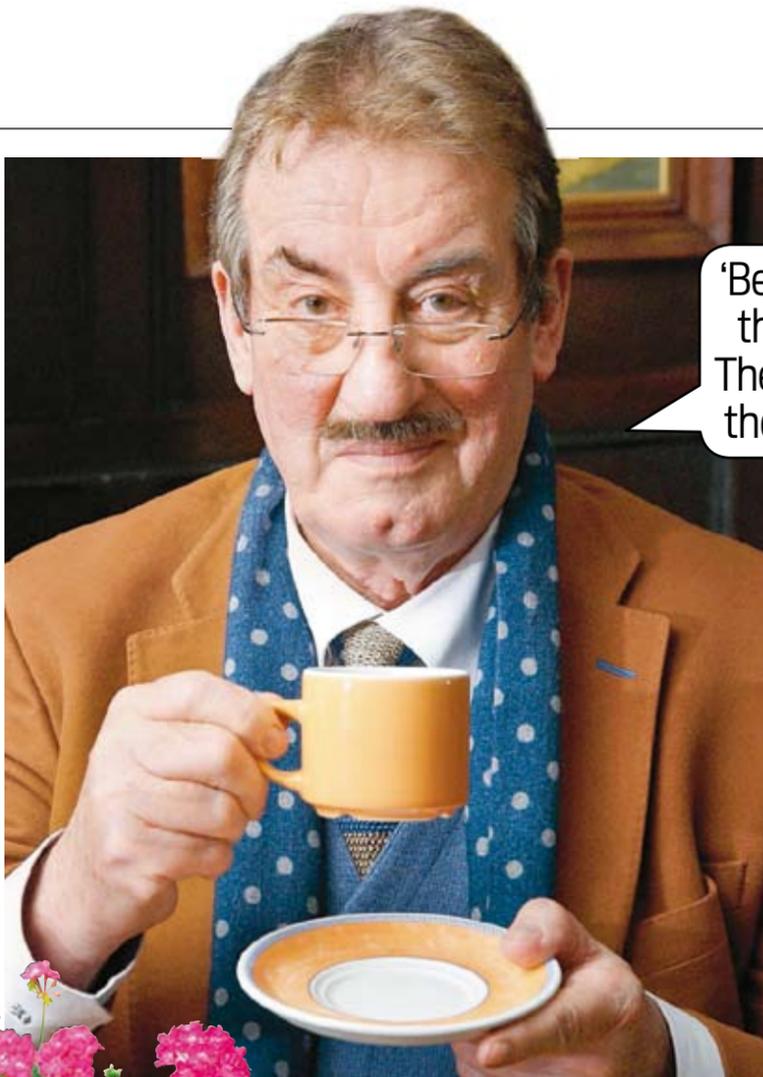


The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: Only Fools And Horses star John Challis



'Because of Boycie people think I know about cars. They're disappointed when they discover I'm clueless'

The prized possession you value above all others... My 12th-century home in beautiful Herefordshire. My wife Carol and I moved here 16 years ago and it has an extraordinary atmosphere. You can really feel its history.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Losing the £50,000 inheritance left to me by my mother. I helped a friend out on an aloe vera farming idea in Portugal. It was a con and I lost the lot.

The temptation you wish you could resist... I'm addicted to BBC1 antiques show Flog It! We bought some antiques from the presenter Paul Martin's shop in Wiltshire and he brought them to the house himself. He's such a nice bloke.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... First Light, Geoffrey Wellum's memoir of being a Battle of Britain pilot. It's very inspiring.

The person who has influenced you most... Spike Milligan in The Goon Show. His surreal humour lit a spark in me.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Avarice.

The film you can watch time and time again... Apocalypse Now. It sums up the futility of war and Marlon Brando is riveting.

