Twenty five year-old case re-opened following deathbed revelation

NEW CLUES IN HEIRESS HUNT

By JENNY PAUL

A NEW search for the body of the Nice casino heiress who disappeared without trace in 1978, was launched this week after a café owner revealed new evidence relating to the crime from his deathbed.

Agnès Le Roux was persuaded by a friend of the mayor to sell her casino voting rights and, four months later she disappeared.

No trace of Agnès – then just 23 years old – or of her Range Rover has been found since.

Now, the case has been re-opened after the former Cours Saleya café owner’s son told the police his father had seen Agnès’ lover, Jean-Maurice Agnelet, hurrying through the Cours Saleya in blue work overalls and covered in cement dust at around six am, several days after Agnès disappeared.

Alibi

The new information, coupled with the admission in 2000 by Agnelet’s now ex-wife that she had given him a false alibi for the night of Agnès’ disappearance, has led to the opening of a new inquiry, 25 years after her disappearance.

The case lifts the lid on the seamier side of Niçois politics at the time of the infamous ‘casino wars’ and involves many influential Nice personalities, including Jacques Médecin, who succeeded his father Jean as mayor of Nice.

Before being persuaded to sell her holding Agnès had owned the controlling shares in the Palais de la Méditerranée, a famous Promenade des Anglais landmark which was once the second most successful casino in France and is now being converted into luxury apartments.

Agnès’ mother Renée, a former Balenciaga model married to the head of the Societé des Bains de Mer in Monaco, and Jean-Dominique Fratoni, a Corsican ex-school friend of Jacques Médecin, were both clients of Agnès’ lover, Jean-Maurice Agnelet.

Swiss bank

Following her disappearance, Agnès’ money, held in a Swiss bank account, was transferred to Agnelet and his new girlfriend. The two later moved to Canada, but Agnelet was questioned and cleared again in 2000.

Fratoni, who owned a casino club near the Galeries Lafayette department store and ran the Promenade’s new Casino Ruhl, also left France and Mayor Médecin himself ‘moved’ to Uruguay in 1990, dogged by rumours of dirty dealings.

An architect and a geologist now have until 25 February to thoroughly examine a number of potential locations in Nice which could contain Agnès’ remains.

Caverns

The Le Roux family home, Villa Marichu on the Cap de Nice, is to be the main focus of their investigations, along with Agnelet’s former office on Cours Saleya.

André Rogge, a private investigator hired by Agnès’ mother, is convinced there is a forgotten well underneath the palatial villa. The sea-facing side of the mansion contains a series of underground caverns, he believes, blocked by rocks. He has discovered a 40cm outfall pipe and is convinced this is the outlet for the ‘forgotten’ well.
A Roquefort-les-Pins man built his house under his rock garden. Jenny Paul finds out why...

GOING UNDERGROUND

AT THE END of a winding track in Roquefort is a gate. There's no number or house name. If you go through the gate confirms that there is no house there.

There is, however, an original garden with rocks and cacti which appears, at first glance, rather like a moonscape.

The occupant of the land, a convivial troglodyte called Pierre Dalmasso explains "My house is underground, below the garden. From the sky you can only see land, there is no ugly building spoiling the landscape.

"I have done this for the environment. I did not want to build a house like some of the ugly monstrosities you see ruining the countryside here."

Pierre explained how this 'eco-house' came about. "I had the idea around fifteen years ago, and ten years ago I started building, helped by a group of friends. It is of course an ecological development and I consider it to be my life's work, " he said. The idea around fifteen years ago, and ten years ago I started building, helped by a group of friends. It is of course an ecological development and I consider it to be my life's work, " he continued. "The house still isn't completely finished. It may never be, as I always have new ideas and ways of improving things here and there."

"Living underground is much better than a traditional house. It is warmer in winter and cooler in summer."

"Electricity is supplied in the usual way, although soon I'll install solar panels. The Riviera is ideal for solar power because of the great weather. The house is one of a kind in a very built-up area. It's a pity more people don't live underground."

Pierre lamented, before brightly inviting "anyone who wishes to look or simply relax amongst the cacti, away from the World, is welcome, always."

