# 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

The Sunday Telegraph

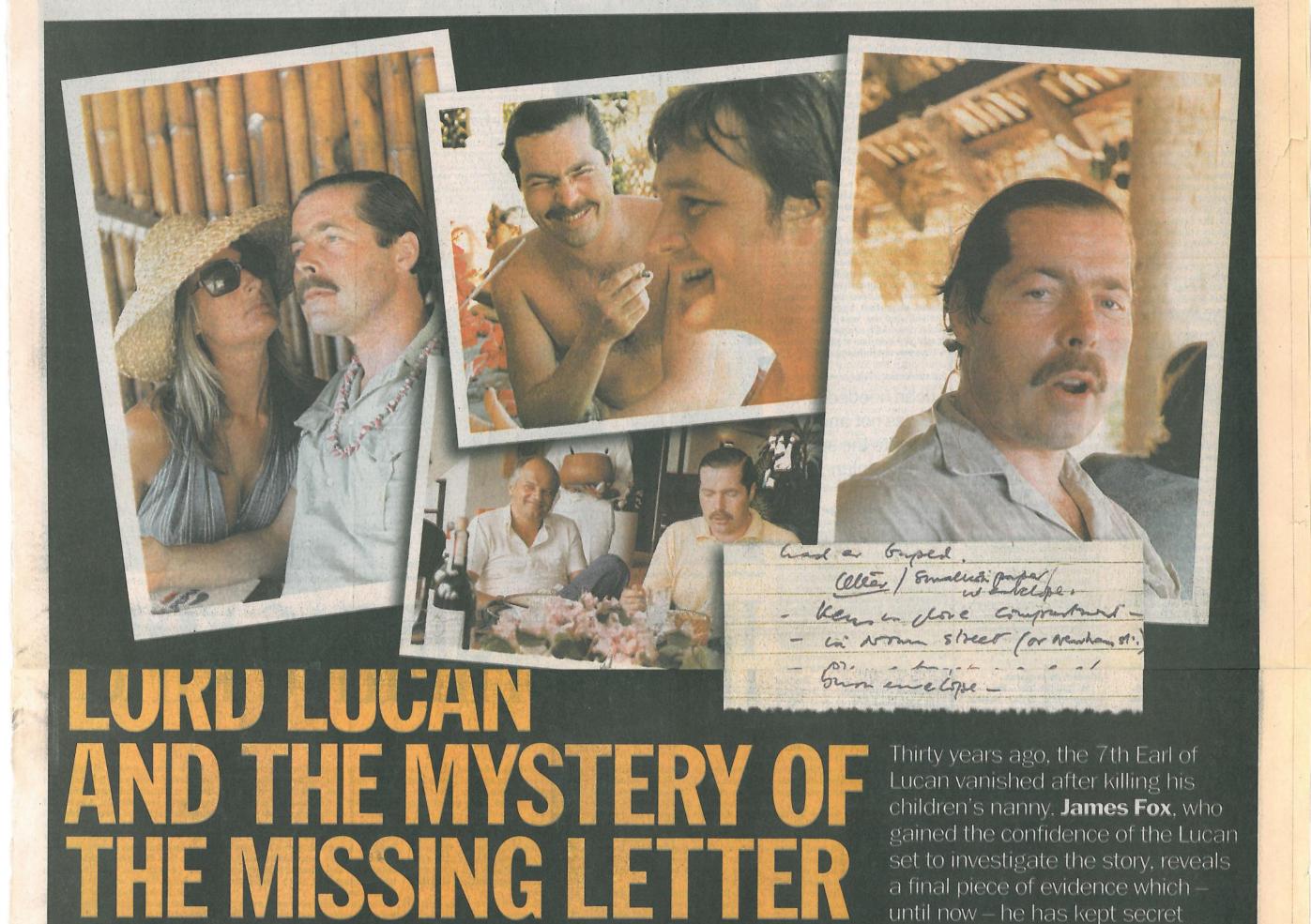
Never too young for love

My daughter's tarnished crown



**OCTOBER 10 2004** 

arts.telegraph.co.uk



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

round 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 Brit-ish history. For my part, I was in my late twenties, working as a writer on a Sun-day newspaper, my marriage collapsing, but with no thoughts of murder. Yet within weeks I was thinking of little lese.

