

Books

High society goes under microscope

The Stranger's Child

Alan Hollinghurst (Picador, £20)

WRITER of the 2004 Man Booker prize-winning novel *The Lines Of Beauty*, Alan Hollinghurst returns with his eagerly anticipated fifth book, *The Stranger's Child*.

Set amid the pomp and circumstance of England's high society, the novel begins with a visit by the aristocratic young poet Cecil Valance to his friend – and secret lover – George, at his home of 'Two Acres'.

The weekend has profound effects on the inhabitants of the house, especially George's sister Daphne, and the story follows its repercussions throughout the 20th century.

This is a rich portrayal of English family life throughout this tumultuous century, told by an acutely observant writer who remains fascinated by the fates of the upper classes.

Ben Major

Marrying Up

Wendy Holden (Headline Review £12.99)

ALEXA MacDonald has done everything in her power (including changing her name) to conceal her humble socio-economic background from high society. Her ambitious eyes have always been on one prize – marriage to a man with money and aristocracy.

Polly Stevenson, meanwhile, is recovering from a broken heart. A student of archaeology at Oxford University, beautiful and good-natured, Polly is a sharp contrast to her scheming, selfish schoolmate Alexa.

A chance encounter (powered by a conniving mind) leads Alexa to glamorous but naive socialite Lady Florence, whose title and connections could open grand doors to the rich and the famous. The three young women see their paths cross which leads them to Maxim, the Crown Prince of Sedona. But the noble royal has his heart set for one girl...

Marrying Up is Wendy Holden's 11th novel. Fact and fiction blend seamlessly with wit and humour, making this impressive chick lit a mildly satiric depiction of the upper crust of British high society.

Nilima Dey Sarker

Agent 6

Tom Rob Smith (Simon & Schuster, £16.99)

IF you loved Tom Rob Smith's debut novel *Child 44* – an original, masterful thriller set in Stalinist Russia – don't read this.

His third book may see him go mainstream, with billboard posters proclaiming him the new Nesbo and Larsson, but *Agent 6* is a tired attempt to drag out the charms of his anti-hero Leo Demidov into a franchise.

It's badly written and dumbed down to the point where readers are reminded of the action in the previous chapter (sometimes twice) just to make sure they are keeping up.

The opening is well done – when Leo's wife is murdered during a school trip from Soviet Moscow to New York at the height of the Cold War.

The plot unravels at the end as do all the interesting facets of Leo's character. A crying shame.

Emily Shelley

Ghost Milk: Calling Time On The Grand Project

Iain Sinclair (Hamish Hamilton £20)

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHER Iain Sinclair, London's grumpy conscience, casts a wearily furious eye across the city's desecration by 'Grand Projects'.

His focus is on the Olympics, but any grandiose scheme that uproots the lives of ordinary people, unleashing poisons both social and chemical while costing an ever-spiralling amount of public money, is fair game; he has yet to forgive or forget that "shabby tent" the Dome.

An excursion North takes in Hull, Liverpool and Manchester, already blighted by the legacy of "vanity interventions" that betrayed the communities they claimed would benefit while making millions for consultants and corporations.

Visiting Berlin feels less relevant; Sinclair is out of his element, as in Athens and America.

This will be best read publicly in paperback during the 2012 games, by way of muted protest.

Alex Sarll

Interview

Globetrotter gets his world back in order

No Off Switch is the title of Rochdale-born broadcaster Andy Kershaw's autobiography, chronicling a life lived at breakneck pace. Now 51, he says: "Don't assume I've found the off switch. In fact, I've just found the overdrive button," **Paul Taylor** catches up with him

TWO years ago, Michael Eavis contrived to arrange broadcaster Andy Kershaw's dream Glastonbury line-up, featuring Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young.

But the man so obsessed with music that he bunked off half way through his economics A level exam in Oldham to rush to a Bob Dylan concert in London wasn't there at Glastonbury to see his heroes.

"I was fully recovered from all that nonsense a year or two before, but I simply couldn't afford to get to Glastonbury and I couldn't afford a ticket," says Kershaw without self-pity.

It was a time when Kershaw was so poor that he sold off treasured rock 'n' roll memorabilia and fed himself with whatever he could catch from the sea near his

home in Peel on the Isle of Man. "Not ruddy lobster again," he recalls thinking as he opened his freezer to make a meal.

That "nonsense" was, of course, the breakdown of his relationship with the mother of his two children, the issuing of a restraining order against Kershaw in 2007, breaches of which led the Isle of Man judiciary to jail Kershaw for three months.