And so to the garden, "Cacti are excellent plants for the Riviera, they do not need much water and they provide colour all year round. I don't need to spend hours watering them in summer as you would a normal garden. It is much more environmentally friendly," says Pierre.

He has recently added a huge open air tank, used for collecting rain water. This is pumped out, cleaned and used for drinking, bathing and also waters all the cacti.

So feel free to pop over for a look at this most unusual house. If you can find it, of course; it's the one that looks like a garden.

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FRANCE’S lowest ski resort was able to open again last weekend thanks to the recent cold snap.

Lying at an altitude of just 180 metres, the parc d’Olhain cross-country resort in the distinctly northern department of Pas de Calais welcomed more than 1,500 skiers on Saturday and Sunday. It last opened in December 2001.

Nearer home up to 40cm of snow has fallen locally, providing fresh cover for the coming school holidays.

A SCHOOL bus driver who had been smoking marijuana was arrested in Nice last Thursday as he drove 45 students home from school.

Police boarded the bus with a sniffer dog during a routine check, and ten grammes of cannabis were found in the 22 year-old driver’s pocket. He was detained and his licence immediately suspended, leaving the bus to be collected by his employers.

MOTORWAY tolls at Nice St Isidore and on sections of the A8 and A57 in the Var went up last weekend.

Motorists will be paying an extra ten cents at affected toll plazas.

Nationwide the average increase in tolls is 2.01% for light vehicles and 3.88% for heavy vehicles.

SOME hotels in Cannes currently have no guests at all and overall occupancy is down 15% on 2002, which was itself a bad year following the September 11 terrorist attacks in America, says the local branch of the Hotel Trade Union. Only the city’s deluxe hotels seem to be unaffected.

Wallis Simpson two-timed the Prince of Wales during their courtship in 1935, papers released by the UK’s Public Records Office revealed last week.

The twice-divorced American socialite fled to Cannes during the abdication crisis and, after his stepping down as the King of England and their marriage, often spent time at their Cap d’Antibes mansion.

She was still married to second husband Ernest Simpson during her affair with car salesman Guy Trundle, which carried on when she was dating Edward, the then Prince of Wales.

Mrs Simpson also two-timed Edward with top Nazi minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in 1936 and went on to have a three year affair with Woolworth’s heir Jimmy Donahue from 1950.

The affair with Trundle took place before Edward became King. Special branch agents discovered it when they began tailing her after her involvement with the Prince of Wales became public knowledge in 1935.

“The identity of Mrs Simpson’s secret lover has now been definitely ascertained,” says the secret Special Branch report.

“Trundle is described as a very charming adventurer, very good looking, well bred and an excellent dancer. He is said to boast that every woman falls for him… Trundle receives money from Mrs. Simpson as well as expensive presents… Trundle is a motor engineer and salesman and is said to be employed by the Ford Motor Company,” it continues.

Edward was crowned King in January 1936 but as it became clear neither the royal family nor the public would tolerate a twice-divorced Queen, Wallis Simpson fled to the south of France.

She arrived in Cannes on December 3 that year, where she stayed with friends in the wealthy La Californie area. At a press conference in the town she stated she would “withdraw from a situation that has been rendered both unhappy and untenable”.

Increasingly unhappy, Edward VIII abdicated on 11 December 1936 saying he “found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of my responsibility without the help and support of the woman I love”. He left England for France and married Wallis in June 1937, six days after her second divorce was finalised.

Apart from the five years the former King, now known as the Duke of Windsor, spent as Governor of the Bahamas, the couple lived in France, splitting their time between their main home in Paris and the Chateau de la Croe, their mansion on Cap d’Antibes. The Duke of Windsor died in 1972 and his wife in 1986.

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More money is being spent on health, leisure and technology. The findings show that Europeans are spending less on clothes, with a total average of 5.4% of income spent last year, against 7.5% at the end of the 1970s. Europeans according to a study of 5,000 consumers by The Institut Francais de la Mode.

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The Riviera Gazette

Thursday, 6 February 2003

Technology

A GANG of drug dealers were handed stiff prison sentences at the Grasse criminal court on Tuesday. A tip-off led to police crack-down on the drug gang, which the courts have been trying to make an example of by handing out particularly harsh penalties.

It is believed that the courts are trying to manage a pop of the market by handing out particularly harsh penalties.

