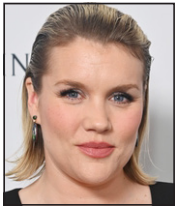


HICKEY



SHE'S a screenwriting Oscar winner with acting roles including the young Camilla Parker Bowles in TV's *The Crown* and the recent *Barbie* movie but rising star Emerald Fennell says she never gets recognised and lives a normal life.

Briton Emerald, who scooped Best Original Screenplay Oscar in 2021 for her debut film *Promising Young Woman*, says modestly: "The Oscar was completely mad. But I'm lucky – it all happened in the pandemic, so there were no red carpets.



"I'm not famous, I don't get stopped in the street or spend nights mingling with 'the stars'. I hold Eurovision parties at home.

"My existence is normal, domestic and wonderfully boring."

FORMER *Game of Thrones* actress Emilia Clarke believes that she functions as well as ever despite having only "half a brain" after suffering two brain aneurysms.

"I physically don't have a lot of my brain," she declares dramatically.

"If you look at my brain scans there are a lot of black parts, and that is where it's dead. I think what's left has been forced to be intensified. What's there has to work so much harder."

COMEDIAN and *Grumpy Old Woman* Jenny Eclair's stand-up career thrives but at 63 she feels she doesn't have a face for television.

"I'm a difficult age for TV: too old for *Live at the Apollo* and too young for a *Stannah Stairlift* gig.

"What I'm waiting for is one of the presenters on *Rip Off Britain* to retire in a year. I would love to be there."

Watch out Angela Rippon, Julia Somerville and Gloria Hunniford!

A COLD shower is required for ebullient broadcaster Gyles Brandreth, who nurses a lifelong crush on evergreen singer Lulu.

Happily married for 50 years to Michelle, fellow septuagenarian Gyles declares: "I love Lulu's music – I always have. I love her, I have since I first met her."

Gyles previously said: "Of all the girls I fancied in my life, there are three I could have been happily married to: one is Lulu."

The *Shout* singer's opinion – or indeed that of wife Michelle's – about his ardour is not recorded!



TV chat show host Graham Norton does not regret quitting the social media channel Twitter – or X as it is now known – after he was recently trolled.

"It was interesting when I turned it off. It was incredible, the calm. It was like when roadworks stop. I never open it now."

Very wise.

DESPITE insisting he's pleased he turned down an offer in his youth by his late actor uncle Jeremy Brett to pay to have his prominent ears pinned back, *Doc Martin* actor Martin Clunes nevertheless admits: "The younger me didn't like having my appearance insulted or being 'ear shamed'.

"Age gives you a clearer perspective. Now I think my ears are rather splendid and I realise they earned me roles I might not otherwise have had." Intriguing.

A NATION OF TREASURE HUNTERS

As new figures reveal a record number of ancient artefacts being discovered, RICHARD WEBBER goes on the trail of the metal-detecting hobbyists passionate about striking gold...

NAPOLEON once decried the English as a nation of shopkeepers. But perhaps today we should be known as a nation of treasure hunters, such is our great enthusiasm for unearthing the past.

More artefacts were reported last year – some 1,378 discoveries in all – than in any other year since records began, according to statistics released last week by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

They mark the ninth consecutive year that the 1,000-strong figure has been exceeded and show a huge increase from 2021's total of 1,072 across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which was similar to the 2020 figure of 1,071.

Of course, TV shows like *The Detectorists*, starring Mackenzie Crook and Toby Jones, have bolstered the pastime and the pandemic saw a surge in metal detecting as people spent more time outdoors.

Without the estimated 25,000 hobbyists in the UK, the majority of the 1.6 million objects discovered to date wouldn't have seen the light of day. Earlier this year, Museum Wales revealed that a find of 15 Iron Age coins was the first from that period found in the country.

Even Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, Arts & Leisure minister, values the efforts made by detectorists, recently stating: "It is wonderful to see archaeology and metal detecting thriving across the country, helping to uncover treasures which deepen our understanding of our shared national history."

But what is it that drives the hobbyists who, rain or shine, spend hours searching muddy fields for buried treasure?

Is it the lure of riches or, more likely, a love of history?

WORLD FAMOUS ROMAN HAUL

RETIRED builder Peter Humphries, 81, lives in Wiltshire and entered the record books in October 1978 for his first discovery – the Cunetio Hoard, near Mildenhall, Wiltshire – comprising a staggering 54,951 Roman coins. It is the largest ever found in the UK. "I'd only been metal detecting for two years," he tells me.

"My interest in the hobby, though, began at school when a friend brought in Roman coins his girlfriend found in a nearby field. It's hard to believe that in the same field decades later, after gaining permission to dig from the tenant farmer, I'd find thousands of low-value Roman coins.

"I was detecting with my friend, John Booth, when I got a massive signal from my machine. Initially, I thought it was a dustbin lid or an old oil drum. We dug down nine inches and discovered two coins stuck in a stone.

Realising there was no way they could produce such a large signal, we scraped away dirt under the stone and noticed the top of a pot, the size of a dinner plate."

The pair knew that their find would draw unwelcome attention so they filled in the hole and decided to return that evening. "Thankfully, it was a full moon so we returned with a bucket – not expecting the find to be that large. But when we quickly filled it, I had to phone my wife and ask for more," Peter continues.

"We filled sacks, buckets – everything my wife could get her hands on – and still pulled more coins from this gigantic pot."

After an exhausting five-hour dig, they finally removed the last of the coins they could see. The following day, Peter reported their find to the police.

"When I told them the quantity, the sergeant thought I was a crank. But they



ROMAN HOARD: Peter Humphries unearthed 54,951 coins in Wiltshire



UK RECORD: The Mildenhall find in 1978 was worth £142,000

took the coins and asked to see where I'd found them. While I'd made a neat hole, the police officers used crowbars and dug deeper, finding another 50 coins.

