



The Old Un's diary

All the news that matters. And some that doesn't

Blanco: latest developments

Police investigating the death of actor Mark Blanco, who fell from a balcony in suspicious circumstances at a party in 2006, have admitted to his mother that they are only now starting to review new evidence broadcast on *Newsnight* almost a year ago.

The *Newsnight* report (reviewed at the time by our award-winning TV critic) contained interviews of several witnesses from the east London party held by drug dealer Mark Roundhill and attended by the pop star Pete Doherty and his minder. It also commissioned analysis of the CCTV footage taken outside the flat from US-based expert video analyst, Grant Fredericks.

Fredericks concluded that 'the images strongly suggest that one person is leaning far over the balcony as Blanco's body is moving outward and downward from the balcony railing.' James Saunders, the Blanco family's solicitor, wrote to the Crown Prosecution Service earlier this year to alert them to the new evidence. He told the CPS, 'Although the identity of the person behind Mark Blanco is not revealed by the enhancement, the knowledge that there was such a person confirms Mrs Blanco's view that this is a homicide case.

'The throwing of a passive person over a balcony, onto a pavement below, must be a dangerous act at the very least, and is more suggestive of murder.'

After repeatedly calling for a new investigation into the case, Mark's mother Sheila Blanco recently received an admission that the investigating police officer has only just received the discs containing the *Newsnight* report and

Fredericks's review. Detective Superintendent Fiona Mallon wrote to tell Mrs Blanco that the police received the discs on 13th October, adding that 'Police were previously not aware that the tapes existed. I understand that Jenny Hopkins [Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor] of the Crown Prosecution Service will be writing to apologise for the delay on their part in passing the discs onto police and for

failing to make police aware of their existence until now.'

One might have hoped that the police's investigating officer would have noticed *Newsnight*'s high profile media investigation and asked for the evidence directly. But alas, no. Mrs Blanco believes the police letter and CPS activity are partly in response to the recent flurry of media articles about the Blanco case and partly thanks to a letter of complaint her solicitor wrote to the DPP Keir Starmer about the police delays. She tells us, 'Police have dismissed other evidence that I've put to them as irrelevant. They are in a real mess with this case. They're now starting to realise, after all these years, that I'm not going away.'

Mrs Blanco is calling on the police to conduct further tests using 'calibrated reverse projection analysis' to further enhance the CCTV footage. DS Mallon told her that the case's investigating officer would now seek expert digital advice and would review the interviews in the *Newsnight* report.

• www.justiceformark.com

Scam alert!

Conmen seem to think that oldies are soft targets, but we want to prove them wrong. With that in mind, we will be running reports to alert

The police told Mrs Blanco that they were not previously aware that the tapes existed...



'Just give him the cold shoulder, George'



ILLUSTRATION BY HEATH

★ Great Bores of Today ★ No.65

'...they got me in here just after eight this morning when I fell off the ladder first of all they put me in a cubicle and said someone would come straight away I had blood pouring out all over the place then this nurse put some bandages on my arm and then she got a wheelchair and took me to have an X-ray well I must have been waiting outside for a good couple of hours nothing to drink I was dying to go to the loo and if you said anything they didn't take a blind bit of notice or pretended

they didn't hear anyway after all that it was about lunchtime this doctor who I swear couldn't understand a word I said was telling me said I needed to see a specialist and they put me here and said someone would be along but the three people who came in after me have all been seen the last time I was here was when I had the car accident it was fifteen hours before they got round to seeing me look at the time I can see it's going to be the same all over again...'

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readers to the increasingly sophisticated swindles these criminals carry out.

Our first case features a couple in their late seventies, Mr and Mrs D, who received a phone call from a man claiming to be from the police fraud squad. He said that a debit card cloned from the couple's own card had been used twice in London – in Regent's Park and in Tottenham Hale. He advised them to phone the number on the card to cancel it and then to dial 999 to report the theft. They phoned what they thought was the bank, which promised to cancel the card, then phoned 999 and were given a 'crime number' and the name of the officer said to be in charge of the investigation. In both cases the crooks merely stayed on the line and were able to pretend to be the bank and the police.

