



CUMMINGS' GOINGS

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



PHOTOS: MARK CUMMINGS

Mark and Katie Fforde enjoying a gossip in The Prince Albert

Bowled over at the top of the hill

Totally by accident, the first column of 2024 has a lovely thread running through it with some of my favourite people popping up more than once. Starring this January are Katie Fforde, Jack Russell, Tom Kerridge and The Prince Albert pub. Let's start with an evening out with my friend Katie, a bestselling, British romantic novelist, a Cotswold treasure and fantastic company if you enjoy a riotous evening at the local pub. Our chosen location was the Prince Albert perched on the top of Rodborough Hill, a perfect environment for hours of ribaldry, indiscreet gossip and 'arty' conversations. I

told her about the burst of pride I have every time I see someone reading her novels when I'm away on holiday. We discussed her new book *One Enchanted Evening*, caught up on family news and she gave me sage advice with a little writing venture of my own.

We both love this place because of the special vibe created by hosts Lotte and Miles and I was excited to share with all of them a lovely story that happened years before any of them had a connection with the pub. It was here where former England wicketkeeper, and now artist, Jack Russell met a man called Henry Peglar who subsequently taught Jack

to drive. It was, however, his military past that left a lasting impression on Jack and led to his latest project of immortalising the last surviving veterans of the Korean War on canvas. Henry was badly wounded at the Battle of Imjin River and was a prisoner of war for two years. He shared some of these memories with Jack during their hours driving through the valleys. In next month's column Jack will share the full story of those conversations and the dramatic impact it had on him. Thank you, the Prince Albert for providing the perfect place to meet, laugh, create and be inspired.

As I walked out one mid-January morning...



above: Jack Russell's print *Timeless Valley*

right: Jessie Lee, third from the left, at The Stroud Book Festival

My first crisp January walk of 2024 will be from the centre of Stroud to The Woolpack pub in Slad via Swift's Hill. This will take me through the middle of a painting that's my pride and joy. When I left the BBC, Jack Russell gave me a copy of his wonderful landscape entitled *Timeless Valley* which he's framed and inscribed with some very moving words. I committed to this winter ramble while hearing Laurie Lee's daughter Jessie reading previously unheard poems from a new Penguin classic collection. It was an enchanting evening at the Stroud Book Festival with a delicious sensory overload of Laurie's word craft. His work means so much to me for the following reasons: I studied *Cider with Rosie* for O Level; I spent an hour in the company of the real Rosie; my wife, Jo, met and had lunch with Laurie (he flirted outrageously); and, on his centenary, I hosted a magical show from the Woolpack. I can see this iconic pub every time I walk past my treasured artwork. Time now, thanks to Jessie, to walk the walk.



Saucy times with Tom

You might have seen The Prince Albert pub featured on the TV show *Saving Britain's Pubs* with chef Tom Kerridge. Tom helped the slightly over-generous hosts Miles and Lotte acquire a little more business-savvy. I've interviewed Tom many times and here's an *amuse-bouche* of delicious anecdotes: He grew up in a single parent family in Matson in Gloucester and happily admits to being one of the 'naughty boys'. He went to drama classes at The Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham

mainly because the girls from Ladies' College always liked a 'naughty boy'. His acting career involved usually playing a thug in programmes such as *London's Burning*, *Miss Marple* and *The Tomorrow People*.

My favourite story involves Oprah Winfrey, a chippy in Gloucester and a delicious accompaniment. Tom used to frequent his local fish and chip shop in Matson in his youth and they did a fabulous curry sauce. He invented his own version and called it Matson

Sauce which can be found on his menu today. When dining in one of his restaurants, TV legend Oprah loved it and asked Tom where it came from. He told her it was inspired by the estate he grew up on in Gloucestershire.

She clearly got the wrong end of the stick as her follow-up questions revealed she'd assumed he grew up clad in tweed, hosting shooting parties and making delicious sauces to go with the pike he'd caught that morning in his private lake...

RESOLUTELY CHAOTIC

I thought when I gave up hosting a daily radio show and moved into a more flexible lifestyle I would do the following: Up at 7am, healthy breakfast, an hour on the cross trainer followed by time spent cleansing my mind and soul by learning Spanish, reading

great works of literature, becoming expert on the guitar and perfecting my meditation technique. In reality for the first four months I went on a hedonistic road trip which involved enjoying the 'grape and the grain' every day, getting addicted to Netflix thrillers (*Ozark* is

amazing) going to bed at 2am and putting on a stone in weight. I loved it but knew it couldn't last so I made my New Year's resolutions back in November. I joined a gym, started writing a book, ensure I am in bed by 11.30pm and now only have a drink on days ending in a 'y'. ●