at, um, university, cause I was a big fan of private. I remember it coming out. I've still got the first issue that I bought in 1992 when I was 20. And as I said, some of it is aimed at older people, but the main aim is to be amusing or interesting or sad or all the things you want out of a good read. Um, and actually my huge achievement in, uh, the five years I've edited is I've taken the average age of the reader down from 70 to wait for it 68, but we do have an awful lot of readers in their nineties. That means we do have people fall like you in their forties. And in fact, we've got a much prize reader, a 14 year old who wrote in the other day and said they loved it. So, uh, he'll be with us. I hope for the next 90 years.

I remember it got a kicking from the press when it launched.

That's right. A lot of, uh, Richard adult friends, including the great Peter McKay, the, um, great journalist and gossipist on the male is just about to turn 80 himself said it would never last, uh, Julie bil I think is a fantastic writer. She mocked it and said it would never last. And Richard Ingrams in his very funny way said, this is just the sort of attack we want. This shows it's gonna last. And, and he was, he was right. It has lasted, it filled a hole in the market that, that people didn't really know was there.

And you were thrust into the editor's hot seat by the untimely death of Alexander chancellor. I mean, the, as you just said, then about the launch of it, people were saying, well, how could a 45 year old edit the AI I remember them asking at the time he seemed to have done very well.

That, oh, well, that's very kind, but I think, um, well some, my friends will say I've been an oldie since I was, um, five years old, but also I think actually the main principles, um, are the basic ones of entertaining journalism that go beyond being any particular age. I would say Alexander Chancellor, who, as you say, sadly died in 2017 aged, uh, 77, I think it was, um, he, um, he had what I call just a brilliant boredom detector. He's quite a quiet, quiet, different man. But he would say with one of those pieces, which comes in, which you would think we ought to run this cause it's very worthy by a worthy person, but he would just have the courage to say, however, famous the person was, this is boring. Um, and so I think that's one of the

great things of being an ed. I'm not saying I do it very well, but is to be a board and detector and think about the poor bloody reader the whole time. And so that applies to any magazine or newspaper I'd seek.

So how do you go about doing the job of editor? I mean, you know, when I was a kid, I used to think an editor would literally do what a sub editor does and I sort of play with the words, but course you're setting the direction, managing the team, commissioning articles, you're in effect, defining what the product is. How, how do you go about doing that sort of what, you know, what's a typical week look like?

Well, it comes up every four weeks, confusingly, not every month, cuz we have 13 issues cuz you get the benefits of a, of a monthly magazine, but you also get an extra issue. Therefore you get 13 issues worth of advertising and, and that's a great luxury coming out every uh, four weeks. So I started off working on the evening, sand on the Telegraph, which came out obviously, um, uh, six days a week. So I'm still quite used to that, uh, ritual of having to get something in every day. So I still feel it's, it's quite a luxury to have four weeks to get things um, done. And so it means at the beginning of that four week schedule, maybe about half of the articles in the oldie are by columnists and uh, on the whole with a few exceptions, which I won't name, they follow their deadlines.

So those come in pretty much like clockwork and then the other half are the ones that I commission. Again, some of those, uh, the great thing about the oldie is that some of them are timeless pieces, which you could have commissioned a long time ago and, and they still work. So in fact, we've got a, a, a brilliant article, latest issue on what it's like to have a stingy friend, how you spot them and how they never change. Well, stings have been around since the Dawn of time, they'll be there forever and then we'll have more timely articles. Um, uh, like we've got a piece by Martin Jarvis, the actor on a appearing in the foresight saga, which, uh, your older listeners will remember was a hugely popular TV series in the, um, late sixties, an adaptation of the foresight SAR by John Galsworthy, which was written a century ago. So, well we had to run it some time this year, so still quite a, a lazy peg, but some of the pieces have to go in at a particular time and some can wait. So I'll have quite a few at the beginning of that four week schedule lined up. And then sometimes during that four weeks, something fantastic will come up and I'll put that in and something very timely might, uh, come up and I'll put that in at the expense of one of the pieces that don't have a, a time peg.

I mean, judging from your predecessors, you could be editing the oldie for another 40 years. Is it the editorial equivalent of a life period?

Uh, well, I'm really happy doing it. And, um, Richard Ingram's having edit private over, over 23 years, edited the oldie for, uh, 22 years. Uh, Alexander did it for four years, poor untimely death and it's really, really enjoyable and it, it never STAs cause of that great variety of content. And, uh, I think it is good to have a peg for certain articles. It's certainly true that, um, people are more likely to read, uh, something if, if there's a topical reason why they should read it. But at the same time, there are timeless pieces which could go in any time and you are always in search of the perfect thing, which is to have an issue full of perfect brilliant articles. And although they are brilliant in the old D you are never, ever going to have, um, 50 perfect articles. So it never, ever, ever gets boring.

How does it work in terms of the website then? Because, uh, again, I'm, I'm probably making an S generalisation here, but the older you get, the less likely you are to be online. You've gotta finite out number of articles and space in the magazine. The, the, the more modern way to say is, okay, right. We fill the magazine, the rest of it can go online. Do, do you do, I mean, how active, how vibrant is the website and the online strategy?

Um, well we, uh, put up new articles every day on the website and, and the other brilliant aspect of those, um, timeless pieces is that you can run them time and they still feel fresh. Or if, you know, a good example is a couple of years ago, we had an article is 2020 is 60 years since Elvis left the army, I think that's right. Yeah. Um, and then with this new Elvis film coming out, now, you can, you can give that a, a, a new peg, and it's still just as fresh as it was a couple of years ago. And we'll commission a few new articles to the website, but at the same time, uh, we realized that you mustn't kill the golden GOs as so many papers did at the beginning of the internet revolution by giving away huge amounts of your contents from your new magazine for free.

So in fact, tomorrow we've got a new issue coming out and we'll, we'll give away three articles completely for free, uh, on the website. And then we'll have, um, uh, a dozen articles, which have an intro that you have to pay to see the whole article, but we've got so much, um, content, which as I say is timeless that we can put on new material. Hasn't been on the website before, say from the two issues ago, which unless you're a subscriber and you, or a regular bar, and you've read it already, it will

be fresh to you, but, uh, you are a member 15 years ago when all the papers embrace the internet revolution too much and gave everything away for free. Uh, and that was a disaster, whole generation basically got used to reading articles for free, uh, uh, and you can't do that and survive. And the other thing is we do is we put out a, an app as well, which you can buy, which is much cheaper than the, um, actual hard copy magazine, but you're right. Paul readers do tend to prefer older readers, the hard copy, a version of the magazine. So it's still quite a small percentage of our sales are of the

App. You are right though in your point that ultimately good journalism has to be paid for.

Yeah, definitely. And, um, I, I think it works both ways that, um, first of all, people appreciate, I think, appreciate magazines of papers more, funnily enough, if they've paid something for it, I dunno about you, but I no longer get the evening standard religiously when now that it's free. And I don't think it's good as it used to be either, but when you had to pay 50 P for it, I remember rushing around to news agents to, uh, trying to find it if it was late in the evening, a and the other, and on the other side of the coin, I think you should, um, you, you should pay your contributors too, but it's, it only really works if it's, if it's making money and, and people are paying for it. And I think on the whole, not always, you know, guardian is a great newspaper, uh, but it's heavily subsidized and there is quite a good argument saying that subsidy makes, um, all sorts of media worse because you're not thinking again about the poor.

So the bottom, isn't, it it's the same with the BBC license fee, as well as the, the Scott trust. The minute the reader gets quality journalism doesn't have to pay for it. That's, it's not fair on all of the other outlets that do have to, you have to pay your contributors and your staff.

That's true. Exactly. And, and that's certainly true, but also the other thing is if you are not, um, having to think about somebody paying for it, um, you can let your standards slide, or you can, I could, as an editor, choose to commission things about only I'm interested in not what the reader's interested in because the money's coming in anyway. So I think it's a, it's a really healthy thing that you have to try and produce as interesting a magazine as possible for more people to buy it

In today's modern media marketplace. These brands are the platform for events and apps and all kinds of things. And would that be something that you

would, you would go into? I know you have the, um, old of the year awards, but you also have the literary lunches. They're legendary, you know, the best gossip in the town is exchange. Would you, would you have retreats and are you gonna expand the brand into sort of experiential type things? Do you have a business plan for the next five to 10 years?