"Three months later, the police knocked on my door accusing me of defacing a national monument. In September 1979, I attended court where I was also accused of stealing the coins, despite having the farmer's permission.

"Quite rightly, we were found not guilty. The coins were passed to the British Museum and three years later, after being cleaned, they were declared treasure and valued at £142,000.

"Because the land was Crown Estate, John and I only received a third of the total – just over £47,000 between us, which in today's value would be over £340,000.

"Mind you, in those days that was a lot of money. Let's put it this way, on the Sunday morning I had a 24-year mortgage ahead of me. By the evening, I had enough to pay it off. That can't be bad!"

DOG-TAG FIND WAS MAGICAL

SURGERY practice manager Fiona David, 59, from Gloucester, has owned a metal detector since she was a teenager.

"But it wasn't until attending a course four years ago that I adopted the hobby in earnest," she explains. "Before long, I'd joined my local metal detecting group and was enjoying organised events."

"I thought I'd be the sort of person who'd only find junk – certainly nothing important. Then, one day in 2022, my machine started beeping. I dug up what I thought was just another bit of metal, so threw it in my bag. When I got home, I realised it was a dog-tag and started wondering who it had belonged to."

It was the start of an intriguing adventure. With her daughter Chess's help, Fiona established that the tag had belonged to Thomas Flynn, a US soldier who'd arrived in Britain during the Second World War for training before heading to France.

Thankfully, he survived the war and lived to a ripe old age.

"We were determined to reunite the tags with his family. Chess established contact with a woman in the States who traced the whereabouts of dog-tag owners. With her help, we found Thomas' son, who was able to tell us that his father had been injured numerous times during the war and, later, received a battlefield commission."

"Thomas' son was presented with his father's dog-tag in November 2022 at a veteran's dinner. We made contact with the family afterwards and they're coming over next year to visit the site where it was found. Without a doubt, that's the best find I've made. Yes, I'd love to discover a Roman hoard but you just don't know what you'll find, it's a lottery."

DETECTIVE WORK: Fiona David was able to reunite the dog-tags with the son of a Second World War US Army veteran

MORE WOMEN ARE METAL DETECTING

BUSINESS development officer Laura Wells, 35, lives in Warwickshire and is out pursuing her hobby most Sundays. "I was about six when I started metal detecting," she explains. "My earliest memories are being on beaches with my dad and brothers wondering why we kept finding coins underneath the sand."

"What it really meant at that age was that we could enjoy ice creams the next day. Now, I go out with several metal detecting clubs in the Midlands. 'Digs', as we call them, normally start at 9am and finish at 4pm. Everyone usually turns up earlier to catch up with friends – metal detecting is not just a hobby, it's a community."

"September and October are my favourite months. It's the combination of crisp mornings followed by warm afternoons while sweeping through stubbled wheat fields surrounded by medieval villages and Saxon churches. It feels like you're taking a trip back into the past."

"When you uncover an artefact or a coin, you're the first person to hold it after hundreds or even thousands of years," says Laura, *inset below*.

"When I was younger, there were few women detecting. But with the rise of social media, women are now more aware and seeing other women enjoying the hobby lets them feel safe."

She adds: "All finds are special to me. One in particular, though, was my first silver medieval coin. The King John silver penny. I remember shouting and running to my dad clutching a small clod of earth with just the edge of the coin poking out. Discovering that coin after 800 years felt like a rite of passage. Detecting is more about the finding and the history surrounding the objects rather than their monetary value."



THE PUBLIC SEES US AS ANORAKS

WRITER David Villanueva, 72, lives in Kent, the third most abundant county for treasure, with 81 finds in 2022, after Norfolk (95) and Hampshire (83). He goes metal detecting weekly.

"I've been metal detecting since 1972," he explains. "I'd always collected coins and the prospect of finding a fortune excited me. Of course, chances of that are slim so my main motivations include the thrill of the chase and trying to bring the past to light."

"You never know what you'll find and the excitement of handling something which hasn't been touched for hundreds of years is a real pleasure. I normally detect within half an hour of home. Over the years, I've found thousands of interesting items, most of little or no monetary value but, occasionally, something turns up worth a few pounds."

One of his biggest finds came in 2003 when his local detecting club received permission to search the grounds of an old house.

"I'd had a couple of signals, which turned out to be rubbish, when my machine began beeping again," he continues. "This time, the detector indicated the item could be gold. I began digging carefully until a 16th century gold Tudor iconographic ring revealed itself. It was glinting in the sunlight and I had a feeling it was valuable."

It is thought the ring David uncovered was once worn by a clergyman or minor noble and probably fell off while they were removing a glove. It was eventually valued at £3,750 – which the detectorist shared with the house owner. "Another time, I found two Iron Age gold coins in a field, where I'd been searching for years. They were clearly potential treasure under the Treasure Act 1996," he continues. "My Iron Age gold coin hoard now stands at 27 with a total value of over £10,000."

He adds: "Most detectorists have a love of history. Those who are in it for the perceived money quickly become disillusioned and quit. The public largely views us as anoraks grubbing around in muddy fields in all weathers for a few dirty old trinkets. But they get excited when major finds are discovered."



SEARCH FOR THE PAST: Detectorists love history says David Villanueva

● **METAL** detectorists must abide by the Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting which includes requirements such as obtaining permission from landowners/occupiers before undertaking a dig. And if you're considering taking up the hobby, it's important to familiarise yourself with the Treasure Act 1996 and its recent revisions. For more information, visit the Association for Metal Detecting Sport's website amds.org.uk