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 electric 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 prepare the story of Lord Lucan set, who blamed him for the article I wrote.

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

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 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 note-book 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 appetite for the Lucan case. Veronica ran

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 cliquey 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

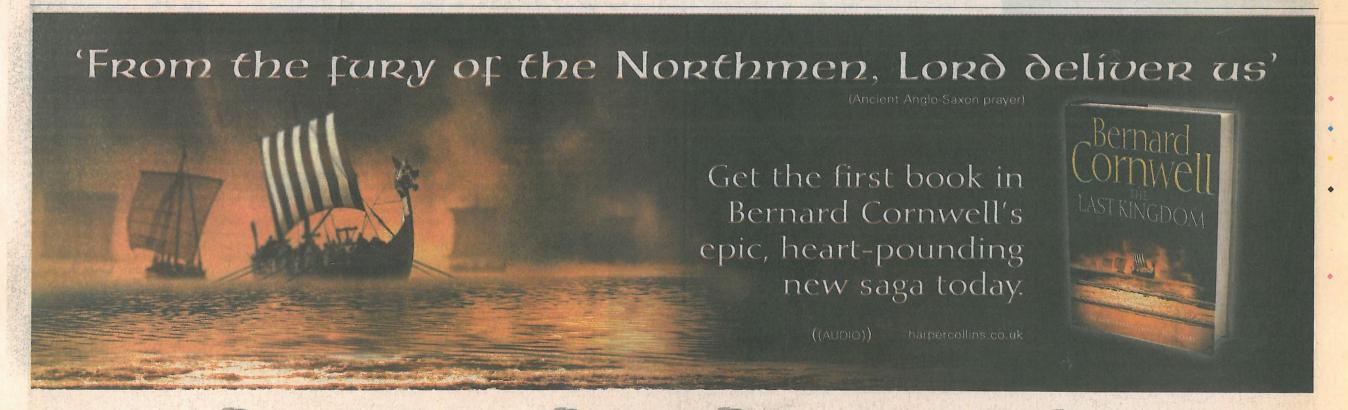
weeks. He would often arrive drunk at to the pub. Lucan tried to alert a neighbour, then got into Michael Stoop's car and drove to the house of his friend Mrs Maxwell Scott, a barrister who lived in Uckfield, Sussex - the last time he was

> 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-inlaw, 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

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** 



## Matthew Holehouse **FIRST PERSON**

## Why save a way of life natives abhor?

or six middle-class 16-year-olds from suburbia, it was the realisation of a fashionable dream. As the prize for winning a Channel 4 competition, the television company would sponsor our chosen development project - in the village of Sivincani, 13,000ft up into the Bolivian Andes – and fly us out with a film crew to document our experiences. It was a chance to travel, get on television and help the poor. We hoped our £10,000

prize money would "save" Sivincani. Thanks to frost for 300 nights a year, only root vegetables grow there, giving the indigenous Aymara community a diet that leaves most of them anaemic. Unsuprisingly, many villagers leave for La Paz, where many end up homeless or find work in

sweatshops or as prostitutes. Few of us doubted that the wells and crophouses funded by our prize money would give the inhabitants a reason to stay on. Indeed, we arrived in Sivincani to find its first salads emerging under blue polythene tunnels, and we noticed how clean the water was compared with the grey pools that we knew the families had drunk from months earlier. In the festivities that marked our arrival, we saw exactly what we had come to preserve culture of dances and panpipes, of vividly coloured that simple. As I shared meals of llama stew, ploughed with medieval equipment, used the cows' field for a lavatory and slept in the farmers' tiny huts, I began to see why the villagers would want to leave Sivincani for the neon lights of La Paz. They would go because of hunger, yes, and poverty, but also through boredom. Perhaps I'm just an over-privileged English schoolboy, but working the soil with oxen and a wooden ploughshare

seems a truly dull way to

With 60 classic numbers,

this three-CD set is

bursting with heavenly

notes from the finest

traditional jazz

earn a living. After a morning furrowing our host's plot, I found it hard to

see why I – or anyone else – would choose to stay. If I couldn't see why I would want to live in Sivincani, then why should I expect its inhabitants to remain? It was patronising to assume that they would be satisfied with the barest essentials of life and not aspire to something better.

