

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's Lord Patten, who as governor handed Hong Kong back to China 20 years ago today

The prized possession you value above all others... My vegetable garden at our home in south-west France. It gives me huge pleasure to see our crop of fruit and tomatoes and courgettes every summer and I love the sight of my eight grandchildren with handfuls of strawberries and raspberries with big red stains around their mouths.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not leaving school and taking a gap year after I won a scholarship to Oxford when I was 16. I stayed on to captain various sporting teams, but I should have travelled, learnt a language or done voluntary work instead.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Second helpings of my wife Lavender's roast dinner – at 73, I know it's not good for me.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Middlemarch by George Eliot. The ending is a reminder that the world is made better by people doing decent small things.

Right: Michael Caine in Zulu. Above right: gardening tools. Far right: The Lacemaker by Vermeer, which hangs in the Louvre



The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd watch my grandchildren at school or with their friends, so I can see them not having to cope with grandparents.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Women on the Tube putting on make-up. It's very undignified.

The film you can watch time and time again... Zulu. It's exciting and Michael Caine is wonderful.

The person who has influenced you most... Lord Carrington. I worked for him in the 1970s when he was Conservative Party chairman. He was funny, kind and courteous – the best boss ever.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... I'd need two – the Duke of Wellington, who'd have a pint, and Sir Thomas More, who'd want a sherry. They can both lay claim to being the greatest Englishman ever.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... I taught my three daughters to stick to invitations you've accepted, or you'll get known for letting people down.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Gardening. When I think of paradise, it begins with my garden.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... If I hadn't lost my Bath constituency in the 1992 general election, I'd never have become the last governor of Hong Kong, where I had the happiest five years of my life.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My pinhole glasses, whose lenses were covered and had pinpricks in them. I used them to build up my eye muscles when my vision started to go in my 40s, but lost them during our return from Hong Kong in 1997. I tried to replace them, but no one knew what I meant.

The poem that touches your soul... Embassy by WH Auden is a moving description of the purpose of diplomacy. It should be carved over every foreign ministry door.

The song that means most to you... The aria Mir Ist So Wunderbar (A Wondrous Feeling Fills Me), from Beethoven's opera Fidelio, makes the hairs on my neck stand up.



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– as it's a fantasy day – chocolate mousse, which I usually have to avoid.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The moment when we gave Hong Kong back to China 20 years ago was happy, but mixed with sadness. There was such enthusiasm for what the British had done over the years and people were sad to see us go.

The saddest time that shook your world... The attacks of 9/11. Before then the world seemed to be getting better, but it changed everything.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To explore southern Italy. I'd like to enjoy my 70s as an old gentleman should – drinking wine, eating pasta and listening to music.

The philosophy that underpins your life... As an active Christian, I think it's important to treat others as you'd like them to treat you.

The order of service at your funeral... I want a reading of The Prodigal Son, then the hymns I Vow to Thee, My Country and Thine Be The Glory.

The way you want to be remembered... As someone who did his best and left the world slightly improved.

The Plug... First Confession: A Sort Of Memoir by Chris Patten is published by Allen Lane, £20. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... I'm amused when I get called a 'Tory grandee'. I'm a scholarship boy from Greenford, west London, where there are no rolling hills or lochs. But my mum would be delighted.

The unending quest that drives you on... To keep muddling through life as honourably as possible.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal a Vermeer painting from the Louvre for my home in south-west London.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd begin with a full English breakfast at a café in Mayfair. I'd then watch England play cricket against Australia in Sydney with Lavender. For lunch, we'd gather our daughters, who are in their 30s and 40s, and grandchildren, aged between five and 11, at the house in France. Afterwards we'd all play tennis. Next Lavender and I would watch the British and Irish Lions beat the All Blacks at rugby in New Zealand before dinner at Cinq-Mars in Paris. I'd have something French, pinot noir and



PS...

Tom Holland stars in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* – in cinemas Wednesday. A 25th anniversary edition of kd lang's *Ingénue* album is out on Friday. And Sir Ian McKellen's show *Shakespeare, Tolkien, Others & You* is at London's Park Theatre from Monday



NEXT WEEK

● The hunt begins for our second £25,000 treasure trove ● Strictly dancer Joanne Clifton invites us into her theatre dressing room ● PLUS Britain's best TV guide