



CUMMINGS' GOINGS

with former BBC Radio Gloucestershire presenter **Mark Cummings**



The bright festive lights of Fairford

Goodwill to all... except Swindon

My adventures switching on the Christmas lights across the Cotswolds is a yuletide tale of love, glamour, dodgy electrics, royalty and disaster. The iconic market house in Tetbury looks stunning with its dreamy string of golden lights draped beautifully around its walls. My only problem when pushing the plunger was to not be daunted by the couple who'd done it the year before... the future King and Queen. According to my Tetbury 'snout', Camilla couldn't work out how the plunger connected to the electrics and kept asking for clarification. The plunger is fake and it's Sid in a little room underneath

the building who flicks the switch. As the clock was ticking to showtime she was still debating the technical details when an exasperated organiser said: 'Just push the bloody plunger!' I've had great nights in Dursley, which always has reindeers and snow. Fairford is special because the tree is massive and the local school children are delightful, and Bourton-on-the-Water with the tree in the river is a dream. I used to do the countdown in the market square in Cirencester for the advent market launch until the year it went, oh, so wrong. On stage with me were the cast from *Dick Whittington* at the Wyvern in Swindon. I'm not a fan of

Swindon for many reasons, and this year a rather irritating performer playing Dick grabbed my microphone and said, 'Hello. I'm Dick from Swindon'. The crowd groaned, I grabbed the mike and said, 'Don't be a D**k, live in Cirencester,' and the crowd cheered. The following year I was counting the days until I could return and cohost with a special guest from a nearby village. Three weeks before the switch-on I was informed that the reason the panto team from Swindon had been invited was to strengthen links between the two communities and the Swindon lot had refused to take part if I was host again! The special guest I missed out on? Liz Hurley.

Home thoughts from abroad



Mark in the taverna in Corfu, with generous host George.

I'm looking forward to many adventures around the world in the next few years, indulging my love of travel, exploration and writing. Wherever I go I will promote the county of Gloucestershire for all I'm worth. I love talking about the Cotswolds and encouraging people to visit. It's remarkable how often when on my jaunts I find connections from back home. I was in a taverna in Corfu recently which was run by George, who was the most charismatic,

warm, generous host. As soon as he found out where I was from he told me all about his uncle and cousin from the 'Pan-aswick road' who run Morgan Supplies on Painswick Road. I was in a hotel in Times Square, New York, a few years ago and the view from our lofty hotel room reminded me of home. It was a view out towards Long Island with a sloping hill that looks just like Stinchcombe Hill near Dursley, that slopes down towards the River Severn. Every time



Fellow Gloucester Rugby season ticket holder, Becky from Cheltenham, spots Mark's cherry-and-white shirt in Buenos Aires

I looked out of the window I genuinely thought I was back home. I love the warm glow when travelling across Europe every time you see the purple livery of a Downton's lorry, a Katie Fforde novel being read, or a cherry-and-white rugby shirt. I was wearing one of these in the centre of Buenos Aires when suddenly I heard the chant of 'Glaws-ta, Glaws-ta' behind me. It was Becky from Cheltenham who was a fellow season ticket holder.

Radio rehab

When people ask me how I'm doing after leaving the radio show I adored, I say 70% good, 30% pain. Last month I shared stories of the 70% with my travel adventures and the joy of having more time and plenty of sleep. So, here's the yin to that yang. Terry Wogan wisely said when he left his Radio 2 *Breakfast Show*: 'There's no right way to

leave this show but there is a wrong way.' The 'wrong way' was getting sacked, or having lost the energy and the joy of doing it. I left on a high whilst still absolutely loving it because I couldn't pursue my other dreams and hold down a daily show at the same time. However, I miss the connection, fun and interaction with thousands of brilliant

listeners and the sheer adrenaline of being on air. I knew this would happen, and at the moment there's a big, painful gap in my heart which I know eventually will become a small, happy peephole.

My aim for this time next year is a 90/10 split with the pain reduced to a warm, reflective pang.

2023... NEVER A DULL MOMENT

Is there a specific year that you'll always recognise as being a 'Big' one because of family, work, health or happy/sad reasons? The visions in my head for the past 12 months include the following... kidney stones, La Gomera in the Canaries, Paul Weller at Westonbirt, announcing radio departure, precipitous ledges in the Lake District, selling camper van, pleurisy, a magical leaving do at Gloucester Rugby Club, cycling and swimming in Wales, leaving radio show, sailing around Greece,



Mark is presented with his Outstanding Contribution award at Gloucestershire Live's business awards

a posh London hotel, conceiving a book about Gloucestershire, thousands of lovely messages from listeners, buying a new camper van, travel writing, Edinburgh Fringe, a first trip to Jersey, a new job at Westonbirt Arboretum for my wife Jo, Wychwood, Barn on the Farm and Lakefest music festivals, a special honour at the Gloucestershire Live Business Awards and, finally, a surprising invitation to switch on the Christmas lights in Swindon. I might have made the last one up. ●