Uh, well, what we do and in, uh, in conjunction is I must say, he's, he, he's much more in charge of these things than me, but my, uh, publisher James pembro, we keep on trying lots of different things like that. Thank God. The great oldie lunches came back for the first time, a couple of weeks ago. And we had the terrific Norman Scott telling about, uh, Jeremy Thor tried to, um, kill him. And funnily enough, uh, for the first time our lunch took place in the national liberal club. And I said to Norman, Scott, have you been here before went, oh, yes. Jeremy brought me here the whole time. And in fact his, uh, his portrait is here, but they've hidden it away behind a pillar now, anyway, that was, um, that was fantastic to see him in the flesh. And I think the readers love seeing him in the flesh and we try lots of other things along those lines.

So we have all the holidays, um, mostly to Italy and France and Greece, and then it was difficult. Um, those bits in the pandemic where you're allowed to have gatherings people funny enough were, were nervous about sitting down together for a meal, but they were happy to come in for, we had what we called the oldie gang show where people gave talks and they had a few drinks, but there was no sit down meal. So we also do oldie walk. So I've just done an oldie theme walk around Roman London. So you try as many things as possible. And sometimes people go for them, sometimes people don't and, um, and we'll keep on doing that. But at the moment, the, the lunches and the walks and the holidays seem to be doing very well.

Do you have a, a reader in mind for the magazine? I mean, other than them being old, I suppose is, yeah. Do they share a particular demographic location outlook? Like when you, when you are putting the magazine together, do you have a read reminder and what kind of feedback do you get from your readers? You must, rather than imagining you might actually have sort of actual data, right?

Yeah, we do. Cause we've done. Um, it was just done a survey. In fact, we did another one, uh, five years ago when I started, uh, and as I said, the average reader is 68. Um, they tend to be from London and the home counties, but they do spread. We've got a, a across United Kingdom. Uh, we've got lots of readers in Northern

Ireland and Ireland and Scotland Wales, and we've got quite a lot in America and, uh, a lot in Australia. And, um, the really great thing about, um, catering to that market is they're incredibly well informed. So I'll give you an example. We had an article about the great Tony Hancock and the 50th anniversary of his death in 1968. And we had the wonderful, great friend of the oldie, uh, Barry Kreer, um, who sadly just died, who addressed our literary lunches for 15 years.

He wrote a terrific piece about Tony Hancock, but the who knew he knew him. Well, the great thing is he didn't ever have to say Tony ha in the piece, Tony Hancock, who was a famous comedian in the fifties and sixties who did Hancock half hour because our audience know that all already. So it's, it's wonderful to have such a, a knowledgeable audience, so you can make shortcuts to the amusing and funny bits. You don't have to do too much plot exposition if you like. So, but, um, it's not just to the older read, I'm trying to appeal. I think I'm trying to appeal to that particular frame of mind, which is, um, well informed and likes that ironic amusing, amused tone that I think you also find in a spectator and private eye, not taking it. There are some very serious articles in, in the magazine, but not taking anything too seriously.

And we've done political surveys as well. And it's roughly half, half on, on right. And left voters. Uh, we don't do many political pieces, but we will at general elections. But so at the last election, we had a piece on the left hand side by Alan Johnson, the former labor cabinet minister. And we had on the right side by, uh, Norman Tibet, former cabinet minister. So you try to be even handed because, um, cuz I say it's pretty much split down the middle, but it's, um, it's tried to be as broad as possible in interest. And as I say, not all pieces are funny, but to have that slightly, um, worldly wise, slightly ironic approach to the world, I'd say.

I mean, I don't hear some kind of revolutionary pivot coming. It sounds to me like if it ain't broke, don't fix it. You're a steady hand at the tiller and uh, it's going well, the key is to, to, to maintain the quality of the product. Is it now?

I think you are, you are exactly right. And, uh, as I said, circulation held up pretty well. Um, during the pandemic and, um, circulation climbed massively from around 15 years ago when it was, um, just under 20,000 and, and wasn't doing so well and thanks to, um, Richard Ingrams and the publisher James Pembroke and my predecessor, uh, Richard and Alexander chancellor circulation has gone up to just under 50,000. We're now on, uh, just over 49,000. So all, if you would, on your way home tonight or into work tomorrow by 882 copies will go over the 50,000 mark can

See light done.