A TOTAL of 1,318 jobs were created in 2002 on the Riviera by 35 companies of which 30 were created in the Côte d’Azur development agency, CIDA, helped to attract to the region. “These are companies which we monitor and whom we help and advise,” said the CIDA’s Catherine Gentil, told The Riviera Gazette. “The figure is slightly down on the previous year. French firms created the most jobs, followed by the USA, UK, Switzerland and Finland. 80% of new investment was within the IT sector.”
Cannes crime up

CANNES is one of the most dangerous cities in France according to crime statistics published in Le Figaro on Friday.

The statistics, released by the Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, indicate that crime rose by 2.93% in Cannes and Le Cannet last year. But the figures are “false and insulting,” according to Cannes’ mayor, Bernard Brochand, who published a rebuttal in Nice Matin on Saturday.

“The ministry bases its figures on the 68,000 inhabitants who are registered on the official census, but the real number is actually closer to 150,000”, the mayor claimed.

Furthermore, the mayor claims another factor distorting the results is the high volume of visitors to the popular Croisette during the summer.

“As a tourist hotspot, you cannot reasonably compare Cannes with a town like Avignon, for example,” the mayor maintained.

The figures also conflict with results of a recent study conducted by the Statistics Department of the city, which indicate that crime has decreased since November.

The ad-hoc trio featured Ian Anderson on the piano, Jean Michel Watteau on the double bass and Philippe Moreau on drums. Joining in were accordion player Jojo Labit and Tony Bagwell on the baritone sax and flute.

The statistics released by the ministry of employment last week show that unemployment was up by 4.8% this year, with a total of 2,306,800 people or 9.1% of the working population now jobless.

Unified university

A JOINT French and English university will be created following a £1.4m education accord signed by the countries’ education departments on Tuesday.

Courses at the “Transmanche University” are set to begin in autumn 2004, taught in both English and French. The Ashford and Lille campuses of the new university are only an hour apart via the Channel Tunnel rail link.

Til death do us part?

THE widow of a policeman who was killed by a hit-and-run driver last September has successfully applied for a posthumous marriage.

Christelle X, 34, of Nice, was three weeks pregnant when her fiancé was killed. Christelle has been granted permission to marry by President Chirac, under a law introduced in 1959. The wedding is planned for next year.

Cow-ed

A MAN from Caen was last week given a seven month suspended sentence for shooting dead a cow while taking pot-shots at bottles.
My Riviera

Mortgage broker Carole Bayliss tells Alison Craddock how she loves helping other people make the move to the Riviera

The FIRST time I came down here was February ’96, on one of Easyjet’s first charter flights.

We enjoyed our visit so much that my husband Tony and I decided we wanted to move here permanently from the UK.

Over the next four years we came down at least six times a year, planning where we would live and what we would do.

We always stayed at the Hotel Chez Nous in Cros de Cagnes, and we still love going to their restaurant – it has the best view on the coast. I always celebrate my birthday there as it’s on Bastille day and we get to watch the fireworks over a lovely dinner.

I think it’s really special here. Some adore it, some hate it; but I love the beach life and attitude, the weather – even here in the shady end of la Colle sur Loup!

When first we arrived I met a lot of helpful people over the internet, others passing on what they have learnt about moving here and living here.

This was how I first heard about the Sunnybank Association, who have regular second hand goods sales where they plan to build a British run retirement home here on the Riviera. I often help them out.

I also saw a notice asking for volunteers to help with a local cat’s home. I was intrigued, and although I’m more of a dog person I went along – and now I go every week to see the pussycats. They live in little chalets in the grounds of a big house which was left to the cats by an old lady. Volunteers come every day to feed the cats and play with them. They especially need cuddles on rainy days!

We have two Jack Russells at home; Stan and ‘Ilda, named after characters in Coronation Street, a UK soap. We inherited Stan eighteen months ago, then we heard of a Scottish lady who had some Jack Russels. I have to go back at least six times a year, planning where we will live and what we would do.

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In our spare time we love to watch horse racing at the Hippodrome in Cagnes sur Mer. It’s really good fun, with a nice family atmosphere and lovely views of the sea and sky from the glass pavilion. We always place bets – but not very high stakes! I enjoy putting people together – helping them meet like-minded others.