Kershaw is keen to point out that this unhappy chapter occupies just 22 of the 400 pages of his autobiography *No Off Switch*. But the sense of injustice he feels about it plainly still burns bright, more of which later.

But for the most part, *No Off Switch* is a tale of giddy musical enthusiasm, globe-trotting adventure and a winning boldness which sees our hero squaring up to REM's Michael

Stipe for a slight against Kershaw's sister Liz, attacking Saint Bob Geldof in print for failing to include African musicians in Live Aid, and delivering less than complimentary opinions about sundry big beasts of rock. Of U2, he says merely: "Nice guys. I've met them face to face. I don't want to hear their damn music."

The Rochdale of his childhood gets mixed reviews too – "suffocatingly parochial", but with a sense of neighbourliness now vanished. Kershaw, the son of two teachers, has a theory that although he was born in 1959, he effectively arrived during the Second World War, since Rochdale had not properly emerged from that global ruction.

As for that "parochialism", he says it "stirred in me a longing to see what was over those hills, beyond the Pennines".

Here I must declare an interest. I was two years ahead of Kershaw at Hulme Court Preparatory School, Oldham, Hulme Grammar School for Boys and Leeds University. We both, separately, honed our life-long musical passion amid the racks of Ma Dobbs's tatty record store on Oldham indoor market. I know of which he writes.

Of that prep school, Kershaw says: "I hated every single rotten minute of the spiteful, small-minded, dehumanising little torture centre".

He describes the grammar school as a place of "ludicrous values and absurd traditions", but concedes that "for all those nutcases in the staff room, I got a bloody good education out of it".

Should anyone wish to lobby for the erection of a blue plaque, Kershaw also reveals exactly where he lost his virginity – the car park beside the museum in Uppermill, Oldham. He sent a draft of the chapter describing this event to the woman who "deflowered" him, Joanna Coop, offering to give her a false name for the purposes of the book.

"I got a call two days later saying 'Stick it in, it's really funny,'" says Kershaw. "Joanna even arranged for a photographer friend of hers to go along and get a photograph of the parking space."

Later conquests for Kershaw would include Carol Vorderman and a blind date with someone he later discovered to be Courtney Love.

At Leeds University, politics studies went by the wayside as Kershaw became entertainments secretary, booking the likes of The Clash and Iggy Pop. He worked backstage at the Rolling Stones' massive 1982



FAMILY ALBUM Andy Kershaw (right) with his big sister Liz, who both grew up in Rochdale



MUSIC MAN Andy Kershaw with his dog enjoying the Isle of Man sun in the music man's home in Peel, Isle of Man

concert in Roundhay Park, Leeds, acted as tour manager for Billy Bragg, and became a presenter for The Old Grey Whistle Test in 1984.

In 1985, Kershaw began a 15-year stint as a Radio 1 DJ, introducing audiences to African and Jamaican music, blues, zydeco, Tex-Mex and gospel. His love of world music led Kershaw to see more of that world, reporting from the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, civil war in Angola in 1996, Sierra Leone and Haiti. For Radio 3, he did a musical tour of the "axis of evil" countries - Iran, Iraq and North Korea. As he cast wide his musical net, he grew less enthralled by what western rock and pop had to offer.

"Even 25 years ago, I felt the possibilities of what could be done with four or five white blokes with guitar, bass, drums and possibly keyboards had been exhausted by and large," he says.

"I don't know why we have this attitude toward rock music. We don't have these expectations of other art forms or movements, that they should continue to be creative and dynamic, as in the case of rock music, for 60 years.

"I don't think people were urging impressionism be kept alive on a life support machine for decade after decade."

Having visited 97 countries,

amassed a seven-ton record collection and more Sony Radio awards than any other broadcaster, Kershaw set out for a new life in the Isle of Man with partner Juliette Banner and their two children Sonny and Dolly, now 13 and 12, in 2006. It went wrong even before they had unpacked, when

Banner borrowed Kershaw's phone and found a text message from a woman with whom he had had a one-night stand. She left him and started a new relationship while Kershaw sank into depression and drink. A restraining order was granted barring him from contacting Banner or her new partner.

"What happened was scandalous," he says. "I was disappointed by lots of friends and colleagues who are in the hack's trade, like you and me. At the time, if they'd looked at it more carefully, they would have seen that a huge injustice was taking place. It was an injustice visited not just on me but on my two children. I was traumatised by what happened. My response to it was perhaps not excusable but it was understandable. A restraining order was brought in

at the request of my ex-partner on the Isle of Man, who set up a love nest in the next street with a bloke who was a stranger to my children.