Sivincani's teenagers seemed to agree. They told us they didn't want increased farming yields or bigger health centre; they wanted "libraries, a wanted "libraries, a
telephone exchange", and,
above all, a chance to do
something with their lives —
things that could never be
found in Sivincani. "I'd like
to live in England," one girl,
Celia, told me. "It's got to be
better than here." It was
hard to disagree.

I started to think about
why we wanted to preserve

why we wanted to preserve Sivincani; who exactly this culture was being saved for. Quite rightly, we are taught to respect and value other ways of life. "Not wrong, just different" has become the watchword of school citizenship lessons, and we are generally more tolerant because of it. It seems, however, that this ideal can go too far.

This subject kept us arguing for months. Were the mud huts that we slept in quaint and valuable aspects of Sivincani's heritage, or simply cramped and cold? society's heritage sometimes hinders its progress.

So had the trip - the competition, even - been a bad idea? Certainly our crophouses and wells were a success: we had only to look at the way they had changed people's lives to see that the village should never have been without them. But the villagers would continue to flee Sivincani - and frankly, I didn't blame them.

■ Matthew Holehouse is an Alevel student from Harrogate. A World of Difference: Bolivia, Thursday, Channel 4, 11.10am

#### Continued from page 1

had Lucan been doing between 1.15 am and the time his car was

Simple, says Veronica Lucan, who covers the subject on her website, www.ladylucan.co.uk; he must have been sleeping in the car. I can well believe her. He would have been exhausted. There was no evidence that Lucan had driven it to Newhaven – in fact, one of the policemen on the case, Det David Gerring, who believed that Lucan had an accomplice in his movements, said in 1993: "I don't think he ever went to Newhaven. Only the car did."

I was always sure Lucan got to Newhaven, his last stop before tak-ing his own life, and that all the theories about his escape into exile were idle speculation. But it's taken were idle speculation. But it's taken me 30 years to uncover the reason for my certainty. Four weeks ago, while looking in old files, I came across notes of one last letter that Lucan wrote. It was to Michael Stoop, and was much shorter than the three other letters made public at the time. Stoop showed it to me when I interviewed him in early 1975 in his London flat. My scribbled notes record: "smallish paper... no envelope... keys in glove compartment... in Norman Street (or Newham St)... Please forget you ever lent it to me... burn envelope". I could not believe I still had it, let alone had found it, almost by chance. But what was its significance after all these years? cance after all these years?

Lucan had been attempting to reunite his borrowed car with its owner. His mistake about the proper name of Norman Road sounds like his own. If someone had parked it for him and reported back to Lucan, he would have been more precise. It seems clear that Lucan parked it himself and he was being polite, observing club etiquette. "Please forget you ever lent it to me," shows Lucan was not thinking streight. Lucan was not thinking straight. The

### Lucan needed time. He was not about to walk into the sea. He had a plan

car, after all, was covered in blood. car, after all, was covered in blood. But "burn envelope" seems significant. When you read "burn envelope" the first thing you do is examine the postmark. And "burn envelope" suggests that Lucan needed time. He was not about to walk into the sea the morning he left the car in Newhaven. He had a plan.

Why didn't I use Stoop's letter in my article? I knew Stoop hadn't shown it to the police. I felt at the time that he didn't know the signifiground and didn't want to alarm him, or to harden up any implied promise of confidence – I would go away and think how to deal with it later. If I'd shown my note of Lucan's letter to Stoop to the police at the time, three months before publication, all my hard won contacts would been seen to have withheld information in the previous weeks; and so, of course, would Stoop.

The car had been found by the time Stoop had the letter, so perhaps that was why he hadn't seen the significance of it. But to read "burn envelope" after all these years made me start. Stoop must have noticed something on the envelope: what could it have been? I had to talk to Stoop, the last man Lucan trusted, again. He would, I calculated, be 83: his memory might be as fallible as mine, but it was worth a try.

I finally managed to track him down last week, at a chess tournament in Guernsey. Our telephone conversation was brief. I reminded him of the letter: "I think I did show it to you, rather foolishly," he said. He told me that he hadn't noticed it. Nor had he done what Lucan asked - burn it. "I just chucked the thing in the wastepaper basket as far as I remember." And the postmark? "I didn't look, no." I told him I had decided to write about it. "I just wish you wouldn't," he said.

t's unsettling to go back to the strange and jittery atmosphere of 1975. Among the Lucan crowd inside the Clermont, led by Aspinall and Goldsmith, there was a feeling of bitterness and siege, and outside there was something approaching class war. The miners had forced Heath into the three-day week late in December 1973. Who ran the country? The Government or the unions?

When Wilson took over shakily in March 1974, with a Left-wing cabinet, many of the Right, and most of Lucan's friends, saw themselves in a pre-revolutionary situation. Colonel Bill Stirling had formed his private army, to cross picket lines and "run was published, showed that the forensic evidence against Lucan was indisputable. Spin from the Clermont would not have made any difference.

It was the language that was such compelling copy, at first. Aspinall, who couldn't stop using the word 'genetic", described Lucan "as a figure like myself born out of his own time... He was genetically endowed as a warrior."

Charles Benson described 'Lucky" Lucan as "very Right-wing and he never compromised in front of people. He would talk about hanging and flogging and foreigners and niggers equally to shock and get a reaction."

In the months between the disappearance and the inquest, Lucan was becoming something of a popular hero, despite the overwhelming evidence of murder. He had "fallen on his sword", driven to it by the acts of his wife, a madwoman; these were the lines you heard on the street. But as I listened I began to see the story differently. I also got close to the

Det Chief Supt Ranson, in charge of the case, was a quiet, mild man, largely unprovokable by what he saw as the arrogance and condescension of many of the Lucan set, who dined out on stories of the coppers' social discomfort searching stately homes. His partner, Det Gerring, a thick-set bruiser, later fired for being rude to his superiors, had a great love of food. There was no doubt that Lady Lucan was aggressive and unbalanced. But the police played me tapes that Lucan had secretly made of telephone conversations with Veronica - who had a long history of psychiatric illness – in which, clearly drunk, he was trying to provoke her into rage; tapes which he played to his friends. Other evidence, including anonymous threatening telephone calls to her on a line only he knew, made it clear that he was trying to drive his wife

into madness or suicide.
"He pinned all his hopes on the deterioration of her condition," one of his friends admitted to me. "Veronica would retreat into private psychiatric hospitals. There were beatings too, and some of this must have come up in the custody pro-ceedings when Lucan lost. "He did beat her up once or twice," Aspinall told me. "Not surprising, with a wife who's behaving badly. Eventually your temper frays and you give her a few blows or something."

I didn't know how to get to Lady Lucan. She was under contract to the Daily Express. So I doorstepped her in Lower Belgrave Street one day in March. I said I wanted to get her version of events. She was pened," she said.

dressed in a little black velvet twopiece suit. The house was freezing cold; she was clearly hard up. I remember her being lucid and very polite. On a subsequent visit she reenacted the scenes of the fatal night horrors. I never doubted her story, detail in it, and, Ranson told me, she

never changed it from first interview to last. Gentlemanly correspondence Daily Express contract and Lady Lucan sold us rights to her family albums. Its pictures came out, with other photographs, blazed across the pages of the Sunday Times Magazine in June 1975, the day before the inquest opened. The piece caused uproar in Lucan's world, a world considered impenetrable by other journalists and even, at times, the police. My article certainly swung the mood towards some sym-

## I reminded Stoop of the letter. 'I did show it to you, rather foolishly,' he said

pathy for Veronica Lucan - and the forgotten nanny, Sandra Rivett. The story was changing and the Cler-

mont set did not look good. But what really outraged John Aspinall, Jimmy Goldsmith and Mark Birley were the photographs illustrating the piece – not the innocuous Lucan family snaps from Veronica's album, but a cropped picture of Lady Annabel Birley (now Goldsmith) on the magazine cover, sitting closely and apparently inti-mately beside Lucan, taken in Acapulco in 1973. There were other pictures inside from that house party, which included Elwes. And then there was Elwes's painting, which showed the Lucan set, including Jimmy Goldsmith, in cartoonish

Lady Annabel told me last week that he was infuriated by the cover photograph. "Jimmy was a particularly jealous man," she said. He was further enraged that Elwes had col-luded in the article and included him in the painting without telling him. "Anything that went on between the walls of the Clermont club in that little gambling set, I think it's all meant to be highly confidential. Nobody was meant to know who was there and what hap-

Mark Birley, owner of Annabel's and Mark's Club, was "infuriated" at the cover, mostly because Robin Birley, his 16-year-old son, was teased about the picture at Eton. Goldsmith complained to Aspinall. In their as if her mind had shut out the anger at this penetration of their inner sanctum, they leapt to the conwhich had too much uninventable clusion that Elwes had sold the Acapulco photographs and turned on him. Robin Birley wrote to him saying that he had "wrecked my life" Elwes sat up all night writing a reply, between editors got us round the denying that he had given me photographs. Then Mark Birley sent him a formal letter banning him from both his clubs. He also sent writs for outstanding bills. Jimmy Goldsmith sent him furious and terrifying messages.