We have a great barbeque area in our garden, and so a while ago we started having social gatherings for people we’ve met as well. We’ve found that many of our guests have made friends and valuable business contacts.

Now Tony and I have started a business, Mortgage Solutions, to help people like us ‘make the move’. We know from experience that it’s much more complicated than it looks, and now we’ve been through it I really enjoy smoothing out our clients’ relocation, and putting them in touch with people who can help them integrate.

I love the way people are always smiling here, not grey. There is such a fabulous choice of food, fresh produce and fruit growing everywhere. And you can take dogs everywhere with you. You have winter and summer sports, the history all around you; you can pop over to Italy or the Camargue for a day.

There is so much to learn, see and enjoy. Even the wildlife in our garden beside the river Loup is amazing. It’s so diverse; eagles visit in the summer, there are fish in the river and snakes and lizards in the garden, and we even see butterflies in December.

LOUPLA-SIDED... Dogs are just one of the animals found in Carole’s garden beside the river Loup.
**NEW SALE OFFER CANNES**

Modern apartment, leafy park, 35m²
living area, 40m² garden, terrace, pool, 1 bed, 1 bath, 1 toilet, €9,200.

**NEW OFFER FOR SALE MOUGINS:**

Modern house, Mosques, two half-levels, 57m² living area, terr (9m²), 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, €361,000.

**NEW OFFER FOR SALE REX:**

Apartment April with 40m² living area, 35m² terrace, 2 bedrooms, furnished, pool and garden, long-term rental €997 per month.

**NEW OFFER FOR RENT Mougins:**

Apartment April 41m², 2 bedroom, beautiful sea view, pool and fitness room, long term furn €770 per month.

**NEW OFFER FOR RENT NICE:**

Penthouse apartment, 178m², 4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, furnished, pool, garden and sea view, €9,500.

**NEW OFFER FOR SALE LE CANNET:**

2 bedroom apartment, 72m², furnished, sea views, pool, garden, €2,095,000.

**NEW OFFER FOR RENT CANNES:**

Apartment 170m², 3 bedrooms, sea view, swimming pool, garden, €12,500/month.

**NEW OFFER FOR RENTE CANNES:**

1 bedroom flat, with sea views, furnished, €900/month.

**NEW OFFER FOR RENT MOUGINS:**

2 bedroom apartment, pool, garden, sea view, €5,500/month.

**NEW OFFER FOR RENT CANNES:**

Apartment 2 bedroom, furnished, sea view, €1,400/month.

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Thursday 6

- The fifth Sophia Forum is today at the Palais des Congrès, Juan-les-Pins. Attended by 2,000 people last year, it will attract companies and students with the emphasis on recruitment, apprenticeships and work experience in electronics, business management and telecommunications. Entry is free. Tel: 09 49 03 50 80.

- Friday 7

- ski Village International, three days of international yachtating, starts today at Port Gallicien in Juan les Pins, with racing from 10:30 each day. Tel: 04 98 65 05 00.

- The Cannes branch of the British Association has its AGM at midday at the Yacht Club de Cannes. Call Jane Gornall on 04 93 77 77 40 for more information.

- Adapt in France has workshops on Education from 9:30 to 10:30 and Job Search from 11:00 to 12:00 at the Résidence Centre de Vie in Sophia Antipolis. Tel: 04 93 65 33 79.

- The TNT Primo Cup Credit Suisse Trophée continues at the Yacht Club de Monaco, with its second weekend of yachting racing. Racing starts at 13:00 today, Saturday and Sunday. Tel: 03 77 90 16 53.

- The Les Arts de la Table exhibition of provençal market starts on Feb 12. The festival continues at the Yacht Club de Monaco, with tennis, horse meeting on today from 13:00. Entry is €4.50. Tel: 04 92 02 44 44.

- There is a concert performance of Rossini’s opera Tancredi at the Auditorium Rallioulli E2 in Monaco. Tickets start at €18. Tel: 01 37 97 77 11 04.

- The Palais des Congrès in St Raphael is the venue for a salon du Mariage today and tomorrow from 10:00 to 19:00, with everything to do with getting married and for sale. Entry is free. Tel: 04 93 80 16 29.