Mr D was then persuaded to go to his bank to draw out money as part of an undercover police sting to catch the fraudulent bank employee who was supposedly cloning cards. Meanwhile, Mrs D, now alone in the house, got a phone call in which she was bullied into going to her (different) bank with her passport and other ID and withdrawing £5,000. She walked back home with the money and handed it to a well-spoken 'police officer' who turned up at the door. He left saying an arrest was imminent. They didn't hear from him again.

If you know of a current scam – from a simple con trick to a complex swindle – contact the Old Un's diary (contact details on page 11).

Just Fancy That!

While leafing through an old copy of *The Sunday Times Book of Real Bread*, Oldie reader Jill Owen came across recipes donated by celebrities, including one from Stuart Hall,

Tips for Meanies No.66

Politicians love arguing about energy costs, but pricey petrol is the bane of a Meanie's life. The good news is it's actually better to fill up in winter when the service station storage tanks are cold, because the colder the ground, the denser the petrol.

Try to keep your car as full as possible to minimise the amount of air in the tank. Petrol vaporises fast and air in the tank will allow it to evaporate. Keeping tyres at the correct pressure also matters because deflated tyres increase petrol consumption.

JANE THYNNE



ILLUSTRATION BY MARTIN HONEYSETT

JUNE AND GERALD by NAF



the *It's A Knockout* presenter now serving time for indecently assaulting young girls. Its title? 'Aphrodisiac Milk Bread': 'To get the full effect of this simple recipe add the merest sensation of rhino horn,' he suggested. Indeed.

Safe in their hands?

Many oldies will have used council-owned leisure facilities run by the private outfit Leisure Connection (LC). At its peak LC ran leisure facilities for 70 councils, but it has now lost its lustre thanks to a catalogue of health and safety issues.

In 2011, a Freedom of Information request to Worcester Council revealed that a council Health and Safety Officer had found that 15 out of 18 lifeguards it employed were 'not competent or suitably trained'. And a few months ago, LC pleaded guilty at Chelmsford Crown Court for breaching health and safety rules at the Dunmow Leisure centre, which it ran on behalf of Uttlesford District Council, when a two-year-old boy slipped near a drain in the changing area and suffered third-degree burns from a sodium hydroxide solution which had not been properly flushed away by LC cleaners.

Seven-year-old Michelle Gellard drowned at the Blackwater Leisure Centre which

LC ran on behalf of Maldon District Council. A Health and Safety Executive investigation found that LC had failed to ensure there were sufficient lifeguards on duty at the pool. 'Michelle Gellard was robbed of her chances of rescue and survival by LC's failures,' said the HSE.

Now three London boroughs, Brent, Harrow and Ealing, have dispensed with LC's services in favour of not-for-profit contractors. None of this will affect LC's chief executive at the time of Michelle's death, Graham Farrant, now cosily ensconced as chief executive of not one

but two councils, Thurrock in Essex and its London neighbour, Barking and Dagenham.

The Lucy show

There were cheers all round at the BBC a few months back when its deeply unpopular Head of Human Resources, Lucy Adams, was branded a liar by Margaret Hodge, chair of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

Lucy has now agreed to leave the Beeb after overseeing executive pay-offs of around £20 million. Apparently she will not be getting a goodbye bung herself. She received



'Santa doesn't like to be threatened, dear'

Not many dead

Important stories you may have missed



There was a close call this week for Dundalk FC manager Stephen Kenny, who nearly lost a jumper in a local café.

The Dundalk Democrat

Llŵchwr Town Council has decided to stack its new Welfare Hall tables differently to see whether it would prevent them from being damaged.

South Wales Evening Post

A schoolgirl almost had her handbag stolen in an alleyway.

Mid Sussex Leader

A man was hit in the chest with a coin thrown from a white minibus as he walked in Henley yesterday. Police said the culprit was a passenger on the vehicle who had shouted 'Oh, hello' to the victim in a 'posh' accent.

Henley Standard

£25 for published contributions



THE OLDIE APP

The Oldie is now available in a digital format for iPhone or iPad. See:

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£320,000 p.a. for her duties, but Director General Lord Hall is making it clear that she will be the last Director of HR to be so extravagantly paid. Ludicrously, Adams was receiving the same salary as the Director of Television, Danny Cohen.