That would be fine exactly. But that would be fantastic. So, so it's all those magazines, which as you say, have kind of, as it were stuck to their guns, haven't done down, understand what their reader likes, don't try and alienate them to appeal to a market that may never ever buy the magazine have done, have done very well. Spectators doing really well, new statesmen, doing a lot better, not a review of books. Uh, I think went up to something like 90,000 under, uh, the pandemic. A lot of people were trapped at home. That's gone down a bit, but it's had a stratospher rise. And I think to a certain extent, our gain has been the newspapers lost because so many newspapers, I think foolishly have, as you refer to, uh, uh, made a slight race to the bottom, I still read a lot of them. I'm a newspaper addict, but actually one shouldn't underestimate how many intelligent, curious people there are out there. And if you, um, have a race to the bottom and you are all writing the same article about, or Britney Spears or something, people are gonna stop reading your paper cuz they're gonna find it elsewhere. So you must be whatever's idiosyncratic or unusual about you. You must treasure that.

I kind of gave up on the evening standard a year or so ago when Afghani Leber dev was, there was photos of him at the theater awards and he was on about 20 pages. And I thought, I quite like the, the good old days when proprietors of newspapers were evil, you know, Bon Villa type people like Robert Maxwell and you know, people like that. And I, you know, I quite want the orders of newspapers to do evil rather than just sort of have a paper for some kind of pathetic vanity just to try and make themselves relevant, just

Those photos. And he, in fact, he even put himself on the front cover, uh, delivering, uh, charity boxes for the very predator charitable calls they were running. I think he was feeding the homeless, but there he was in a high his jacket on the front cover, delivering food parcels. It doesn't look good. I think I, I, uh, do the film column for the oldie and occasionally write a piece, but I, um, I don't think I should employ myself. There was a great thing, um, said by, I can't remember who perhaps, you know, Paul, somebody said an editor who commissions himself is a fool. And uh, I think that's all, I'd do it occasionally, but I certainly wouldn't put a picture of my face on the front cover.

What do you enjoy about being editor and what are the, what are the challenges, you know, how would you explain to someone starting out in their career? What the job of editor actually is like what all

The dream is trying to find that elusive perfect article. So getting the perfect person on the perfect subject and when that comes off, it's, it's really, really enjoyable cuz you know, you can pack yourself on the back for finding them, but also it's just a, a pleasure to read it. So in fact, in the, uh, next issue, we've got the great, uh, writer, Aaron Wilson on Philip Larkin who Centenary will be in August. I knew that he knew him and I know that Aaron, Wilson's a great writer, but it, it, it's a really wonderful piece, a joy to read a mixture of great understanding of Larkin's poems, but also lots of anecdotes cuz Anne, Wilson's got a brilliant memory for conversation. It's moving and it's very funny at the same time. And so how to hunt should be good and it, and it's really fantastic. So when that comes off, it's really enjoyable.

Then you get the, the added bonus, um, which is a pleasure which never really fades of then the, when the actual issue comes in, the hard copy in there, it all is to begin with. You are just terrified. You'll find a mistake cuz in a hundred page magazine, there'll always be a mistake and you kick yourself over that. But it's, it's really pleasurable seeing this, this final product like any job, there are difficult things as well. You've got to be incredibly wary of liable obviously, cause for a small magazine like us, we could be wiped out by a big liable damages. Um, so we've got to be wary of that. And then because we have slightly, quite a long lead time before we go to press on a Friday, uh, the app comes out the following Wednesday and the hard copy issue comes out the week after that.

So you've got 12 days between putting the magazine to bed and it actually appearing. And because we're not that topical, that doesn't matter too much, but occasionally something will happen in the interim in those 12 days. And you think, oh my God, I'll give you an example. Uh, a couple of years ago, um, Steven Glover are, are really good media correspondent wrote a very good expert, uh, piece about who might be the next editor of the evening standard. He gave five or six runners all look very good. And then on the morning, Friday morning, just before we're going to press, um, I suddenly saw it in the paper that the George Osborn was going to be the next editor. You remember, he was a real surprise choice. And so Steven is a great old pro could turn around his piece and discuss that. But if that had gone to press all the readers, would've thought, God, how extraordinary he's talking about

these five runners and in fact it's George Osborne. So those little things, uh, are the sort of things that are worries for editors.

They just keep you up at night. But in a sense it's just, uh, part of the course, isn't it. You you're gonna have these problems when you've got a latency between when you're off stone and when someone takes the printed copy in their hands.

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. And um, and also the reason why there's quite a long lead time is if you give the printers quite a long time to print, it means they can, uh, they charge you less cuz they can print any time in that 12 day schedule. So actually sometimes you are lucky within that 12 days you ring up the printers and they haven't gone to press and you gotta thank God. And there sometimes it's just too late and that, that that's a, that's a bad feeling. Normally it's normally with a sort of small typo or something. There hasn't been any great disaster, but even then you hate it when you, when you've seen a typo before the actual think it's the streets and there's nothing can do about it.

The Americans call them teaching moments, but have you dropped any clangers in, in the editor's chair? Any mistakes that you'd care to reveal if I were you, by the way, I'd refuse to answer that.

I'm sure. I'm sure there are actually, this sounds very arrogant. I can't at the moment for a long time, there was a terrible thing called the curse of the oldie, cuz we would tend to, uh, as we do now interview, um, older people and, and quite a few times in that gap between going to press and it actually, um, uh, being printed, the poor overnight individual would be, would die. So we had it with the late great cl dun of dad's army. He was on the cover and it was too late and he had died in the interim. And so obviously the reader is ahead of you and touch wood that hasn't yet, uh, happened to me. But, um, I'm, I'm sure is bound to, but um, uh, not so far,

But in a sense that would make people want to buy the magazine because you've, you've interviewed them. It's just unfortunate that Mr. Dun died, but actually that's the last interview with him and you know, what a better way to sort of get to know psych is in his very last interview.

Yes, that's true. That's true. But, but, and most readers will understand about, uh, you know, that gap. Um, but at the same time, it it's, it's always a bit jarring if

someone has been referred to in the, in, in the fir in a present tense and sadly they've been removed to the past tense. I mean, I know, um, it's obviously the big, the big thing is on the sad day when the, um, when the queen dies, um, is, uh, everyone has got their supplement ready to go, but, um, uh, that, that might happen at the wrong time. So you might have a, uh, not there's a right time, but, um, you might have a very, very jolly, upbeat, uh, cover that you've, um, got ready to go. It's gone to the printers in a sad event like that happens at all jar on the newsstand, but again, that's yet to happen.

I remember Paul Peter, SISs got it in the net when the queen mother died. Cause he wore a very dark purple tie. It was obviously very respectful, but because he didn't, you know, obviously I assume hug Edwards has got a black tie his pocket at all times just in case someone's dying. He just seems to be a little bit ridiculous.

Yeah. Yeah. I thought that was, I thought that was very, very unfair on him. Um, and actually on all these things already well planned by the BBC in the papers. I remember when I was working on the Telegraph of a few years before the queen mother died, we were doing, um, planning a supplement I'm she was quite a good health. Then she was a mere WIPA snapper of 98 or something. And, and I said to a, an elderly designer I was working with, um, is this the first time you've, you've done a piece like this? And he went, no, this is my fifth queen mother commemorative supplement. He'd done his first one in the sixties. And so, um, it just shows how, how really good papers and magazines are at, at planning ahead like that. And, um, even on, um, days, which aren't, you know, as tragic as that, the amount of work that goes into producing a, a daily paper particularly, or even a magazine, uh, is a huge amount.

There's a great I'd recommend to any, um, younger listeners, a great book on journalism as editor by max tasting, Senator RIDT, Paul, but it's really good. It's full of great stories, but all great sort of tips about journalism, but he was once when he was editor of the Telegraph was sitting next to, um, somebody at dinner and this lady said to him, the thing is I get all my news from news at 10 on TV, because there's much more information there. And max said, well, yes, obviously there's more moving images, but there are many fewer words. And this woman said, no, it goes on for half an hour, takes me 20 minutes to read the paper. Um, uh, there are, it's much more informative, use it 10. So max bought some, uh, four min the next day to count up the number of words in that day's daily Telegraph and the number of words

in that evening news at 10. And I can't remember what the figures are, but it's, it's, it's think it's something like 120,000 words in a, in the average, um, copy of the daily Telegraph. And I dunno what it is that music 10, but it's, it's less than a 10th of that. I think. So just showing this great volume that's produced day after day.

