

One eye on the games kit and the other on the future



Teresa Driscoll

OH YIKES! I have an interview. Not me interviewing someone else this time but a panel interviewing me. For a job.

Gulp!
I haven't been interviewed for a job since... heck, come to think of it, I haven't even had a proper job for 20 years. Even at Spotlight I was a freelance. Before that I had one-year rolling contracts at Thames TV. Only now that I come to think of it do I realise that although I have always worked, I have never really done so in an entirely conventional way.

Since leaving the BBC, I have been happily tapping away as a freelance writer – something I love and plan to continue until they pop me in a box. It delivers that perfect buzz of pitching constantly for commissions plus the delicious flexibility that you can work in your pyjamas – filing features, columns and fiction at any time of the day or night.

But it has always been in my game plan to mix this with something else once my younger son moves to secondary school.

Cue what my boys affectionately call Mum's MAD phase (as in Making A Difference).

I have for some time had this strong urge to work in the third sector.

It's probably an age thing. All these years as a journalist helping to identify and analyse problems in society has made me think that it might, just once, be nice to be part of the solutions.

When I explained this to the family, the reaction was very interesting. They weren't in the least bit surprised (they know me well and had seen it coming) but they did start immediately to worry about who would find their lost games kit, act as taxi driver and cook their favourite meals.

I think, surprisingly, this is the very point at which I decided I would definitely like to work a bit more outside the home as well as the writing.

For as a professional woman one has to be a tad careful about being TOO available to one's family.

The spell since leaving the BBC has been crucial in rebalancing family life as we were all horribly over-stretched. Working from home has allowed me to continue my professional life while being very much closer to the children. In short, it's recharged the family battery. The only problem with working from home is that it's invisible and you have to be careful not to be taken for granted. So as I reach that longed-for phase where I can work without childcare, I relish a wider range of options.

I have always done voluntary work for local charities so the idea of a part-time professional role in the third sector is very much on the list...

Which is how I suddenly find myself facing this interview panel.

Am I nervous? Funnily enough I am. But also rather excited.

It may, of course, turn out that there is no match. No holy grail of a role where I will suit them and the hours will suit me. But it is rejuvenating nonetheless to see different options opening up as the children get older.

And at the very least the whiff of possible change in the air may keep the family on their toes. Who knows? They might even look for their own games kit.

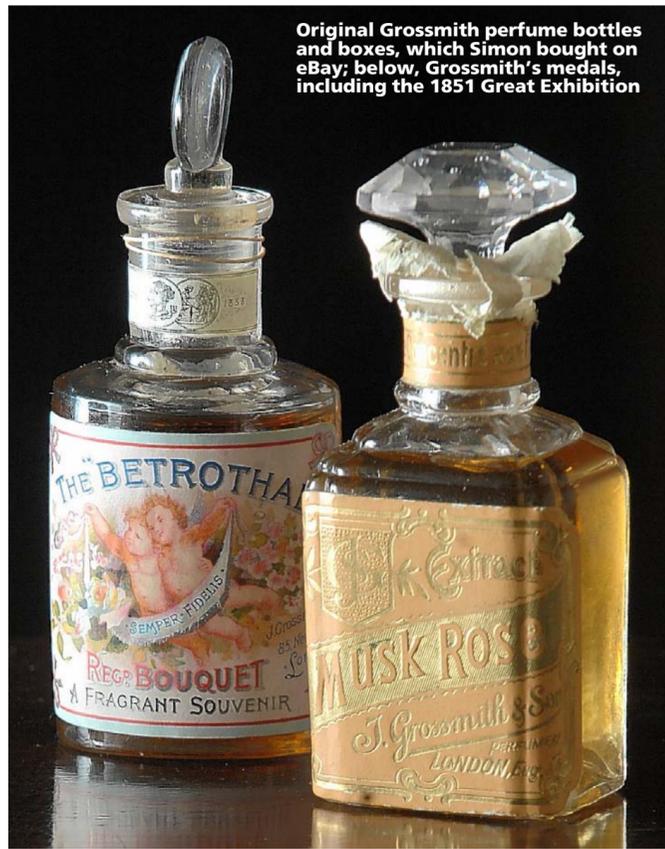
So here's to my first interview in donkey's years. It may not bear fruit... but it is certain to be interesting.

I have picked an outfit. I have booked the hair appointment. And I have done my research.

All I have to do now is remember that they get to ask ME the questions...

As a professional woman one has to be a tad careful about being too available to one's family

Why it makes scents



Original Grossmith perfume bottles and boxes, which Simon bought on eBay; below, Grossmith's medals, including the 1851 Great Exhibition



The discovery in a Dartmouth cottage of a book containing forgotten formulae for some of Britain's oldest perfumes has led a chartered surveyor and his Exmouth-raised wife to gamble everything to bring the exotic scents back to life. **Gillian Molesworth sniffs out the full story**

THIS is THE box," said Amanda Brooke, and her husband Simon echoed delightedly: "THE box". Carefully they placed a bevelled, cream and gold carton on the table. Amanda brandished a small key, jingled it in the air first. There was a moment of hush and we craned our necks to see: journalist, photographer, costume curator, and assembled curious faces from Killerton House near Exeter. Click went the lock and the box yawned open to reveal the fruits of five years' labour: three glittering crystal bottles filled with amber liquid.

