

## Get me not to the church - but on time

It's his daughter's wedding and our Richard just cannot be late. Can he?

Pictures by JON STOCKHAM: [WWW.APPLEPHOTOGRAPHY.CO.UK](http://WWW.APPLEPHOTOGRAPHY.CO.UK)

**THERE HAD BEEN A LONG BUILD UP.** The date had been fixed more than a year earlier. The happy couple had planned it with the kind of dedicated precision that befits a commercial solicitor (also known as my daughter Sophie) and a neurologist (also known now as my son-in-law Tim). Rumour had it that Sophie had even produced a spreadsheet with all the timings down to the minute. All I had to do, as father of the bride, was to get from home (Norfolk) to Trinity Hall Cambridge where the ceremony was to take place and be there early enough to accompany my daughter down the aisle (except that it was not an aisle).

But it was not just me. There was also my wife and her four children – Tom, Becky, Philippa and Bryony, along with assorted boy or girlfriends.

From our end tensions had been running high for days with frequent trips to clothes shops and hairdressers, along with numerous deliveries by white vans as the females strove to be elegant (they are anyway, but tell them that and you quickly got a thick ear). We were to travel in two cars. It was a complicated operation. The females could not drive in their wedding finery. They had to change when they reached Cambridge. We had booked rooms at a local cheap hotel.

I was ordered to wear morning dress (my threat to turn up in jeans having almost caused a family split) and I had to change at Sophie's mother's home; then go with the bride to the ceremony.

That was the plan.

We set out in reasonable time. It was pouring with rain and we sloshed through the puddles. About 15 minutes into the journey, Becky rang us to say she had left her shoes behind. Would we go back and get them?

Shoes were already a problem. Tom also had to put on a morning suit and had brown shoes which apparently would have caused him to be barred from entry if he wore them.

There was no time to go back. Becky was told firmly to buy some more shoes in Wroxham, where Tom was to buy his black shoes.

Then the low fuel light came on in our car and we had to fill up before we reached Cambridge.

Everyone in the world had also decided to fill up. When you are in a hurry in a queue those in front of you slow to a snail's pace. When they have eventually fuelled up they amble into the shop and browse for things to buy. You can imagine them: 'Do I want spearmint or peppermint today, or chocolate with nuts in it? Yes, peppermint will be fine; on reflection fruit and nut. Now what's my pin number? Let me see – it's my gran's birthday.'



**SOPHIE AND RICHARD**  
en route to Trinity Hall Cambridge

Ten minutes later the driver emerges with his spearmints and plain chocolate. He then checks his tyres before getting very slowly into his car where he combs his hair, adjusts his seat and rear view mirror before very carefully putting on his seat belt and eventually turning on the ignition. Heart stoppingly his reversing lights come on and he starts to move backwards. Then he has to recover from the shock before pulling off – at last allowing us to fill up.

In contrast we were like a pit stop – with Kirsten waiting with card in hand at the checkout to pay the moment I stopped the pump.

We were away again into the rain and spray. Kirsten then realised that she did not have suitable tights, so we pulled into a supermarket in Thetford. She leapt out and instructed me to drive round and round until she came out again – which resulted in many circuits. The reason became clear. She had bought enough pairs of tights to fit a troupe of ballet dancers – and more shoes for Becky.

Then we were on the open road again – and into the congestion on the A11. The traffic had slowed to a snail's pace. The sat nav was pushing our time of arrival later and later. I could not be late, but it was currently beyond my control. We could hardly ask for a police escort.

When eventually we did arrive it was like a speeded up film: I raced into the house and tugged on the morning suit. It was not a quick process – so many buttons and links and clasps. Jeans would have been much easier. Then there was the tie – or whatever it was. I had no idea what to do with it, and nor did anyone else. I slung it round my neck like a cravat. By then the taxi had been waiting for several minutes and the driver was leaning on his horn with increasing frequency.

In contrast the whole house was a haven of organised activity – bridesmaids were everywhere: having their hair done, being made up, posing for the photographer.

Throughout, Sophie remained calm. She emerged wearing a 1940s style dress in pale gold with an original 1940s' veil and pale gold sparkly shoes.

We set off in the taxi which, because of the weekend parking restrictions, deposited us at least a quarter of a mile from the wedding venue. Sophie, still calm, happily walked through the precinct with me in tow, to the bewilderment of the shopping public who no doubt presumed that this was some kind of stunt. It was Cambridge after all.

With one minute to spare (after a final check by the Registrar) we walked into the room where the ceremony was to take place.

*More next month...*

# Speak up

It's the second part of Richard Barr's report on his daughter's wedding. So how was his speech?

*'I am very glad that Sophie married Tim, and not a guinea pig,' was how I started my father of the bride speech at my daughter Sophie's wedding.*

Last month I told of the trials and tribulations of actually getting there on time: we only just made it even though Sophie had had to walk the last quarter of a mile through Cambridge's shopping centre – seen no doubt by most of the shoppers as some sort of stunt.

Sophie and my new son-in-law Tim decided, like many people these days, to have a civil ceremony and they had chosen Trinity Hall Cambridge as their venue. Many venues are now licensed for weddings

The day was the culmination of many months of effort, mostly carried out by them and their friends – with a view to creating a spectacular occasion with a not-so-spectacular price tag.

The table decorations were all prepared by Sophie and her friends. By the time they had finished spraying the pinecones

and foliage they had become so high on whatever was in the aerosols that they lay around on the floor helpless with laughter.

One delightful touch was the crackers (the wedding took place just before Christmas). Every single cracker was hand made, and each contained a small pot either of Welsh jam (Tim hails from Wales) or of Norfolk honey (see Places and faces August 2012 for an account of our bees).

The crackers also had jokes tailored to the recipients – mainly insulting. There was a nervous moment when Sophie feared that a cracker with a particularly risqué joke might have been given to her new mother-in-law but fortunately the aspersions about Welsh sheep were delivered elsewhere.

Transport was the responsibility of Sophie's brother Nick. Normally he crosses the skies tens of thousands of feet above us as a commercial pilot (I am making you read a lot >>





of back numbers of Places&Faces\* – it's worth it and you can get them online. See the November 2012 issue). He journeyed from London to Cambridge with car loads of crackers, table decorations, programmes, wedding suits and above all Sophie's wedding dress.

My part during the ceremony was a small one. I did not have to produce the ring or say anything. That was to come later. All I had to do was hang onto Sophie as we walked past the guests, then lift her veil back over her head.

The ceremony was simple and moving, culminating in the couple exchanging their own vows.

Tim's was to 'promise to continue wooing you even when we are both very very old' and Sophie's was 'never drink vodka even if coerced or misled by my friends'.

Even the serious registrar had to smile when these were read out.

The service and the signing over, it was time for family photographs and handshakes before we all made our way to a large hall - which had more than a passing resemblance to the main hall at Hogwarts (except there was not an owl to be seen).

***"My dilemma must have been the same as for fathers all over the country: what do you say about your daughter that will entertain the guests, raise a laugh and above all endorse the union of two newlyweds"***

There we were formed into three long rows for the wedding breakfast (which happened to take place at 4pm). Underneath the avuncular gaze of past university professors more than 100 guests tucked into a seasonal feast.

Then came the part I had been dreading for weeks: the toast to the bride. My dilemma must have been the same as for fathers all over the country: what do you say about your daughter that will entertain the guests, raise a laugh and above all endorse the union of two newlyweds.

I bought some books on wedding speeches and quickly abandoned them: I was not going to regurgitate someone else's work. Instead I took some glimpses from Sophie's life starting with the day she was born, and drawing some common themes – her bossiness, her ability to charm birds off trees and her love of guinea pigs. To my relief, after a brief hesitation, I had the crowd with me and photos show Sophie laughing while I was speaking.

The speeches over, the celebrations moved to the next phase – a ceilidh. This, I was to learn, was a traditional way of facilitating courting and prospects of marriage for young people, though time will tell whether this wedding will have led to more nuptials.

Sophie and Tim kicked off with Frank Sinatra singing Cheek To Cheek. They looked extremely expert. I did not remember Sophie ever going to ballroom dancing classes as a child – but I later found out that they had had weeks of dancing lessons from a very accomplished neighbour.

Then we all joined in traditional folk dancing – complete with a caller and little band of a fiddler, a guitar player and an accordionist.

And so, late into the night it ended with Sophie and Tim well and truly married, and Tim not looking in the least bit furry or like a guinea pig.

