

informer postbag

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Too many dodgy drivers are getting away with it

THE RECENT case of a heroin-addicted driver being jailed indefinitely after he had killed someone and injured two others in a hit-and-run tragedy provides distressing reading. Even more shocking is that the Newcastle youth in question was already a banned driver with 17 previous convictions for motoring offences.

As a non-driver, I have always wondered why, when dramas of this kind come to court, the motorists on trial already seem to have a string of disqualifications.

Is it that such sentences are not meant to be taken too seriously, even by the courts? Does this explain why dangerous drivers continue to speed around, regardless of their punishments?

In one recent case, a Swindon man described as a 'self-confessed driving addict' was given his 48th motoring ban.

He evidently has nearly 200 convictions, mainly for driving crimes.

In another, a Perth man was ordered to serve a 'double lifetime ban' as he already has 64 years of motoring bans to serve.

Yet neither man was sent to jail.

It is an alarming fact that despite our modern age of surveillance, a culture of disregard for disqualification blatantly exists. Meanwhile the Government claims that most drivers are law-abiding and rarely commit endorsable offences.

On the contrary, surely this shows that our policing systems catch only a tiny fraction of the criminals on our roads.

Disfigured pavements will last for generations

YOUR correspondent Jessica Hern makes a perfectly reasonable point about the effect of 1990s cable-laying on the capital's pavements (*Informer Postbag*, January 19).

The straggly lines of low-quality tar which covered up the cables will be a blight on thousands of streets for many years to come; a legacy of an era when privatisation was seen as the answer to everything.

Many of our pavements are disfigured by cable trenches, which weave up the centre of the pavement, not along the kerb where the effect would have been less marked.

Even roads with proper paving stones are affected. The workmen who lifted and relaid the stones did so hastily, leaving many prone to cracking.

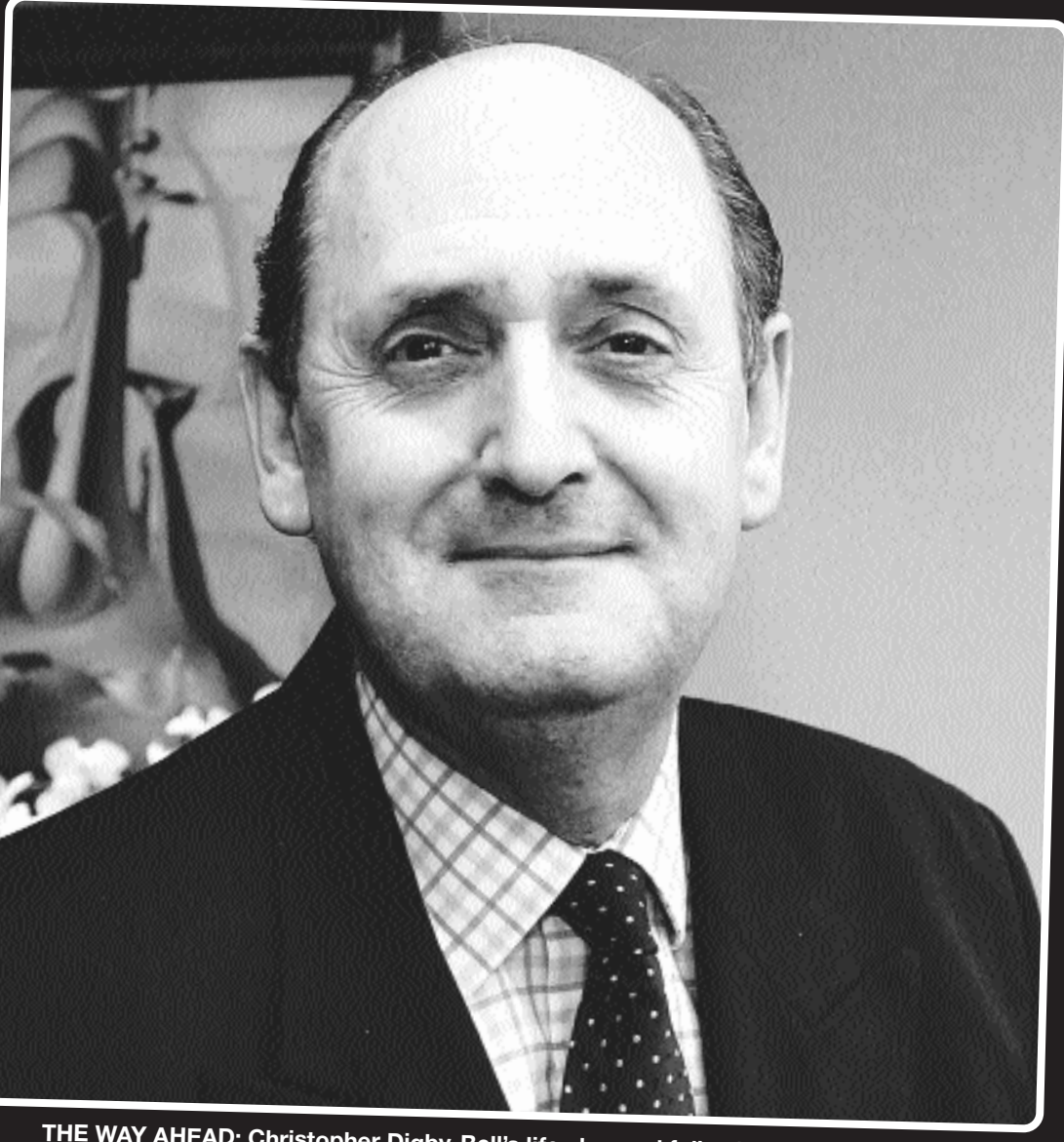
At the time, any accusations of sloppy workmanship were waved away on the grounds that pavements would eventually be repaired and replaced anyway.