"I've never been violent in my life. I've never done anything wrong before in my life. No-one was threatened by me."

On the last occasion he was jailed, Kershaw says, "I was sent to prison for giving my ex and her new boyfriend a dirty look."

"In the week I was let out from that final stretch, it was reported in the Manx Independent that a bloke who had threatened his partner with a knife was sentenced to 61 days in jail, but because he'd already spent 30 days on remand he was allowed to go free. He got 60 days for threatening his partner with a knife; I got 90 for giving my ex a dirty look."

After his last jail spell, Kershaw left the Isle of Man, breached the restraining order yet again with phone calls and texts, and went on the run, staying in Anglesey, London, Ex-moor, Somerset and Shropshire. Nine months later, he returned to the Isle of Man to be given a suspended sentence, only to face another expensive losing battle

in the courts to stop Banner taking the children to live in Scotland.

The book ends with Sonny having chosen to come back from Scotland to the Isle of Man to live with his dad, Kershaw back at work for Radio 3's Music Planet and "strong as a monkey's tail".

Next year, Kershaw plans to do a tour of small theatres along the lines of "An Evening With...", presenting an illustrated talk, featuring artefacts like the letter from a booking agent for a Hazel O'Connor gig at Leeds University asking Kershaw to pay "this spotty little support group" £50. The name of the group - Duran Duran.

Kershaw is a little sick of being asked if writing this book was "cathartic".

"It's not catharsis. It's a job of journalism and assembling a historical record, if you like," he adds.

"There is life part one, and I am now boyishly excited by the idea that as of today, life part two starts. What is going to happen, I have absolutely no idea, and that's very exciting."

No Off Switch: An Autobiography by Andy Kershaw is published by Serpent's Tail in hardback at £18.99.

My Week

A shining light in the music world

SIMON, my secret spy and talent scout, has given me a tip about Manchester's next big stars so I thought I'd share it with you.

Three young fellas, two of them classically trained musicians and a young man with a voice to die for, have formed a band and written a full set of beautiful songs, all in the space of nine months. Jamie McCool, Jack O'Connor and Howard Eastwood call themselves Black Lights and are creating a real buzz around the city.

They met at music college in Manchester and last week they played to a packed audience at Academy 3. They



TIPPED New Manchester band Black Lights

have been getting great reviews and have gathered a loyal following through their Facebook page.

Without any record company money or hype behind them, these lads have already made an impact and their shows are selling out quickly. You can follow Black Lights on facebook.com/blacklightsmusic

The gift that keeps on giving

IT'S the time of year when teachers rub their hands together in anticipation of a deluge of presents. I don't know how the tradition started but many primary school teachers head for home at the end of term laden with goodies from grateful or press-ganged parents.

Many years ago on the final day of my teaching career I was touched by the thoughtfulness of the kids as they queued up at my desk to hand me their gifts.

Michelle's present was beautifully wrapped in shiny green paper and there were a few tell-tale twigs peeping through. I knew Michelle's mum worked in a garden centre so I correctly guessed it was a plant.

Next was Susan whose mum worked in a department store. Her present came in a little bag with a fragrant whiff so, using my amazing powers of deduction, I reckoned it



Eamonn O'Neal

was a bottle of aftershave. Right again.

Then Derek arrived at my desk and handed over a tatty, brown cardboard box, carelessly stuck down with sticky tape. However, Derek's dad had an off-licence so I was hoping for a nice bottle of something. As I picked the box up, liquid leaked from the bottom of the cardboard and went all over me. "Is it a bottle of wine that's broken, Derek?" I asked. "No sir, it's a puppy."

A wonderful ceremony

I'VE always loved Manchester Town Hall. It's an imposing 137-year-old Gothic style structure, built by Alfred Waterhouse and the Great Hall within is magnificent.

I was here on Tuesday to witness the installation of Manchester Metropolitan University's new Chancellor, Dianne Thompson CBE. Dianne is the chief executive of the Camelot Group, which runs the National Lottery and she is a former student and



IF THE CAP FITS Eamonn at the Town Hall this week

lecturer at MMU so there's a symmetry to her return.

The event was full of wonderful splendour and to sit in that great room listening to inspiring speakers was a joy. Dressing up in the cap and gown was fun too.

The life and strife of Brian

FINALLY, congratulations to Brian from Bramhall who's just got into Oxford after two years of trying. What a traffic jam that was.