

Client: SCM Private
Source: The Daily Telegraph (Main)
Date: 27 December 2012
Page: 10
Reach: 546438
Size: 278cm2
Value: 8934.92

Mandrake

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The gong show: our alternative honours list

Vita in justa est. The recipients of the New Year honours already know what gongs they are getting – but are they worthy of them? The list that is published next Tuesday is unlikely to bear much comparison with Mandrake's, but mine might perhaps get people thinking... and, possibly, even chuckling.

LIFE PEERS

Sir Ronald Harwood

A more distinguished wordsmith to my mind than Lord Fellows, Harwood has been a civilising, thought-provoking and intensely human influence in theatre, film and television for more than 60 years and would add a touch of class to the debates in the Upper House.

Sir James Dyson

A peerage for the inventor of the Dual Cyclone bagless vacuum cleaner would put out a clear message that the Coalition is serious about restoring the country's industrial base to its former glory.

LIFE PEERESSES

Gina Miller (right)

The wife of the multi-millionaire Alan Miller, the original "Mr Hedge Fund", is the founder and chairman of Miller Philanthropy. I rather fell in love with her when she stood up and halted a desultory charity auction at the Hurlingham Club to tell the hugely wealthy gathering that

they were all being far too mean. She would be a sparky addition to the Upper House.

Ann Widdecombe

Uncharitably known as Doris Karloff in some quarters, but quietly respected on both sides of the House, she has to find something more useful to do with her time than appearing in pantos and on *Strictly Come Dancing*-related events.

KNIGHTS

Michael Grandage

The man who has just launched his new theatre company – with its pledge to bring quality productions to the West End with realistically priced tickets – is, quite simply, the most impressive figure currently working in his field of endeavour.

Simon Weston

An inspirational figure after coming to terms with the horrific injuries he suffered in the Falklands war with such spirit and good humour, Weston was appointed OBE in 1992 for his charitable work. He has, however, taken on a great deal more since then and has become an unstoppable force for good.

Ronnie Corbett

When the much-loved 82-year-old comic was appointed CBE in the last New Year honours, it

followed a long campaign by Mandrake. It was a step in the right direction, but far too small a step. A knighthood is now more than overdue.

Simon Russell Beale (inset)

The thinking man's Christopher Biggins finished off a

triumphant year on the stage by demonstrating that he could also manage a spot of cross-dressing in the wickedly funny West End comedy, *Privates on Parade*.

DAMES

Jilly Cooper

She has inherited Dame Barbara Cartland's mantle as the nation's foremost romantic novelist with good humour, charm and an enormous capacity for industry.

Penelope Wilton

In *Downton Abbey* and many stage productions, Wilton has shown that she is equal to the talents of Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Eileen Atkins – and most certainly those of Diana Rigg, late of *The Avengers*.

CBE

David Dimbleby

Even more charming and unflappable off-screen than he is on, Dimbleby was a stabilising influence at the BBC during its innumerable crises over the past year.

THE GILLIAN DUFFY AWARD

William Gove

Named after Gillian Duffy, the Rochdale grandmother who helped to bring down Gordon Brown when she took him to task on her morning shopping expedition, my special award recognises all the Davids who take on Goliaths. William Gove, the eight-year-old son of the Education Secretary, has to be

recognised for saying to his father on a visit to Chequers – and within earshot of David Cameron: "Daddy, when you are Prime Minister, will we have this place to ourselves?"

