



MY HAVEN – DAME MARY ARCHER

The 70-year-old scientist and wife of novelist Jeffrey in her study at their home in Cambridgeshire

1 PAST PORTRAITS
Our house, the Old Vicarage, dates back to 1683, but the folly in the grounds where Jeffrey and I have our writing rooms was built in the 1850s. On the wall is a montage of portraits of my forebears including this one of my parents on their wedding day in 1937. My father, Harold, died from cancer when he was 61. I was only 26 and I've never truly come to terms with losing him so young, but there's something lovely about seeing him in this photo when he was in his late 20s with his life ahead of him.

2 CHOIR GIRL
Singing has been an essential part of my life since my father put me on his knee at the piano when I was three and taught me carols and nursery rhymes. I belong to a small choir, Cantus, in Cambridge and we do about six concerts a year. I sing first alto, and I particularly like Baroque and Renaissance music. These are some of my choral scores – I play the piano well enough to accompany myself – but these days I download my scores online and play them ad nauseam!

3 THE BROOKE BOND
The First World War poet Rupert Brooke has a strong association with this house. He rented rooms here from 1910 to 1912 and wrote his poem The Old Vicarage, Grantchester, about it. When he died of blood poisoning in 1915 his mother bought it as a memorial to him. Jeffrey and I commissioned a full-sized bronze sculpture of Rupert in 2006 which stands in front of the house [inset above], and this is an early model of it. When I look at it I hear the echo of his words which still resonate a hundred years later.

4 WILD CAT!
This is my three-year-old brown-marbled Bengal cat Sunita. I've loved the company of cats since I was a little girl – they're easy to keep as they're so self-sufficient, but they're also wonderfully affectionate and great fun. Sunita has a wild streak – she even likes water – but she also loves to snuggle up to me while I'm working. She used to sit on my old computer monitor as it was warm, but now I have a slim screen she wedges herself on the chair behind my back, like a cushion.

5 TOP OF THE POTS
Jeffrey's an avid collector of fine art and sculpture, and we've enjoyed collecting Moorcroft pottery for over 20 years. We started soon after we moved here and we've bought almost all our collection from the local auction house, Cheffins. We particularly love these flower designs with their flambé glazes. We have about 50 pieces in all, and the best have become quite valuable. But we love them for their craftsmanship, not their monetary value – after all, we bought the first one for £25.

6 RACE FOR LIFE
This T-shirt reminds me of my recovery from bladder cancer. I was diagnosed in 2010, and in April 2011 I had my bladder replaced with a new one reconstructed from my small intestine. While I was recovering I promised myself I'd still do the annual Chariots of Fire fundraising run around the Cambridge colleges. That year it was for the Rosie Hospital, an excellent women's hospital here. I ran my leg in 19 minutes – hardly fast but it meant I was getting back to full health.

As told to Rob McGibbon. Dame Mary is the new chairman of the Science Museum Group, www.sciencemuseum.org.uk.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MIKE LAWN, REX

LOOK WHO'S 33

It's Kate Middleton's birthday this week, but how well has she aged compared with her peers?



CURSED On this day in 1924 Howard Carter discovered the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun in Egypt's Valley of the Kings