

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/nov/16/bbc-public-services-attenborough-peter-morrison>

■ Privatised companies – energy, the railways – are presently gouging us for everything they can get, via bloated prices or taxpayers' subsidies or both. So, like the NHS, it's even more vital that we keep the [BBC](#) a public service, even if other media corporations would love to dismember it.

Oh, and since they need a new director general, why not [Greg Dyke, now amply vindicated after the Hutton nonsense](#)? It's a really good idea, which I suppose is why it will never happen.

■ To Southwold for the annual literature festival. I was fascinated by Jessica Fellowes, niece of Julian, who spoke about [Downton Abbey](#) and revealed that most of the characters are based on real people.

The earl, for example, is Julian's father, a man so honest – it was said – that if he crashed his car in the desert and there was a parking meter, he'd fret if he didn't have the right change. Carson, the butler, "more snobbish than the family he works for", was based on a butler called Arthur Inch. O'Brien is a cousin of Julian's grandfather, and the dowager countess is Jessica's great-great-aunt. Maggie Smith is the only female member of the cast permitted not to wear a corset – she says she's finished with them.

There was some disagreement with the audience about the language. How is it, they wanted to know, that every visual detail, down to the appearance of telegrams and the cast's underwear, is researched immaculately and reproduced perfectly, while the dialogue often sounds as if it could have come from Friends or EastEnders?

The examples they quoted from the last series were "steep learning curve" and "a big girl's blouse". Jessica said that if Julian used them, they existed at the time, though I doubt that's the case in the first, and the second might have been heard in a ladies' clothing store, never used as an insult.

■ Jeremy Vine told a story about perils of the internet. He has Google Alert, which tells him if his name crops up online. Once he learned about a blogger who was asking his readers, "is [Jeremy Vine](#) (a) a tosser, (b) a huge tosser or (c) an intergalactic tosser?"

He said: "I needed to know how the voting was going, but to find out you had to vote. I did, and discovered that I was the only person who had voted." As the Google people will tell you, half of all blogs have only one reader: the blogger.

■ More on the late [Peter Morrison, the paedophile who was also Margaret Thatcher's parliamentary private secretary](#). Grahame Nicholls, who ran the Chester Trades Council when Morrison was the local MP, wrote describing how he'd often met Morrison, who was by the 1980s pretty well constantly drunk.

"After the 1987 general election, around 1990, I attended a meeting of Chester Labour party where we were informed by the agent, Christine Russell, that Peter Morrison would not be standing in 1992. He had been caught in the toilets at Crewe station with a 15-year-old boy. A deal was struck between Labour, the local Tories, the local press and the police that if he stood down at the next election the matter would go no further. Chester finished up with Gyles Brandreth and Morrison walked away scot-free. I thought you might be interested."

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This was only a year and a half after his failed, boozy campaign to save Mrs Thatcher. Incredible that she – presumably – had no idea, and that such deals could be struck then.

■ Sir Rex Hunt, who has just died, returned to the Falklands as governor after being thrown out by the Argentinians in 1972, which meant that he was on site for Thatcher's greatest ever double entendre. She had flown out for her victory tour, and was being shown around battle sites. On a cliff top overlooking the plain over which the Argies would have had to march if they re-invaded, she was shown a huge field gun, manned by a single squaddie. She admired the weapon and the soldier asked if she would like to fire a round.

"Goodness!" she replied, "won't it jerk me off?"

The problem with this unintentional smut – bizarrely frequent – was that nobody could ever laugh or even look remotely amused because of the terrible fear that she might turn to you and inquire in that blood-freezing fashion what was so very funny.

■ Daft labels: John Cranston bought a tube of Ronseal smooth finish filler: "Smooth over filler with wetted finger prior to drying", then further down, "avoid contact with skin".

*There are a few tickets left for Simon Hoggart's talk next Wednesday about his new book, House Of Fun. [www.kingsplace.co.uk](http://www.kingsplace.co.uk)*

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