I also think there's a bit of a disconnect cause when prince Phillip died, one of, you know, a lot of real people, you know, in, in members of the public celebrated him because he, you know, was politically incorrect from time to time and used to say some things. And that, to me, that added to the fact that he was a character, but of course the media couldn't celebrate that because that would be seen to indulge, you know, that the, the, the UN politically or the politically incorrect side of, of him. And I wondered actually, cuz I mean, I dunno whether you agree with this or not, but all the, all the readers are navigating a world in which often older people fear there will give of offense if they say the wrong thing about issues like gender of ethnicity and so on and so forth. Is that something that they worry about?

Well, I think that's, it's one of the great joys of, um, Eddie's The Oldie's is I think the older generations who say are much less worried about those things. Um, you know, they not only did they come through from a, from an earlier age, but also they've dealt with so much throughout their lives. They've seen so much, so I'm never trying to be ally incorrect, whatever, but I love having people who are shocking and funny at the same time, including we've got, uh, the great Barry Humphres as a columnist who occasionally writes his

Legend.

Australian cultural at attaches. So there's Paterson. And he says some absolutely fantastically, shocking things. Um, and I thought to begin with, and I'd never, ever, um, edits, but I thought I'd get into trouble for some of the things he says, but actually no one's ever, ever, ever objected to anything soles or anybody else has said on politically correct grounds. And I think that's, that's partly to do with the, the less shockable readership. Um, but I've gotta, I've gotta bear that in mind. I think this kind of fine line between, I think actually if you are funny and the intention behind it is to be funny rather than to be offensive, then you can say almost anything. So soles Patterson, who is, it's a brilliant, it's a bit like David.

He's outrageous, isn't he? I think he's, yeah, I think he's brilliant.

He's fantastic. But because he's a fictional creation, I think, uh, you can get away much more from him, uh, than you can if it's Barry, Humphrey's talking directly about these things.

But prince Phillip said that, you know, um, he was asking Scottish driving instructors, whether they could keep the natives off the source long enough to pass their test, he was clearly joking. No one would suggest one second that he was being genuinely racist. And yet of course the, the prude brigade brigade would attack him for that, you know, is, is freedom of speech being eroded by this frankly sensor sensor humorlessness frankly.

Well, I think there are certain places where you have to be, which is sad, where you have to be really careful. And then there are other places where you are completely free. So it's, you know, sad that you have to negotiate, which place you're talking. I say the right thing, but I completely agree about the principal thing. In fact, I, once I once met him at a Umer cent of the Galali campaign where my, uh, great-grandfather had sadly been killed and prince Philip was head of the ly association. And, uh, my great-grandfather had sadly been shot because, uh, his second in command ducked and my great- grandfather said to his second command don't duck, uh, it's no good for the, uh, men's morale and it'll do you no good. Well, I'm very tragically, a few seconds later. My great-grandfather didn't duck got, uh, shot and died and his, uh, second in command who ducked lived for another 50 years.

So it was a moral of the tale there. And I said, told the story to prince Philip. And I said, um, what was the protocol on ducking during the second world war? And he said, there's not much bloody point in ducking on a ship you idiot. And actually he was saying, it was very, very funny. I cracked up exactly like that story just told about Scotsman. Actually it was a really good way of breaking the ice. Cuz here I was meeting this, this great man who was, uh, what was he, 94 then. And um, it immediately, you know, I was being very polite and deferential immediately broke the ice and you could see that's exactly what he was doing on all those other occasions. And I think a lot of papers said that when he died. So it's about, uh, being able to say that sort of thing and the paper that would approve of it. You know, otherwise you can, you know, you can be in trouble. If you say the wrong thing in the wrong place.

Now you've got a better record than mystic Meg really because you wrote how Brexit became a weapon of, uh, mass political destruction and your book five years ago. Have you got any tips for the grand national

<laugh> no. Sadly not, but it was well, you and your listeners will remember how incredibly ruthless. I mean the first person who's said that to me was, um, in fact, Rachel Johnson, the now prime minister's sister at, uh, it was a spectator party in 2016. So just after the referendum and um, you'll remember that, uh, Boris Johnson considered standing and there was knifed by Michael Gove and then I can't now remember them, but there were serial resignations in the Tory cabinet and, and she put it to me. She said to me the party, she said, um, she said, uh, Brexit is like kind of rotating sore. That's dropped loose from some timber yard and just goes around, slicing up everybody in sight. And it went on, it went on doing that well until pretty recently didn't it? So it was, it it's amazing how long ago it is now, how much further ago it seems now, but it, it was very, very, very destructive.

Is the destruction, the, the path of destructions still likely to continue, frankly.

Yeah, I think we'll go on being a kind of division, particularly in the Tory party for four years. But I suppose the difference is out of thought, it's very unlikely that we'll go back into Europe. So it won't be, uh, like the burning question that, um, Europe was basically ever since master from 1992 to 2016, uh, as to whether we'd leave or not. So I I'd have thought it'd become less of a burning issue than it was for those 24 years or so.

Who were your editorial heroes? What qualities do you admire in other editors?

I, uh, I worked for Charles Moore at the daily Telegraph to begin with and, and he was fantastic cuz he had a, in a very calm approach. He was a complete reverse of the editor out of legend. I never saw him shout because he was highly intelligent if he criticized you, he was right, but he wouldn't scream and shout. So I remember once I was a deputy editor of the comment pages and we'd had a, a good piece by a politician. Who'd use the expression, vague the question wrongly. I didn't realize he'd, he'd used it wrongly and Charles who read every single word in the paper the next morning at the, uh, editorial conference, he said just very calmly. He said, this man used the expression wrongly. And because he is a clever man, I knew he was right. Um, I felt mortified, but actually I'd learned something and, and I I've never got it wrong since.

So I thought that was a really good lesson in just being calm, but also got to be, uh, something. My dad, who's also a journalist said, he thought that one of the crucial

things of a good journalist is being meticulous. It really, really matters obviously getting facts, right. But even, uh, little idiomatic expressions like that you've gotta get right. So he was, he was a great hero. And then I worked only for about six months on the daily mail, about 15 years ago under Paul acre. And I know he gets some people, uh, palpitating and I understand why, but he, he was an absolutely brilliant, he had a, he had a complete sixth sense for what people would read. I remember once going into the news conference and the very good news editor put way down on the news list. And there was a story about a new form of tea made, which instead of making you a cup of tea in the morning, boiled you an egg and uh, the newsletters were put this low down the list, cause it seemed a bit rubbish.

And uh, Paul David said, no, put that much higher, put it up, put it on page three with a big, big picture. I thought, oh, this isn't gonna be very good. And actually there, it came out the next morning on page three and it was just, there, there is immediately readable. There was this picture that CS maybe, you know, big dimple where you put your egg. And it was a, probably some very good headline, but it was, it was just brilliantly readable. So he had that complete, uh, umbilical cord to his readers if you like, he knew what people want to read. And he also like Alexander chancellor had a boredom detector. So, so those two editors were, were the greatest I worked for, I think.

And is that the job of editor then where you don't necessarily have to agree with the writer, but it has to be engaging content. If, if there was an article that you disagree with you, would you then commission someone else to, to, to write a country piece? How, how does it actually work?

I, I think, you know, certainly something like, uh, you know, Telegraph and the daily mail, uh, uh, uh, conservative mind papers and, um, they were on the whole, or I would when I was there commission pieces that, that fall in line with those views. But at the same time, I feel very strongly should commission articles from the, from the other side, cuz actually funny enough, they become even more readable cuz they're a bit contrary. So when I was at the Telegraph, uh, on a couple occasions, they got Harold Pinter, the late playwright to write some, you know, uh, very, very, uh, aggressive articles about the, um, Tony Blair's Labour government. And actually I think as I say, you're more likely if I enough to read that there cuz you, you know, there you are. Uh, as it were the mythical lefthand, Colonel RET retired living and Wilshire reading the Telegraph and there it is there there's um, a Harold Pinter in your paper saying something very, very outrageous and, and quite rude and that's a

real Marade dropper. So I think, you know, papers obviously have got to appeal to their, um, readers, political persuasions, but at the same time, it's quite good to commission against those persuasions. Uh, occasionally

Now we live in the world of multimedia. I was gonna ask you how the podcast is going. I've just looked at the website. It, it is an occasional podcast. Is it not? I think the last one was in January. I, I quite like the fact that you're only doing a podcast when you've got something interesting to do, whereas I have a weekly podcast it's uh, the schedule could be gruelling.