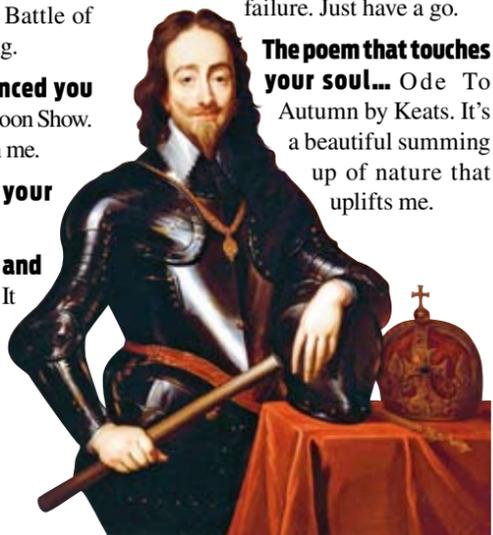
Right: Charles I. Above right: Geraniums. Far right: A pair of African elephants.

The event that altered the course of your life and character...

Buying a copy of The Stage when I was 19 and doing odd jobs. I replied to an advert to be an actor in a travelling children's theatre company and got the job. I've never looked back.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Charles I. I'd like to ask him why he wouldn't compromise and avoid such a bloody civil war.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... I don't have children but I tell friends' kids never to be afraid of failure. Just have a go.



The poem that touches your soul... Ode To Autumn by Keats. It's a beautiful summing up of nature that uplifts me.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...

Geraniums. I propagate them and give them as presents to people. I keep them for years. You'd think they were my children!

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My youth! I'm 72 and still have lots of energy, but everything creaks now.

The unending quest that drives you on... To stay alive! I've seen so many friends fall off the perch lately.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm a second-hand car dealer! Because of Boycie in Only Fools people think I know about cars. They're disappointed when they discover I'm clueless.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd destroy every wind turbine intruding on our landscape. I think they're grotesque.

The philosophy that underpins your life... How little can I do to get away with it? I'm quite lazy!

The song that means most to you...

The Show Must Go On by Queen – the version sung by Paul Rodgers of Free after Freddie Mercury died. His voice gets to me and I love the sentiment.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I support Tusk Trust, which protects wildlife in Africa, so I'd infiltrate the ivory trade and take out the Mr Bigs who run it.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

Carol and I would have breakfast on the Orient Express on our way to Venice. We'd be in the Côte d'Azur carriage, designed by René Lalique, and I'd have scrambled eggs with smoked salmon. We'd spend all morning in Venice, which would be devoid of crowds, then take a gondola to the Cipriani Hotel for lunch overlooking the lagoon. I'd have roast chicken and vegetables with champagne. After lunch we'd head to Reid's Palace hotel in Madeira for tea and a cheese sandwich. The hotel decor is a throwback to the 30s and 40s, a period I love. After that we'd arrive in Hawaii and meet friends for a ride in a

traditional outrigger canoe. We'd have a party and watch the sunset with Piña Colada cocktails. Carol and I would end the day by checking into the Ava Gardner suite at the Hotel Splendido in Portofino, Italy. On this day, we'd be in the 40s and the hotel would be full of Hollywood stars of that era. I'd sip a chilled glass of Vin Santo and watch the fun.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Renewing my wedding vows with Carol in 1997 – two years after we got married. I'd been married three times – which I'm not proud of – and I felt like the luckiest man in the world to have finally met the right woman.

The saddest time that shook your world... The day my dad Alec died from a heart condition. He'd suffered from dementia for ten years. I felt guilty because I'd never really got to know him, or how he felt about anything.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To play Doctor Who. I was a henchman alongside Tom Baker in 1976, but to be the Doctor would really be something.

The order of service at your funeral... I want a wicker coffin covered in geraniums and a church service with Thank You For The Music by Abba and Here I Go Again by Whitesnake.

The way you want to be remembered... He had a go and made people smile.

The Plug... John begins his Boycie one-man tour on 23 January in Croydon. Visit www.wigmorebooks.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels return 20 years on with Dumb And Dumber To, in cinemas Friday. The Who celebrate their 50th at London's O2 Arena on Wednesday and Thursday. And The Hundred And One Dalmatians opens at Chichester Festival Theatre on Saturday



NEXT WEEK

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