The trouble is, tighter budgets and reduced government grants to local councils have merely had the effect of pushing up council tax while reducing services.

AVALON PEDDES
Kensington Park Road, W11

IT HAPPENED TO ME...THE BIRTH OF OUR SON WITH DOWN'S SYNDROME TRANSFORMED OUR LIVES

DISABLED FAMILY? IT'S NOT HOW WE SEE IT!



THE WAY AHEAD: Christopher Digby-Bell's life changed following the birth of son William

MERCEDES IS STOLEN FROM RESIDENTS' BAY

POLICE are searching for a grey Mercedes car which was stolen on the night of Saturday, January, 20. The theft, from a residents' parking bay in Prince Consort Road, Knightsbridge, was discovered at 11.30am the next day. Witnesses can call Det Sgt Whitlam on 020 7730 1212 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

HANDBAG DISAPPEARS

A WOMAN had her handbag pinched in the small hours of Saturday, January 20, as she stood outside Victoria Coach Station. The incident happened at around 12.40am by the station's main entrance in Buckingham Palace Road. She had placed the pink handbag on top of a black suitcase. If you saw what happened, call Det Sgt Whitlam on 020 7730 1212 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

MAD MUM

The diary of a middle-aged west London woman refusing to crack up



WELL, here is the news that has put any joy at possibly selling Hell House and seeing son Matt going for job interviews right to the bottom of the pile of things to think about.

It appears I am going to be a grandmother. Matt tells me official girlfriend Comfort Blanket (why did I pick that name!) is having a baby, and secret fancy Felina has been despatched for all time.

What's more, he has a scan picture on his mobile phone to prove it. How times have changed.

This is how I was told: "Lend me £50 for trainers, these ones are falling to bits. There's nothing in the fridge."

"And you need to know we're having a baby and don't bother with any gob cos I'm not gonna listen."

Dear reader, I'm devastated. The personal (selfish?) bit is that I would love to be overjoyed at the idea of becoming a grandparent.

I have no problems with the concept of being a Nana. Instead, all I see is woe.

The scan picture was waved in front of my eyes and I felt nothing but worry. To tell you the truth, it wasn't a shock.

Close friends had predicted this outcome from the moment Comfort could see Matt might be paying attention to other girls.