The embarrassment could have been easily avoided had Hall's predecessor Mark Thompson listened to advice. Two years ago a senior news correspondent told him how outrageous it was for the BBC to pay such a vast salary to a personnel officer at a time when pay had been frozen for journalists risking their lives in war zones. The great man just snorted about the 'going rate for these types of people'. Thompson was receiving a whopping £622,000 as DG, so probably thought Adams was being paid quite modestly. Indeed Adams herself told the PAC that she was seriously undervalued compared to her equivalents working for FTSE 100 companies.

HR people are always keen for CVs to have up-to-date references, so we hope Adams's will include



'Could you hold this for a bit? It says "Serve chilled"...

Margaret Hodge's comments to her: 'I'm not having any more lies this afternoon' and 'You're developing a habit of changing your evidence'...

The forgotten patients

An example of the extreme distress which patients, especially elderly ones, can suffer when their local hospital is downgraded has been brought to our attention by Dr Richard Taylor, former

independent MP, NHS crusader and one-time Oldie Campaigner of the Year. An 83-year-old prostate cancer victim in acute pain recently saw his GP at 6pm and was told that as his local hospital, Kidderminster General, now only had a Minor Injuries Unit he should go to the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch (18 miles away), where Worcestershire's urology services are based. On arrival at the Alexandra's

A&E he was told that there would be a two-hour wait for assessment. He waited in agony until 9pm, when he was assessed, and then waited again for a cubicle, without pain relief. At 10.15 he was given a gown and a urine bottle, and soon after this a doctor inserted a catheter. At around midnight he was told he had a urinary infection, given a supply of antibiotics, and discharged. The taxi home cost him £30.

Dr Taylor, 79, fought against the downgrading of Kidderminster General Hospital in 2000, served twice as the MP for Wyre Forest in 2001 and 2010, and as co-leader of National Health Action has announced that he will stand again in the 2015 General Election. He tells us, 'People like this with common, simple health problems are the "forgotten" patients who are being disregarded by those in the medical and surgical Royal Colleges, who work in centres of excellence and are driving the hospital changes.

'We have learned lessons that must be noted before decisions are taken about changes to other NHS hospitals which, while improving quality and safety of care for a select few, will affect many other patients adversely. Even a downgraded hospital with only a MIU must retain facilities for the reception and immediate treatment of common, simple, painful emergencies before referring on to the appropriate specialist centre.'

Sender's list

The Polish Embassy in London recently held a special evening to commemorate a Polish woman who saved more Jewish children during the war than Oskar Schindler. Irena Sender lived in Warsaw in 1939, when the Germans invaded. She and



What were you doing 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 or 70 years ago?

This month's £50 prize goes to Sue Schilperoort

40 years ago, at the age of sixteen, I was sitting in a magistrate's office in Cardiff, signing the decree absolute on my daughter's adoption.

As a teenager growing up in one of the poorest parts of the country, I'd gone looking for love. But I'd found sex instead, and maybe a little love on the side. Hiding my pregnancy with big jumpers and even bigger lies, I was five months pregnant by the time my mother marched me along to the doctor's. Next day my parents drove me a hundred and

seventy miles south: I would see out my pregnancy in Devon, staying with my older sister.

My return to school after the forced adoption has been totally erased from my memory. But sitting in that office, looking across a large mahogany desk at a kindly man asking me if I was sure this was what I wanted, is indelibly printed on my mind. How do you look someone in the eyes and lie barefaced without being challenged? So I signed the papers, and signed away all rights to know from that moment on if my child was alive or dead.

Was it really forty years ago?

other Christian volunteers created more than 3,000 false documents to help Jewish families escape. In Nazi-occupied Poland, helping Jews meant an instant death sentence not just for the perpetrator but for the entire household.

In 1942, aged 32, Sendler was nominated by Zegota, the underground Polish Council to Aid Jews, to head its children's section. She had a special permit to enter the Warsaw Ghetto in its dying days to check for signs of typhus, which the Nazis feared would spread beyond the Ghetto. She used this cover to smuggle Jewish babies and small children out in ambulances and trucks, even as parcels in sacks. The children were placed with Polish families, orphanages and convents. Sendler and her team helped rescue about 2,500 Jewish children, of whom 400 were saved by Sendler personally. She buried lists of their details in jars under a tree in her garden to enable them to be returned to their families after the war.

