



From top: Harrow School, the view from Polzeath cliffs in Cornwall, fruit punch, the Stylistics, Bob Marley, shoe polish, The Ivy restaurant and Marilyn Monroe in Some Like It Hot

**The prized possession you value above all others...** The address book on my iPhone. I have over 1,000 contacts in there. If I lost it I'd become a recluse.

**The unqualified regret you wish you could amend...** Not going to drama school. My father [playwright and actor Hugh Williams] was opposed to the idea. He wanted me to be a hotelier. I've never felt part of the elite circle of actors who did go.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd begin the day with a walk along the cliffs in Polzeath, Cornwall, with my wife Lucy and my Collie-cross Flute. We'd join our family on the beach for a game of rounders, then I'd bodysurf. In the afternoon I'd doze in the garden hammock at our home near Henley, Oxfordshire, while listening to a Test match on the radio. At sundown, Lucy and I would have a fruit punch cocktail to some Bob Marley at Goldeneye, Ian Fleming's house in Jamaica. In the evening we'd go to the latest big musical in the West End, then have a dinner full of laughter at The Ivy with friends.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Interrupting. I do it because I fear that a brilliant thought I've had will be lost forever, but it's very rude.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Goodbye To All That by Robert Graves. It evokes the England that was lost after the Great War. It was the mainspring of my research for James Bellamy in *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd rewrite the Autocue scripts just before the party leaders make their political broadcasts, forcing them to tell the truth.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** The voice on the telephone that says, 'The person you are calling knows you are waiting.' What's wrong with just having the engaged tone?

**The film you can watch time and time again...** *Some Like It Hot* with Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe. It's the most immaculate film, with amazing performances.

**The person who has influenced you most...** Richard Attenborough. I've known him for 40 years and his energy and compassion always inspire me.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Pontius Pilate. I'd love to know if he regrets washing his hands of Jesus.



'I adore cleaning shoes! I used to do it for the prefects at Harrow and if friends come round with grubby shoes I'll do theirs'

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's the turn of actor Simon Williams*

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Don't ask permission, ask for forgiveness. Act now, say sorry later.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Cleaning shoes. I used to do it for prefects at Harrow and I love the ritual. If friends come round with grubby shoes I'll go off and clean them.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** My father's make-up box, which I inherited in 1969. It was stolen in 1970 and I still miss it.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To be more patient, especially with inanimate objects like the car.

**The poem that touches your soul...** *Cynarae* by the 19th-century English poet Ernest Dowson. It's a haunting poem to lost love.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** People still expect me to be like James Bellamy. He was a humourless, rude, chauvinistic, upper-class cad. I'm quite cuddly!

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** I went to see a clairvoyant when I was 18 who said I was one of twins. I told my mother and she revealed she'd miscarried my twin brother at four months. I was quite shocked and it made me realise I could have been the one who perished and fuelled my desire to live life for him as well as for me.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd steal banker Fred Goodwin's ill-gotten gains and give them to Comic Relief.

**The song that means most to you...** *Sad Sweet Dreamer* by the Stylistics. It reminds me of my wife. It's our song.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Leaving Harrow School in 1962 when I was 16. I hated it. Many of the teachers were ex-military bullies.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** Learning about the Holocaust when I was 12. It shook me to know that such evil was possible.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To be original as an actor and as a writer.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** As George Bernard Shaw wrote for Professor Higgins in *Pygmalion*: 'The great secret is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls.'

**The order of service at your funeral...** A Book Of Common Prayer service at my local church, St Bartholomew's in Nettlebed, beginning with Psalm 121, which is my favourite, followed by the hymns *The Battle Hymn Of The Republic* and *There Is A Green Hill Far Away*. I would like a eulogy with plenty of jokes and, of course, lots of flattery.

**The way you want to be remembered...** With a smile and as someone who didn't take himself too seriously.

**The Plug...** As a Vice President of Denville Hall, the retirement home for actors and actresses, we are forever in need of funds. Please visit [www.denvillehall.org.uk](http://www.denvillehall.org.uk). ■

*As told Rob McGibbon*

PS...

*Helen Mirren fans are in for a treat this week as she stars on the big screen in Hitchcock, and at London's Gielgud Theatre in new play The Audience. Meanwhile, BGT winner Paul Potts leads the Chinese New Year celebrations in Trafalgar Square on Sunday*



**NEXT WEEK**

- BBC Breakfast's Susanna Reid gives her most candid interview yet
- Terence Stamp on bittersweet new drama *Song For Marion*
- Meaty, fishy or veggie – Jamie Oliver cooks lasagne three ways
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings