

People/Adam Hart-Davis and Prof Sue Blackmore

Sue Blackmore

It's a mad, mad world for couple leading the good life



Janet King meets TV's Adam Hart-Davis and Prof Sue Blackmore at their Devon home

Adam Hart-Davis and his psychologist wife Professor Sue Blackmore are quite a double act. That's not a reference to the fact that they recently joined The Ivybridge Theatre Company and trod the boards to great applause in the troupe's most recent Christmas production, but much more to do with their entertainment value as a couple who are so obviously a complete pair of opposites. Scientist, author, photographer, historian and broadcaster Adam is well-known, of course, for presenting the BBC TV series *Local Heroes* and *What the Romans Did for Us*, the latter spawning several spin-off series involving the Victorians, the Tudors, the Stuarts, and the Ancients. He was also a co-presenter of *Tomorrow's World*, and presented *Science Shack*, *How London Was Built* and *Just Another Day*.

Sue, who will be 60 in July, is Visiting Professor at Plymouth University's School of Psychology, and has just published her latest book, *Zen and the Art of Consciousness*, which examines the phenomena of Zen, and considers the deeper questions about life. She used to travel the world giving academic lectures, but, aware of her carbon footprint, she recently decided that that kind of life could no longer be justified – and so she stopped. Or, at least, she is rationing herself to just one flight per year.



Sue performs in the Ivybridge Theatre Company's *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*

"I felt I couldn't be content in myself, leading that kind of life," she says. "So I thought, why don't I just give lectures in Plymouth and Exeter?" And so she does.

Sitting with them in their stunning home, Thornham Bridge, an old converted cider barn set in seven acres on the banks of the River Erme, near Ivybridge in South Devon, it quickly becomes apparent that, while Sue is the exuberant, vivacious one, Adam

is the quieter, more reticent one, who looks on with pride while his wife chatters away ten to the dozen.

"We are so different," says Sue, "I sometimes think, what the hell am I doing with this man? Why is it so easy to be together? My first husband, Tom, was much more like me: much more wild and excitable and rushing off and doing a million things at once. But actually, that was all too much. I'm much happier that Tom's a friend now, and doing his mad things only occasionally with me, whereas Adam is really steady..." ("Boring!" Adam interjects) "... although he doesn't prevent me from doing mad things."

Today, Sue can hardly walk because she's on crutches following a skiing accident in Italy. "My idea of skiing is to go very fast," she says. "However, I fell, had an x-ray, went skiing again, then fell again. Now I can't walk. It



serves me right. Adam's been very, very good. I expected him to be really cross with me, and say 'It serves you right'. But he didn't."

The problem is, Sue (who broke her thigh bone horse riding in Greece a few years ago) is a self-confessed thrill-seeker. "I like frightening myself to death," she explains. Her current thrill is kayaking, which she has chosen as an extreme sport because... "I am genuinely frightened of drowning." Of course.

And Adam, does he join in on these exhilarating expeditions? "Me? No,"



Adam and Sue at their wedding (top and above) which took place at their home, Thornham Bridge, a converted cider barn beside the River Erme in South Devon, in June last year



Adam Hart-Davis and his wife, Professor Sue Blackmore. The couple live in the picturesque South Hams area of Devon, where they keep chickens, swim in the river and generally strive to lead a green and sustainable lifestyle

he says, with his best Clement Freud face on. "I do none of the above. I dislike horses, I dislike skiing. I dislike kayaking..."

"Well, he did come with me for my first kayaking lesson, so good for him," says Sue, "but he hated it, and was absolutely clear that he didn't ever want to do it again." They grin at each other, with huge affection.

"I do woodwork," offers Adam, 67. "I make things out of wood, which is much more practical. You wind up with useful stuff. If you look around the house, you'll find all sorts of things that I've made. In this room, for instance, you see those pegs on the snooker board on the wall? They're my oak pegs. And I've made tables and chairs and stools and egg cups..." Indeed he has, and later, giving me a tour, he shows them off proudly.

Adam, it seems, has endless patience. Not just to skillfully carve out works of art from wood, but in life, generally. Take, for instance, his pursuit of Sue – it took 15 years before she agreed to marry him. But he waited, patiently.

The couple originally met in the mid-1980s, when Adam, as a TV producer, filmed Sue's work as a parapsychologist. "I thought he was a

flirtatious, typical TV producer, who was probably travelling the world, breaking hearts and being really annoying... but I quite fancied him," recalls Sue.

Adam was married at the time, to Adrienne Alpin, by whom he has two sons, Damon and Jason – who have since given him three grandchildren. Born and brought up in Henley, Adam is the son of Sir Rupert Hart-

'I've got my job, my house, my kids, I've got a lover and a husband ... this suits me just fine'

Davis, a publisher, and is, apparently, a direct descendant of King William IV (by his mistress Dorothea Jordan) and therefore a fifth cousin, once removed, of the Queen.

He went to Eton before getting a first in chemistry at Merton College, Oxford, and later took a DPhil in organometallic chemistry at the University of York, before spending three years as a post-doctoral scholar at the University of Alberta in Canada.

Sue (who did her first degree in psychology and physiology at St

Hilda's College, Oxford) was also married, to Tom Troscianko, a psychology professor at Bristol University. They had two children – Emily, now 29 and a junior research fellow at St John's College, Oxford, and Jolyon, 26, who is currently doing a PhD at Birmingham University.

But it would be another ten years before they met again, in about 1993. "I had split up with Tom and moved to Bristol, got myself a house, a job, a car, and the childcare sorted," recalls Sue. "Then Adam rang me up and said he was making a programme about Loch Ness, featuring the monster, and he wanted a psychologist to interview people who claimed they'd seen it. Could he come and visit me?"

He did – and that was it. But while happy to be together, Sue still valued her independence. "I had my own house, in Bristol," she says. "I felt in a position of power. I thought, well, Adam's my live-in lover, I've got my job, my house, my kids sorted, I've got a lover and a husband... and this suits me just fine."

But then, in 2007, after the death of Sue's elderly parents (who both had dementia) the family moved to Devon. It was a turning point.

"When we moved here, it was just, well, everything was different," says Sue. "In Bristol it was my house, my life, and he (Adam) had come to live in it. But we chose this place together – this is our new life, together; it felt completely and utterly different."

And so it was while on a romantic cycling holiday in France, the summer before last, that Adam finally got his timing right.

'I don't think the BBC love me any more. They haven't asked me to do anything for six years'

"We watched the sun setting into the sea from our open window," says Adam. "We had dinner and finally, overcome by sun, sand, sea and Sancerre, she said 'Yes', by mistake!"

They were married on June 19 last year at Thornham Bridge, taking out a special licence to do so. In fact, the licence lasts for three years, so they have thrown open their door to others who might like to marry there.

However, there is one cloud casting a shadow over their otherwise sunny existence. Adam, it seems, feels he is

no longer beloved by the BBC. He has just finished writing a book, which is all about time ("...as in, has it always existed, or is it only there when stuff is happening; how we perceive it").

Sounds like a foundation for a new TV series, I say. "Yes, well, I've suggested that, and the BBC say... well, they've gone very quiet," he coughs, uncomfortably. "I don't think they love me any more. They haven't asked me to do anything now for six years. *What The Ancients Did For Us*, which was broadcast in 2004, was the last major series I did for them."

Loyally, Sue jumps in. "I am so impressed at Adam's transition from being someone who's famous on TV, to being a woodworker, gardening assistant and generally happy around home," she quips.

"Well, I'm probably too old," he says, comparing his fitness and features to the youthful Prof Brian Cox, current flavour of the month at the Beeb. "But I'd be happy to do another series, if the opportunity arose."

Zen and the Art of Consciousness, by Sue Blackmore, is published by OneWorld Publications in paperback, price £8.99. For more details on Adam and Sue's work and books, and hiring Thornham Bridge for weddings, see www.susanblackmore.co.uk and www.adam-hart-davis.org