- Ozons Sartois is hosting a carnival and firework procession on the main street of 15:00. Tel: 04 93 75 75 16.

- There is a bi-provençal market all day today in Beaudes sur Mer, with local organic products for sale in Place Marinoni. Tel: 04 93 23 24 25. The Mimosa Week continues with a Festival of International Martial Arts on tonight with 20:30 at the Chapiteau de Fontvieille in Monaco. Tickets start at €10. Tel: 07 92 16 22 99.

- There is a music evening featuring Jilly nouvo musique at the Opéra de Nice at 20:00 tonight with Gershwin and English jazz musician Alison Craddock, Susannah Hickling, Jenny Oratorio and Stefan Bednarczyk in “a gorgeous language offering next weekend; Tuesday night in Venice.”

- Visit La Colle-sur-Loup for an antiques market from 09:00 on Rue Ancienne Gare, on the main street at 11:00. Tickets are €5.00. Tel: 04 93 38 68 14.

- There is a Pure wedding show and for sale. Entry costs €4.50. Tel: 04 93 92 02 44 44.

- The Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra is performing today at Monaco Musée Océanographique at 11:00. Tickets from €15. Tel: 03 77 93 08 15 77.

- Visit La Côte-du-Loup for an antiques market from 09:00 on Rue Ancienne Gare, on the edge of the village. Tel: 04 93 32 48 36.

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- The Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra is performing today at Monaco Musée Océanographique at 11:00. Tickets from €15. Tel: 03 77 93 08 15 77.

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- The Spanish Chamber of Commerce is holding its AGM today at 12:00 at l’Auberge du Chênes des Pins in Roquefort les Pins. Lunch is €5.00, email info@occcrm.com or fax the BCC on 04 92 28 57 02 to confirm your place.

- There is a horse racing in Cannes-sur-Mer from 13:00. Entry costs €4.00. Tel: 04 93 92 44 44.

- Continuing today is the Nice Philharmonic Orchestra performances, the Fête du Mimosa and the TNT Primo Cup Credit Suisse Trophée.

- Sunday 9

- The Seaside Café in the Grimaldi Forum, Nice is on tonight at 20:30 at the Chapiteau de Garbejaire. Tel: 04 93 65 33 79.

- The European Philharmonic Orchestra plays the music of Prokofiev at the Palais de la Europe, Menton at 20:00 to mark the 50th anniversary of his death. Tickets €6. Tel: 09 42 41 76 74.

- Tracy Chapman is performing tonight from 19:30 at the Palais-Nikaia in Nice, for the launch of her latest album ‘Let it Rain’. Tickets from €45.40. Tel: 09 42 92 31 12.

- Continuing today is the Fête du Mimosa, the TNT Primo Cup Credit Suisse Trophée, the Salon du Mariage, the Snowboard Cross competition in Vaugerv and the Fête de la Ste. Dépe in Ste. Maxime.

- Monday 10

- St Raphael’s Fête du Mimosa Week starts with a walk today at 9:00, and again on Thursday at 9:00, and a parade at 18:30 on Friday. Exhibitions and celebrations start from 10:00 on Saturday and the big carnival is on Sunday.

- The British Chamber of Commerce is holding its AGM today at 12:00 at l’Auberge du Chênes des Pins in Roquefort les Pins. Lunch is €5.00, email info@occcrm.com or fax the BCC on 04 92 28 57 02 to confirm your place.

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- Continuing today is the Fête du Mimosa.

Wednesday 12

- The Opéra de Monte Carlo presents Viva la Vie in Garbejaire. Tel: 04 93 65 33 79.

- The Hippodrome in Cagnes sur Mer has a horse meeting on today from 13:00. Entry is €4.50. Tel: 04 92 02 44 44.

- Continuing today is the Fête du Mimosa.

- Now booking...

- The Bad Post Theatre has a special English-language offering next weekend; Love and the English stars Edward de Souza, Sally Bradshaw and Stefan Bednarczyk in “a gorgeous collection of words and music for St Valentine’s weekend, exploring the many, varied and often misunderstood moods of the English when gripped by the tender passion...” See it at the Theatre Antibes, Old Antibes on Friday 14 and Saturday 15 at 20:00. Tickets are €23.00 from 04 93 65 01 72.

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