Sendler was arrested by the Gestapo, tortured, and sentenced to death. Zegota was only able to save her by bribing the German guards taking her to be shot. For the remainder of the war she lived in hiding, but continued her work for Jewish children.

In 2007, Sendler, by now 97 and living in a convent, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by, among others, the Polish president and Lech Walesa. But her nomination was scuppered by the Israel Holocaust Memorial Foundation, Yad Vashem. It told the Nobel committee that the prize should be given to all who had risked their lives saving Jews in World War Two, and suggested that it, Yad Vashem, could receive it on their behalf. (The prize eventually

went to Al Gore.) The following year Sendler died.

The Polish Embassy invited their Israeli counterparts to help commemorate Sendler. A spokesman told us that no reply was received and no one from the Embassy attended.

Voice from the Grave

This modern craze for putting the young in positions of authority – headmasters in their thirties, bishops without a grey hair on their heads, generals who scarcely need to use a razor – ever since it took hold the world's gone steadily downhill. From *The Herb of Grace* by Elizabeth Goudge, 1948.

Sent in by John D Bourne

£25 for contributions

A burning danger

We have previously reported on the health dangers of incinerator emissions exposed by Dr Dick van Steenis, who died earlier this year with his findings largely ignored by public health officials. Dr van Steenis would have been delighted to read the recent headline in the *Welwyn Hatfield Times*: "People will be dying if this incinerator goes ahead" claim at inquiry.' The inquiry into the New Barnfield waste incinerator had been told by Professor Jim Bridges, energy firm Veolia's expert witness, that the danger to health from the 380,000-tonne plant near Hatfield would be 'minimal'. But distinguished public health specialist Margaret Eames confronted Professor Bridges with a World Health Organisation report published in July which shows that tiny particles emitted from incinerators can cause heart attacks, asthma and other serious health problems. This evidence had been ignored by Veolia, she said, telling the inquiry, 'It will be too late if this incinerator is built ... people will be dying.'

Take a leak!

Good news for residents of the lovely market town of Bridport in Dorset. A local businesswoman has stepped in to save the town's public loos from closure. Caroline Parkin is to spend £100,000 on the project to ensure locals and visitors have loos aplenty. But the Old Un's favourite part of this feelgood story is Mrs Parkin's day job – she is the owner of Leakers Bakery.

The Obituary Game

Who Was What? (answers below)

1. Brian Sollitt

- a. Met Office scientist who introduced satellite technology
- b. Master chocolatier who invented After Eights
- c. Curator of the world's only kazoo museum

2. Wadih el-Safi

- a. Under-secretary to Boutros Boutros-Ghali at the UN
 - b. Egyptologist and expert in deciphering hieroglyphics
 - c. Singer known as 'the Frank Sinatra of the Middle East'
- #### 3. Kadir Nurman
- a. Inventor of the doner kebab
 - b. Algerian footballer whose kick won his country its first World Cup entry
 - c. Tunisian poet who predicted the Arab Spring

For the vulgarian in your life...

Spotted by our New York correspondent in luxury department store Neiman Marcus's Christmas gift catalogue: a \$150,000 'Global Falconry Companion'. The set includes a 20-karat gold-plated perch, a leather trunk, a matching falcon carrying case, hand-carved stands, scales and hand-sewn anklets. There are exotic hoods by 'the world's pre-eminent falconry hood maker', and the falconer can relax at a foldout table and chairs designed by the King of Jordan's furniture maker with a handmade backgammon board, lead crystal decanters and designer cigar cutter.

TOP CHUMPS

JUSTIN WELBY



CHUMPFIL

- ★ Speaking in tongues 100%
- ★ Comic hat 95%
- ★ Tribal dance inauguration 98%
- ★ Oil executive 95%
- ★ Old Etonian 100%
- ★ Buddhist Prince George OK 95%

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IDEAL FOR OVERSEAS AND POORLY-SIGHTED SUBSCRIBERS

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