The court jester had been excommunicated. It was bullying of the most primitive kind; his tormentors wouldn't listen to any evidence that he hadn't done the deed. And it became obvious to many of his remaining friends, including Benson, that he couldn't have been the source. No one on the holiday remembered him taking pictures; he was even the subject of many of them.

Elwes was given to black depression; he had made at least two previous suicide attempts, and other family and financial problems were besetting him. He became dis-traught, at times incoherent. Elwes and Benson both tried to contact me.

I would have moved heaven and earth to get Elwes off the hook - but I didn't know what was going on. For some of the crucial weeks that followed I was abroad in the eastern Cyclades in Greece, far away from telephones. I heard nothing more until Elwes committed suicide in late August leaving a note which read, "I curse Mark and Jimmy from beyond the grave. I hope they are happy now.'

regret it badly. Had I known about Elwes's predicament I would certainly have revealed the source of the Acapulco pictures at the time. Twenty years or so ago, in exasperation at the continuing myth that Elwes was to blame for them, I did reveal the source in the letters page of the Spectator, but nobody seemed to notice - except Lady Lucan.

The pictures had been lying about in Lady Lucan's house and I had taken them along with her photograph albums, with her consent, She left a message on my answering machine after this revelation saying: You know what we do with foxes. We break their necks and break their backs." She didn't leave her name, but I would recognise her voice anywhere.



## It was bullving of the most primitive kind

it until publication, I would have the country" in case of a Communist takeover. Michael Stoop volunteered. So did my own stepfather, who was deputed, in White's, to command the Isle of Wight ferry. I wrote at the time that Lucan's views "had appeared to be degenerating under pressure, from paternalistic feudalism to the extreme Right-wing - views echoed by many of his friends"

As a former Etonian, I had distinct advantages in covering the story, according to Lucan's friend, Charles Benson. I duly launched into a round of cocktails and lunches, beginning with Dominic Elwes. A man of extraordinary comic gifts, he was jester to the Clermont world, while being vulnerably dependent on their approval. That lunchtime, we reeled about in helpless laughter as he took flight with speculation the envelope, hadn't even looked at and satire. He described the Clermont world of gambling in its William Kent building in Berkeley Square, in the most romantic terms as a "hyper-civilised, patrician kind of life". Its ethos, he said presciently, was "concerned with power and success and to a certain extent survival. Anybody who has fallen by the way-side is dismissed." He offered to paint the Lucan set and I fixed a commission on behalf of my maga-zine for £500, his first step in a fatal connection with my article.

Through Elwes, I reached most of the key players. I got the impression that they rarely spoke to anyone outside their group. Charles Benson, then Scout, racing correspondent of the Daily Express, claimed later that the idea was for me to write a serious article about Lucan which would "help to ensure him a fair trial if he ever turned up" - in other words a "write-up" which would show how his wife had driven him to an act of madness. It was naive of Benson, as a journalist: the coroner's inquest, which opened just after my piece

Michael Stoop 'He must have noticed something on the envelope'



Signature

□ Mon □ Tue □ Wed □ Thur □ Fri □ Sat □ Sun □ Don't buy Year of birth19

The Telegraph would like to pass your details on to other carefully selected organisations in order that they can offer you information, goods and services that may be of interest to you if you would prefer that your details were not passed to such organisations please tick this box □. Please refer to our Data Protection Notice in today's Personal Column.

readeroffers.telegraph.co.uk

Issue no

On which days do you normally buy the Telegraph?

Telegraph Music Direct

It's Trad Jazz 3-CD set

This fabulous new three-CD set has the

very best Trad Jazz from EMI's vaults,

priced at just £12.99 inc p&p.