

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: Inspector Morse author Colin Dexter

The prized possession you value above all others... A signed first edition of AE Housman's A Shropshire Lad. I have about 75 first editions, but I'd rescue that one if the house was burning down.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Having four operations on my ears in my 20s. I began losing my hearing at 18, but the surgery hurt and didn't help.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Ginger nuts. I have diabetes but I find them hard to resist, and then my wife Dorothy tells me off.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance...

Bleak House by Charles Dickens. It's a masterclass in writing.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd see what life is like in private for the Queen and Prince Philip. I heard they liked Morse – maybe they watch Endeavour now!

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Litter. I'm 83 now and in a wheelchair, but each day Dorothy takes me for a walk and we pick it all up.

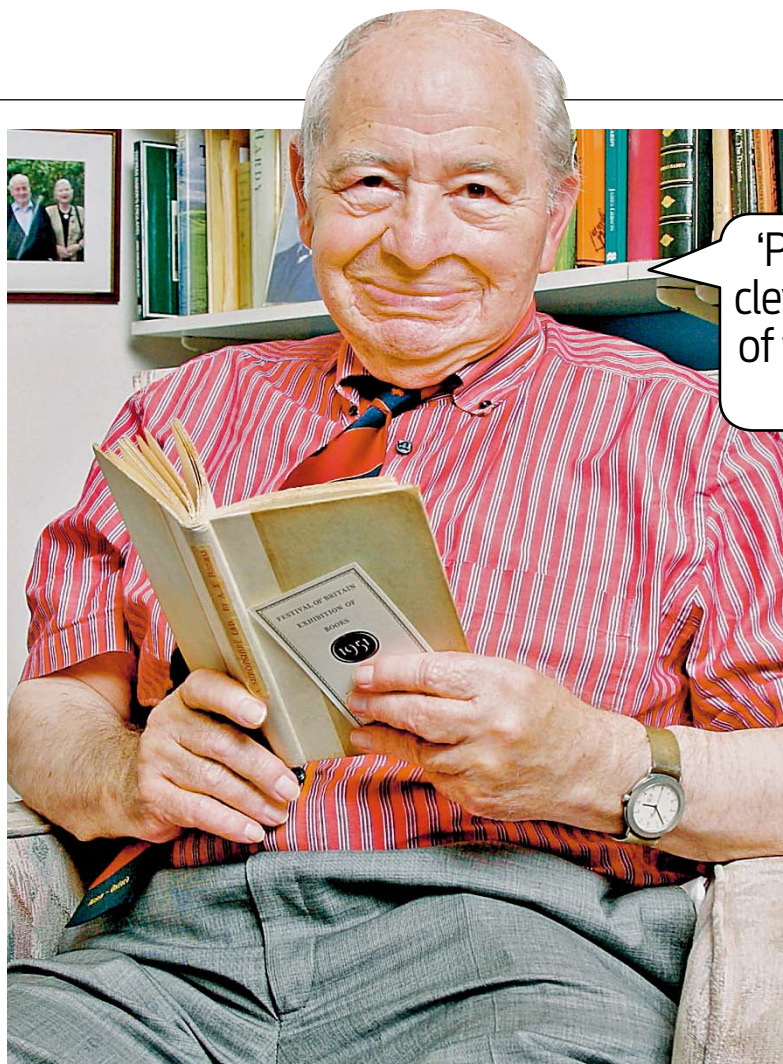
The film you can watch time and time again... The African Queen. It has such tension and chemistry.

The person who has influenced you most... My big brother John. We shared a bed for 19 years as we were so poor. One night, when I was 16, he woke me up playing Beethoven's 7th. He was in tears and I was intrigued. Classical music's been one of the great joys of my life. Sadly, John died two years ago.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Richard III. I'd love to know what happened to the Princes in the Tower [the sons of Edward IV who were put in the Tower of London by Richard, then vanished].

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... When I taught classics from 1952 to 1966, I'd tell my pupils that asking questions is vital.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Greek mythology – but I've forgotten much of it now, not least the names of Zeus's 117 daughters!



'People always think I'm cleverer than I am because of the Morse plots, but I'm not as smart as him!'

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Being given the Freedom of the City of Oxford in 2001. At the time, the only living recipients were Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi.

The saddest time that shook your world... When my daughter's dog Mycroft died. He was very poorly and he looked at me with such sadness as the vet prepared the needle. I could hear Sally, who was 13, weeping next door. It was one of the few times I've wept.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be World Chess Champion. I was pretty good at school – but never good enough.

The philosophy that underpins your life... *Initium est dimidium facti*, which means 'The beginning is half of the deed'. I've always found that the beginning is the hardest part of anything. Once that's done, I'm off and away!

The order of service at your funeral... I'd have a simple service with the hymn O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go. I don't believe in the afterlife – so for all I care you can put my ashes in the dustbin.

The way you want to be remembered... As a good teacher.

The Plug... Colin's book Cracking Cryptic Crosswords is published by Oxford Press, £7.99. www.oxfordpress.com.

As told to Rob McGibbon



The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm cleverer than I am! The Inspector Morse plots made people think I'm very smart. I'm definitely not as smart as Morse.

The song that means most to you... Something by The Beatles. It reminds me of my daughter Sally, because it was her favourite when she was young.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... It'd help if I were younger – so let's say I'm 50! I'd start with porridge in a hotel in the Austrian mountains. Dorothy and I would go for a walk in the hills of mid-Wales and stop in Machynlleth for tea, then drive through Florida for some sun. Later, we'd have fish and chips at The Trout Inn in Oxfordshire, with Sally, 55, and our son Jeremy, 53, and his children – Thomas, 24, and James, 22. I'd paddle in the sea at Skegness, which I loved as a boy, and then see England win The Ashes at The Oval. I'd end the day at the Bayreuth Festival in Bavaria listening to Wagner's Die Walküre.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal Vermeer's The Milkmaid from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. I love it so much I put a print in Morse's home.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The ability to follow The Archers. I loved it for 56 years, but gave up in 2011 because the female characters all sounded too similar. I really do miss it.

The unending quest that drives you on... To write the best page I can.

The poem that touches your soul... Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard by Thomas Gray from 1751. It's so lyrical it's like music when you read it.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting my first book, Liberal Studies, published in 1964 started my writing career.



PHOTOGRAPHS: CAMERA PRESS/CHRIS MCANDREW, GETTY, REX



Left: The Queen and Prince Philip. Below: Chess. Right: The African Queen. Far right: Vermeer's The Milkmaid

PS...

Sylvester Stallone blasts back in The Expendables 3 – in cinemas from Thursday. Sophie Thompson stars in Guys And Dolls at Chichester Festival Theatre from Monday. And Sinead O'Connor's new album, I'm Not Bossy, I'm The Boss, is out on Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Bake along to the new series of Bake Off with our delicious recipes from the show
- Russ Abbot takes us backstage on new drama Boomers
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings