



EXPENSE: Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds are reported to have refurbished their Number 10 flat at eye-watering expense
PICTURE: Stefan Rousseau/PA

ON THIS DAY

MARCH 9 1921

Inspector and Newry Specials

IN THE House of Commons yesterday, Mr Jeremiah MacVeagh (Nationalist, South Down) asked the Chief Secretary whether he was aware that District Inspector Barrington of the RIC, stationed at Newry, had arrested a man named Wharton who acted as guide to the Newry Special Constabulary on looting expeditions; that large quantities of loot were found at his premises and that DI Barrington charged him with theft and receiving stolen property; that on the same evening the District Inspector arrested three of the Specials when they were robbing and had almost murdered three employees of the British Petroleum Company, two of them being Unionists; that at the DI's request a search was made in the barracks of the Special Constables when a large quantity of stolen property was discovered. Mr MacVeagh alleged that Special Constables then demanded the dismissal or removal of DI Barrington and that he had accordingly been transferred to another station of lower status despite an unblemished record of 35 years' service.

Sir H Greenwood said nine Special Constables were arrested by DI Barrington and were now awaiting trial by court-martial. DI Barrington's transfer was in no sense a degradation or a reflection on his conduct or efficiency. Neither was it decided on at the instance of the Special Constabulary.

Mr Devlin - In view of the efficiency of this Protestant Unionist District Inspector in bringing to justice Special Constables looting the houses of civilians, why was he sent away from Newry to an inferior district [Wexford]?

Mr J R Clynes [Labour] - Why was he removed? Sir H Greenwood - This inspector and dozens of others are constantly being transferred in the interests of the efficiency of the force.

Mr MacVeagh - It is a gross public scandal.

Workhouse Death Concerns

AT THE Belfast Board of Guardians in the Union Workhouse yesterday, Dr S R Armstrong referred to the number of deaths of infants in the city and desired to impress upon the Guardians the necessity of treatment of infants' diseases being taken up carefully and minutely by the Guardians. Mr Andrews said that, as a scheme for the Guardians, the Committee were opposed to [hospital accommodation] on financial grounds.

THE sectarian exuberance and frequently illegal activities of ill-disciplined B Specials stationed in Newry and other Nationalist towns in the run-up to partition made constant headlines during 1921-22. Nationalists suspected that the sudden transfer of the popular and conscientious DI Barrington was due to his action against the Specials for robbery.

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A room should reflect its owner, not come as a job lot

TEMPORARY tenants Boris and Carrie are renovating their Downing Street apartment at eye-watering expense, despite the fact their residency may prove to be a short sit.

Still, what's the point of being prime minister if there aren't any perks? So long as the taxpayer isn't footing the bill, good luck to them - though several of their predecessors had greater integrity, less extravagant tastes and paid for the re-vamp themselves, only to see it carted off in a removal van at a day's notice when the electorate changed its mind.

There's been a huge increase in home refurbishment, refurnishing and general domestic dicking up in the past year.

Since Covid has kept us housebound with no valid excuse for procrastination, many paint-spattered menfolk are fervently praying for the liberation of returning to work where nobody criticises their efforts or plagues them with illustrations of designer kitchens and bathrooms costing an arm and a leg and requiring structural changes. Once, long ago, the aforementioned were merely square or rectangular spaces and the fittings had to be located where the power and plumbing were.

In the era that taste forgot, who remembers the profound inconvenience and discomfort of the briefly popular 'breakfast bar'? Now

it's a stonking great 'island' in the middle of the kitchen, like a forensic science slab in a morgue, with a boiling water tap so the children can scald themselves and a skylight above letting out expensive heat. The concept of a 'dining room' has well-nigh disappeared. Everybody's in the kitchen watching you cackhandedly cook and serve a meal with your thumb in the gravy.

Today, 'fast furnishing' is as endemic as 'fast fashion'. We live

Anita ROBINSON



In a disposable society. There are queues at council recycling centres dumping perfectly good stuff, neither broken, outworn nor dilapidated, but just outmoded, that could be passed on to a charity, or that annoying woman on telly who haunts skip sites and makes jam jar chandeliers.

Long before we had an Ikea in Norn Iron, I visited the flagship one in Milton Keynes. It was a discombobulating experience. An hour in and I just wanted to eviscerate my entire house and start again. The concept of buying a ready made room was curiously tempting, but sanity prevailed. Transposing sculptural minimalist Scandinavian style and primary colours to a three-storey Victorian terrace with curly bannisters, moulded cornices and hefty slate fireplaces would be sacrilege. We stuck with our second hand and

inherited family stuff that fitted and suited the proportions of the rooms. Years later moving to a new build bungalow, we just plonked it all down, re-creating the interiors exactly, only with lower ceilings. And thus it remains to this very day - every shabby stick of it meaningful and replete with memories. Any change is gradual, any purchase chosen to fit in.

A room should be built one item at a time, not as a job lot imagined and assembled by a stranger, but reflective of the taste and character of the owner and the purpose of the space. The highest compliment anyone can pay is, "This house is very YOU," (hopefully not delivered ironically).

I remember with photographic accuracy my childhood home, because, apart from minor decorative tweaks, it never really altered. I recollect too for the first time at 15, arguing fiercely to choose the wallpaper for my bedroom - a Sixties geometric pattern in a virulent shade of turquoise, and overhearing my father comfort my mother with the words: "Let her have it Sally. It's at the top of the house. Nobody else will see it." History repeated itself a generation later when Daughter Dear briefly went Goth, with a bedroom to match. Happily mature now, her house is a triumph of pale and elegant restraint.

Wasn't it William Morris who said: "Have nothing about you that is not beautiful or useful?" Fashion is transient and rapidly dates; style is constant and remains timeless; taste is a thing that is taught by example.

"Keep a good thing long enough and you'll get another turn out of it," was Auntie Mollie's dictum.

Wiser than buying stuff other people throw out at an inflated price.

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