I wonder if that's how the perfume was presented, to the Queen, perhaps, at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The story of how these bottles came to be on this table is one of luck, tenacity, nous and imagination. It began with a family tree, and ended with the resurrection of one of the country's oldest brands.

"I've always been interested in the family," said Simon, a Manchester-born chartered surveyor. "While doing some research, I found a book called Government Upon First Principles by John Grossmith, 1860. I'd no idea about the perfume until later. I have the Internet to thank for that."

Simon uncovered that his well-rounded ancestor, in between farming and writing tracts about government, had also founded an eponymous perfume house that had existed into the 1970s.

Thrillingly, information wasn't all the Internet had to offer.

"I discovered that you can buy antique perfumes on eBay," said Simon. "I wanted to smell the scent, so I started collecting Grossmith bottles, some with the perfume still in."

"Of course it had gone off, over time, but there remained a sweetness, and a vibrancy, that made me want to learn more."

His interest piqued, Simon turned his attention to the company. Why had Grossmith, having continued to the 1970s, languished into obscurity?

He travelled to Companies House in Wales and began trawling through microfiche. Meanwhile his eBay habit of buying Grossmith paraphernalia was earning him star rating.

Simon found that the company name still existed, only holding trademarks. He started looking for people who might have been involved with the company.

Around January 2008 his microfiche yielded an address for Moira Grossmith in Kingswear, Dartmouth. Simon wrote to the address, but heard nothing back. Then, at Easter, a letter arrived. It was from Moira's son, Russell, who had inherited the house after her death and now let it out to visitors.

"We had a flat in Exmouth, which is where I grew up," Amanda said. "We travelled down to show him what we had and ask if he had any old documents."

"What I was really trying to find was the medal that Grossmith was awarded at the Great Exhibition," Simon said. "We asked if Russell seen it anywhere."

"He gestured to the wall behind him and said: 'Do you mean that one?' The whole frame was full of medals: from the Great Exhibition, and many others!"

But the jackpot was still to come. Russell handed Simon and Amanda another dusty book belonging to John Grossmith. Its contents took their breath away: it was packed full of recipes of all the old products. There were formulae for toothpaste, hair cream, lotion – and, most important, for the exotically named

to celebrate whiffs of the past

STEVEN HAYWOOD



The fragrances, in Baccarat crystal bottles cast from the original moulds, were remastered from a 100-year-old recipe book which Simon Brooke (right) uncovered in the course of family research. Above, a turn-of-the-century advertisement for Shem-el-Nessim

Grossmith perfumes, like Hasu Na Hana, Phul-Nana, and Shem-el-Nessim.

The Brookes allowed me to leaf through the yellowed pages of the recipe book. It was thrilling. In a spidery hand were written the ingredients, in pounds, ounces, and drams: for rosewood, bergamot, and expensive ingredients such as orris.

"It really felt like a hand of fate," said Amanda. "We'd found the company, and now we'd found the recipes. We felt like we had to bring them back."

So the Brookes sold their flat in Exmouth to generate capital, and before they knew it the middle-aged couple owned a perfume house. Grossmith was back in business.

The Brookes approached Roja Dove, the perfumer for Harrods, who helped them "remaster" three scents for a modern age with ingredients from French perfumer Robertet.

Not only would they now have to conform to modern technical standards, but would also need substitutes for 19th century ingredients such as ambergris, which is a stomach secretion from a whale, and civet, which is polecat musk. (Regulated modern perfumes do not use animal fluids).

The scents are now produced at Broad Oak Toiletries in Tiverton, the manufacturing arm of another historic perfume house, Floris.

One last piece fell into place: the bottles. In Simon's eBay collection were Grossmith bottles made of Baccarat crystal. He wrote to the still

existing Alsatian factory and asked if they might have any of the Grossmith bottles left there.

"They have kept all their moulds since 1800," said Simon. "So we were able to order more casts of the actual original bottles."