Yes. Well, I, I, in that case, uh, sad is cause our podcast editor is, is ill at the moment. I'm afraid, but at the same time we don't do too many, uh, purely because we're an extremely small team and as you'll know will, um, it it's quite a lot of work. And uh, just in terms of the amount of hits, cuz it's free, we get for it. It it's pretty good, but it's, doesn't make much, doesn't make any, any money really. So it's a, an exercise. If you've got a very, very small team of, of working, working out what you can do economically and you know, you are extremely good at getting, uh, people onto your brilliant podcast, but it, so it's just a question of manpower really, but I think that's, that's, it's another lovely weapon to have on your website, but uh, it's, it's expectator does it very well. I think they've got one or two people that could be wrong, who are professionally full time doing the podcast with this a much bigger operation. And I think that also is, is free on the spectator and it's a very clever way of drawing in readers to eventually start subscribing to, or buying the magazine. So I, I think they can be absolutely fantastic podcast in our case. It's really just a question of manpower at the moment.

Tell us of the, uh, the scoops and the articles under your editorship of which you must be proud. I was doing some research into this and I read the blog by miles. Golet about the all scoop that actually exposed Jimmy SAEL.

Yes. Well that was, I must give the credit to, uh, the great Richard Ingrams who, um, who commissioned that piece. And it was, um, it's not often known, but Mar Golet, who's been, uh, extremely a good investigative journalist. He also broke the story about the, uh, kids company scandal. But with, um, Jimmy SEL you'll remember, um, that after his death BBC, uh, pulled a, uh, program that was, uh, attacking Jimmy SPEL for his crimes and miles discovered this and he, uh, offered this article to, um, lots of different places and they all turned him down. And as you know, you know, there was Jimmy SEL, he was, uh, dead. So he couldn't be liable, but, uh, showing

how very brave Richard Ingrams is, cuz it was still then the idea that Jimmy SEL was a national treasure and it was that fearlessness that meant, you know, Richard was prepared to face probably hundreds of liable actions when he was at private eye, which meant he said, go ahead and do it.

And then once it'd been in the oldie, it was then as papers often, do they go well, um, nothing's really happened there, which is course any great, uh, misery to the oldie. So all the other papers followed so that that's probably the greatest scoop the oldies had. I mean on the whole, we don't really do investigative journalism, but I hope I'm not, I'm not as fearless as Richard, but I, I hope that, um, given the same situation, I, I do the same and we're, we are very free except for that li issue. We haven't got the funds, uh, huge liable damages, but actually we are quite outspoken and our general, um, outlook on life is, is not to be too scared and literally, but then I certainly haven't had anything on, on, on that scale that all these great scoop

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Earth shattering news is called its tube called et two Bruta, the best Latin lines ever. And I've written it with a, uh, retired, uh, classics academic called John Davey. And it's got all those great lines like, uh, ETU, BTE or Carpe DM. It's also got some fantastically rude graffiti from the brothels of Pompe Cullan and it's also got, um, uh, some beautiful love poetry, which is not nearly as pornographic as that graffiti. And in fact, I wrote another book about Latin about 15 years ago called a Mo master math and all that's the only book I've written, which has done well. And I think it just shows again that you should never underestimate the curiosity of the, uh, reading public is, uh, as long as you make something not boring, you, you can write about anything and, and hopefully, um, interest your reader.

I hated Latin at school. I did it for a year when I was about 13 and I was like, it's a dead language most, why are we learning this? But like you say, you know, when you, when you, it is the way you present it, isn't it. What gave you your love of Latin?

Well, uh, I mean, I did it for, I can't remember years at school then I did, I did it for a couple of years at university. Um, and actually at the time, um, I quite liked it, but I didn't love it the way I do now. Now I'm so glad all the reasons I was told when I, uh, wasn't enjoying it so much at school university are true that it is the great foundation of romance languages in Western Europe. And along with the Greeks, it's the

foundation of, of, of everything, philosophy, history, architecture, art rhetoric. Um, and so, uh, it, it's incredibly pleasing thinking about the ancient, uh, that as it were and how it became the modernness. So if you just think about the journey from the ancient world to now and how many things have just stayed the same and how other things have changed. It's a wonderful skeleton to look at modern life. I say Latin and Greek give you kind of x-ray specs for the modern world.

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Well, Harry, that was a hugely interesting conversation. Obviously keep up the fantastic work with the all, and I wish you the very best of luck with it. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you, Paul. It was really enjoyable.

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