Not that I am going to blame her for

snaring him – what a catch, the silly girl – for he must share the blame for this new crisis. He's not as stupid as he makes out and could have avoided it.

Here is a story to chill the bones of any parent.

I had been keeping an eye on this romance since seeing Matt chuck his girlfriend through a hedge.

You may also recall that I recently recounted that Matt and Comfort had a sort of kung fu fight outside my home, which developed into a

running street battle with me threatening to call the police.

She gave as good as she got, but that still doesn't make it a fair contest.

Later they reappeared all lovey-dovey,

insisting it was 'just a little row' and I had over-reacted.

God save me from little rows involving kicking, gouging and head-butting.

Days later, Matt told me they had ended the fight and sped to the local supermarket where Comfort Blanket bought a pregnancy test and confirmed her new-found motherhood in the store's loos.

Oh well, I suppose I'm going to have to get used to being the Nutty Nanny from now on.

'THEY HAD ENDED THE FIGHT AND SPED TO THE SUPERMARKET WHERE COMFORT BOUGHT A PREGNANCY TEST'

Don't put up with domestic violence. Tell your friends and tell the police. Email: informermadmum@trinitysouth.co.uk

TRUE LIFE

NO ONE EXPECTS TO HAVE TO COPE WITH A CHILD WITH DOWN'S SYNDROME, BUT IT HAPPENED TO CHRISTOPHER DIGBY-BELL, 58. TRAINING TO BE A CITY LAWYER, THE BIRTH OF HIS THIRD CHILD CHANGED MORE THAN JUST HIS CAREER PATH. 22 YEARS ON, AND WITH TWO HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS FOR HIS WORK IN CHILDREN'S DISABILITY LAW, HE TELLS CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN ABOUT LIFE WITH WILLIAM

MY WIFE Claire told me that she was pregnant for the third time, and we were extremely happy.

It was 1984 and we were living in Putney, with my two little children, Tim, 3, and Melissa, 4. We had no prior notice that William was going to be born with problems.

In those days pre-natal tests, which can indicate high or low chances of your child being born with Down's syndrome, didn't exist. It came as a total surprise.

Our instinctive reaction was to find out more about what we were getting into.

Like most people, we had no prior knowledge of Down's. We were anxious and concerned about the impact it would have on our family.

We realised William was going to need special care, so we talked about it with other parents in our situation. We realised we had to make a choice: to live as a normal family with one of us needing extra support, or to live like a disabled family and give all of our attention to the disabled person at the expense of the family.

Claire and I chose the first option. Tim and Melissa were very excited about the new

member of the family. They weren't scared at all, and have never treated him differently.

At the time I was building a career as a real estate lawyer, but after William was born I realised there was something more important I had to explore.

My journey started with the realisation that if William was

I began to work pro bono [acting for the public good], which led me on to more specialised projects, always with the welfare of those in William's situation at heart.

I then founded the William's Way project in 2002. The scheme teaches kids with learning disabilities to learn to respect the law and the justice system.

As a result, I was fortunate enough to receive a Child Rights Award from Unesco, and a Human Rights Award from the Lord Chief Justice.

My next project, however, is much more light-hearted. I'm writing a book entitled *Travels with Ketchup and Karma* about my travels with William.

I have a real passion for travelling and have taken William whenever possible.

We've been to Sri Lanka, Bali and Las Vegas, to name but a few. I wanted to give him as much of a life as possible. Having a child with Down's requires you to think in a slightly different way.

You have to always have regard that some people need more support than others. For both Claire and I, it's been both challenging and rewarding. Our son William has certainly moved and shaped our lives.

'SOME PEOPLE NEED MORE SUPPORT THAN OTHERS. OUR SON WILLIAM HAS CERTAINLY MOVED AND SHAPED OUR LIVES'

to receive an education, he was going to have to fight for it.

The state doesn't provide enough to have him raised like my other two children.

So, when I was working hard during the day, building my career as a lawyer, by night I was learning about the law in relation to special education needs and discrimination.