

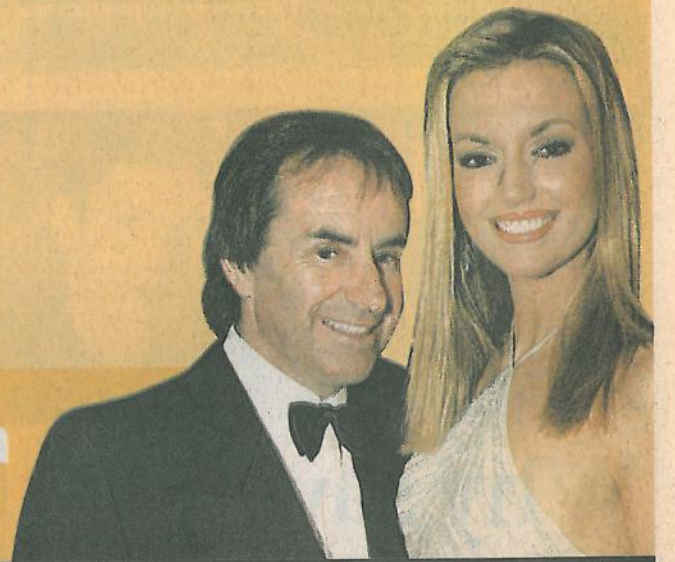
The Sunday Telegraph



THE SECRET ABOUT LORD LUCAN THAT I'VE KEPT FOR 30 YEARS

James Fox, who was intimate with the Lucan Set, reveals an extraordinary letter written by the peer after he committed murder **REVIEW: PAGE 1**

Review

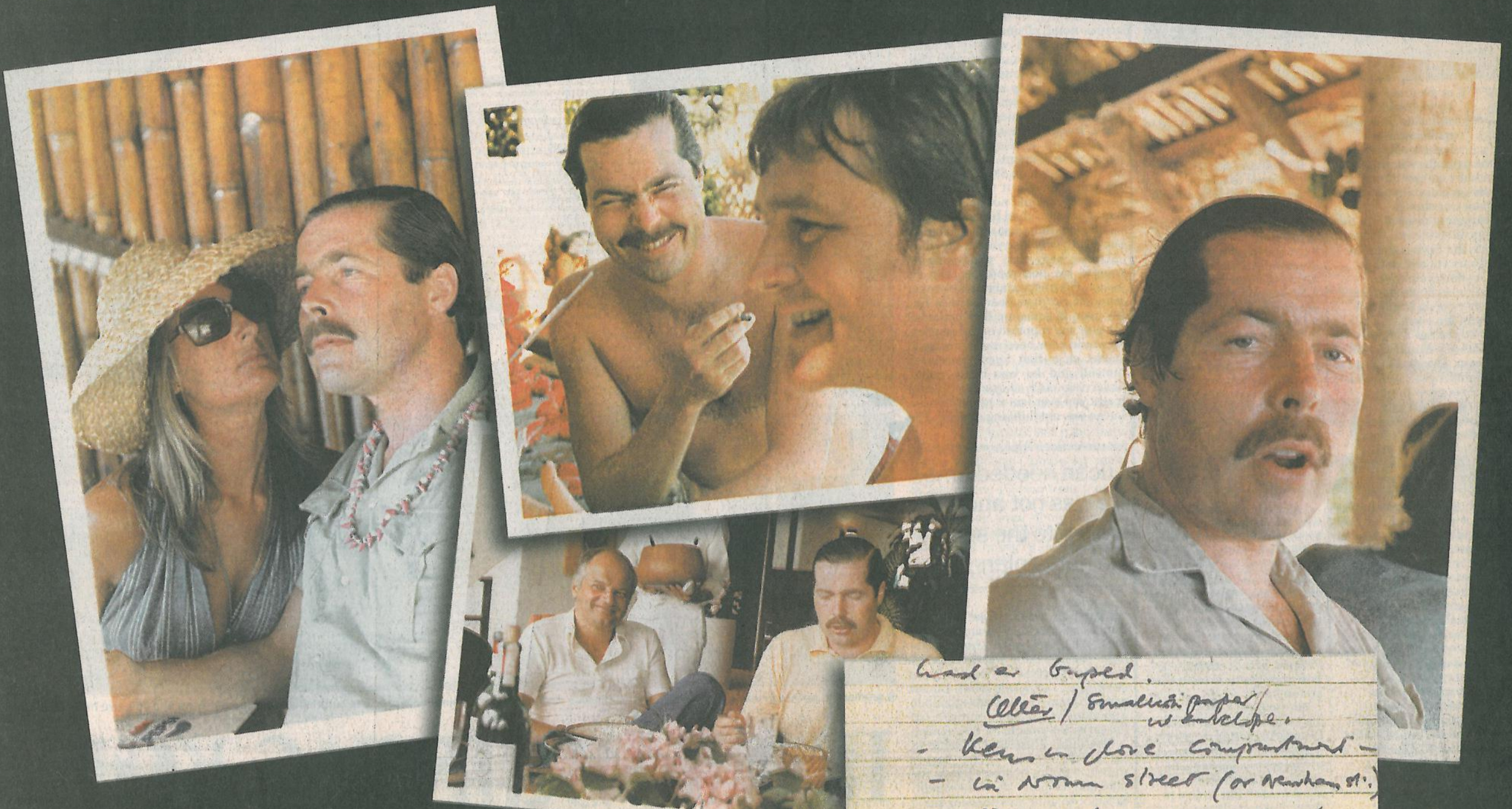


Never too young for love
Peaches Geldof on teenage passion P7

My daughter's tarnished crown
Chris de Burgh on the Miss World contest INTERVIEW P3