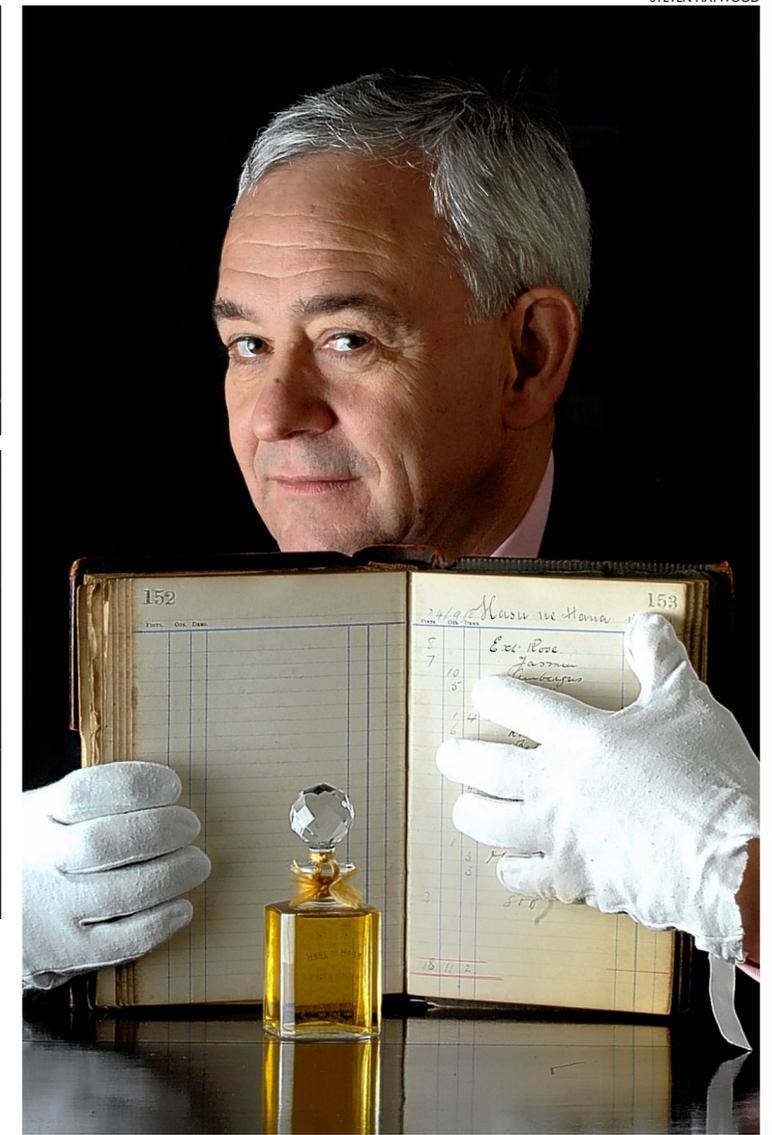
"What we had was one of the oldest perfume houses in the world, we had the original perfumes, and now we have the original crystal bottle. It's an opportunity to create a world class luxury brand. We decided that rather than pay it lip service, we would do it really well."

The new Grossmith's debut is three scents, whose prices range from £95 to £120 for 50ml of the eau de parfum and rise to £380 to £425 for 100ml of the perfume. The box, or "coffre" we saw at Killerton is a deluxe presentation gift (the Baccarat bottles are inlaid with gold), designed to be state gifts or for people who are unimaginably rich (there are only six coffres, and their cost is in the thousands).

Amanda has sprayed samples of the powerful scents on to three cards, and we are passing them around at Killerton's new exhibition of costumes, called Elegance.

Looking around, you could imagine the wearer of this opera cloak, or that flapper gown, or that tea dress, at the vanity mirror: patting her hair, checking her teeth, and dabbing a little more Grossmith on to her wrists.

● *Grossmith perfumes are sold at Woodforde's perfumery in Sidmouth (01395 577 777). Visit www.grossmithlondon.com for more information.*



The debut trio of the Grossmith revivals

Hasu-No-Hana
A bright, radiant floral composition with pronounced Chypre and oriental facets on a woody, dry, sensual base.

Originally created in 1888, this scent paved the way for modern fragrances.

Top notes: bergamot, bitter orange.
Middle notes: rose, jasmine, ylang ylang, iris.

Bass notes: patchouli, oakmoss, vetiver, cedarwood, sandalwood, tonka bean.

Phul-Nana
Hindi for "lovely flower". A fresh, sweet floral composition with aromatic Fougere overtones on a soft, warm, woody base.

Originally created in 1891, Phul-Nana is a rare marriage of herbs with flowers, unusual in a feminine fragrance. It paved the way for the "oriental" fragrances that were to follow.

Top notes: bergamot, orange, nerou.
Middle notes: geranium, tuberose, ylang ylang.

Bass notes: patchouli, benzoin siam, cedarwood, sandalwood, opopanax, tonka bean, vanilla bourbon.

Shem-El-Nessim
Arabic for "smelling the breeze", named after a springtime festival held in Egypt on the Nile. A rich, powdery floral composition, redolent of Francois Coty's L'Origan accord on a soft, sensual base.

Originally launched in 1906, this scent typifies L'Origan style with its warmth and softness. It captures the femininity of the Edwardian era.

One ingredient of Shem-El-Nessim is orris, the dried rhizome of the iris plant, known for its rarity and expense: it costs three times more than gold bullion.

Top notes: Bergamot and Nerou.
Middle notes: Geranium, jasmine, rose, ylang ylang, orris.

Bass notes: musk, patchouli, cedarwood, sandalwood, heliotrope, vanilla.