OCTOBER 10 2004

arts.telegraph.co.uk



LORD LUCAN AND THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING LETTER

Thirty years ago, the 7th Earl of Lucan vanished after killing his children's nanny. **James Fox**, who gained the confidence of the Lucan set to investigate the story, reveals a final piece of evidence which – until now – he has kept secret

The Clermont set Lucan with Lady Annabel Birley (now Goldsmith); with James Goldsmith, below; and with Dominic Elwes, top. Elwes, who was falsely blamed for selling these photographs, later committed suicide. Inset: Fox's notes on Lucan's last letter

Around this time 30 years ago, the 7th Earl of Lucan was planning to murder his wife, Veronica. He was embarking on what was to become one of the greatest murder mysteries in British history. For my part, I was in my late twenties, working as a writer on a Sunday newspaper, my marriage collapsing, but with no thoughts of murder. Yet within weeks I was thinking of little else. I can no longer remember why I was assigned the story of Lord Lucan's attempt to kill his wife and his subsequent disappearance. I knew something about the people in his "circle": rich gamblers and socialites such as John Aspinall, James Goldsmith and Mark Birley. One of their set, Dominic Elwes, was a friend of a friend. Not much of an entrée – but, as it proved, it was enough.

My notebooks are still with me. And they include one piece of evidence that I have kept to myself for all those years – a note of one last message from Lord Lucan which will inevitably rekindle speculation about his actions on the night he vanished. I must examine honestly why I kept it quiet, as I must throw some long-hidden light on another bitter legacy of the story – the suicide of Elwes, shunned by his one-time friends in the Lucan set, who blamed him for the article I wrote. My piece exposed, among other things, the ruthlessness and contempt for others which characterised Lucan's circle. It caused a sensation when it was published, in the *Sunday Times*, on June 8, 1975. I took a certain pride in the way I penetrated and described that privileged patrician world, united against outsiders

to protect one of their own. Yet something troubles me. I saw myself as a journalist set on revealing the truth. But the long-forgotten scrawls in my notebook tell a different tale. Like some of Lucan's friends, I too kept something back in my account of the story. Early in October 1974, Lucan had already told his friend Greville Howard – now Lord Howard – how he was going to commit the murder. His wife's body would be dumped in the sea. Lucan wanted to kill his wife because he had lost his children to her in a custody case, despite evidence in court of Veronica's emotional instability, and he was convinced that they would come to harm under her care. Having planned a perfect murder, he evidently believed that he would never be caught. Lucan was drinking more heavily than usual in these

weeks. He would often arrive drunk at John Aspinall's Clermont Club in Mayfair, where he gambled every night. On October 11, he borrowed an ageing Ford Corsair from his friend, Michael Stoop. Stoop was less cliquy than the rest of the Lucan in-crowd. He played golf with Lucan and partnered him in backgammon tournaments. On Thursday November 7, believing that it was the nanny's night out, Lucan used his latch key to his house, waited in the basement and lashed out at a female figure. He killed the nanny, Sandra Rivett, who had stayed in with a cold. When Veronica came downstairs he hit her with almost equal violence. The sequence of events that followed is familiar from the innumerable books which have since fed an insatiable public appetite for the Lucan case. Veronica ran

to the pub. Lucan tried to alert a neighbour, then got into Michael Stoop's car and drove to the house of his friend Mrs Maxwell Scott, a barrister who lived in Uckfield, Sussex – the last time he was seen. He made two calls to his mother, concerned about the children. He wrote letters, setting up a cover story in which he claimed to have surprised an intruder in the house: two were to his brother-in-law, William Shand Kydd. Mrs Maxwell Scott posted them for him. Lucan then wrote a third to Michael Stoop, alluding to a "traumatic night of unbelievable circumstances". It included the astonishing line, "I won't bore you, except when you come across my children please tell them that you knew me and all I care about is them." The words have a goodbye ring. When Stoop received the

letter he passed it on to the police, telling them he hadn't kept the envelope or noted the postmark. Mrs Maxwell Scott, who died three weeks ago, said that Lucan left her house at 1.15 am, telling her he wanted to get back to London. She waited for 48 hours before contacting the police. On Saturday, two days after the murder, Michael Stoop told the police about the car he'd lent to Lucan. It was discovered on Sunday parked in Norman Road, Newhaven, 16 miles from Mrs Maxwell Scott's house. A lead pipe, wrapped in sticking plaster, identical to the murder weapon, was found in the boot. A pad of Lion writing paper was on the seat. Neighbours said that it had been parked there sometime between 4 am and 8 am. What

Continued overleaf

'From the fury of the Northmen, Lord deliver us'

(Ancient Anglo-Saxon prayer)

Get the first book in Bernard Cornwell's epic, heart-pounding new saga today.

((AUDIO)) harpercollins.co.uk

