

Weighty matters interest Dale

W EIGHT watching has always been big business but medical statistics tell us that, collectively, we, are fatter than ever before.

The Beeb did their bit to try to remedy this last night by launching their biggest ever public health campaign 'Fighting Fat, Fighting Fit' in *The Weight Of The Nation* (BBC1, 8pm).

This hour-long slim-a-thon was hosted by a fit-looking Dale Winton, who confessed himself to be a lifelong diet victim.

"My weight goes up and down like a bishop's yo-yo," he said.

(Does that mean a lot, or not very much, I wonder?)

In a light and breezy style, various expects paraded their

advice before us, usually in the form of bite-sized slogans.

Thus, among the 'fifty ways to lose your blubber' which they promised us were included the 'quick-fix diets don't work', 'it's easy to be active', and 'small changes make big differences'.

I have to confess that it was not without some degree of personal interest that I watched this show.

Until six months ago, I was the none-too-proud possessor of a sizeable beer belly which had been my constant companion for some years.

Regular half-hearted

attempts at diet regimes and exercise had proved fruitless.

As last night's show pointed out, you need to make long-term basic changes

towards a healthier lifestyle to make any difference.

So, motivation

is the key, and for me the motivation came in the shape of a dark, slender Scots lass.

There's nothing like the love of a good woman to charm the flab from a lad, and let me tell you, I've never felt fitter or happier in my life.

So, it's wine and soda instead of a pint for me from now on, and I exercise a lot more than

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I ever used to.

Mind you, in one of life's little ironies, I have rediscovered my sweet tooth and a taste for chocolate. Ah, well.

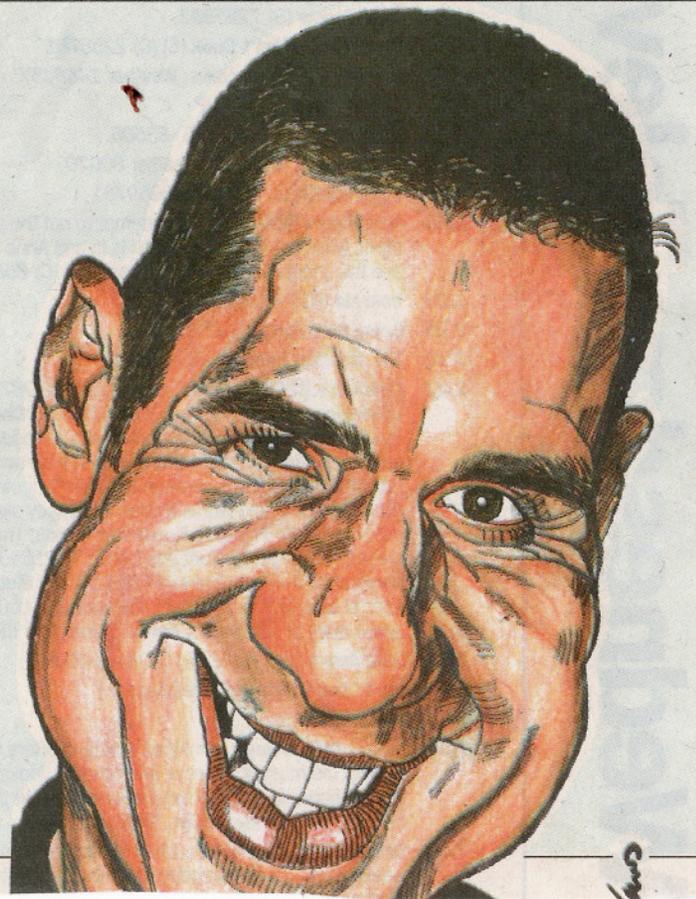
Later in the evening, bare bodies of all shapes and sizes were paraded before, us in *Full Frontal In Flip-Flops* (ITV, 10.40pm).

This expose of nudism supposedly set out to examine whether or not the naturist movement in Britain has managed to divest itself of the saucy seaside postcard image it has endured for the last half century.

Basically, the answer was no, as the title to the show rather suggested.

Ooh-er, missis!

Chris Goulding is an actor and writer.



The Journal television and radio

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Familiar faces in the theatre

SAY what you like about doctors, they're a fascinating lot – and TV obviously can't get enough of them.

Surgeons even more so. Thus, last night we saw the first episode of *Holby City* (BBC1, 8.10pm), a spin-off from *Casualty*.

As you might expect, the drama positively oozed with procedural accuracy, often so much so that you needed a doctor sitting beside you to explain all of the jargon.

But this show pulls no political punches either – setting itself squarely on the side of a well-funded NHS.

"Usual story – no beds" complained one nurse, whilst a crusty consultant heart surgeon took one patient to task for being a smoker when by-pass operations cost

£6,800 a time. One wonders if Unison or the Department of Health had a hand in the scripting.

The show has many familiar faces in its cast.

Angela Griffin (formerly of *Coronation Street*) plays nurse Jasmine Hopkins.

Former *EastEnders* star Michael French plays heart surgeon Nick Jordan and Newcastle's own Fred Pearson gave a storming performance last night as the desperate father of a heart patient refused treatment.

Inevitably, the storylines restrict the action to the hospital and its

immediate surroundings.

This gives much scope for strong emphasis on the almost saintly status that surgeons have attached to them, due to the dramatically

vital nature of their job. "A bit like playing God, isn't it" joked

one character.

But perhaps it also means that the portrayal of the professionals we see in action falls short of fully rounded characters.

I've met a surgeon or two, and their lives away from the operating table range from playing jazz piano to writing poetry – it's not all blood and scalpels.

General practitioners tend

to fare better in having visible private lives on screen, such as in *Peak Practice* (ITV, 9pm) but I fear this is a show that is getting past its sell-by date, and which lacks something without local lad Kevin Whately in the lead role.

I think I may well grow to prefer *Holby City* to *Casualty*.

But let's hope we get out of the wards and into the town a little more.

And incidentally, why are almost all of the women characters restricted to being nurses in seemingly male-dominated *Holby*?

There are such things as female surgeons – I know one very well, and she goes salsa dancing regularly!

Christopher Goulding is an actor and writer

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by Christopher Goulding



Right formula is vital to keep ahead in the ratings game

As far as occupation-led drama goes, TV producers in search of variety regularly try to veer away from the traditional staples of cops and doctors.

This can be a risky business. Who would have thought the life of a parish priest would be more exciting than that of a racehorse trainer?

But the ratings for *Ballykissangel* beat those for *Trainer* by several furlongs.

Potentially, *Harbour Lights* (BBC1, 8pm) has all the makings of a show that could run and run.

The harbour master of a busy small port has to be a sailor, policeman, diplomat, and customs officer rolled into one.

The plot possibilities are

endless. But that's not all there is to drama, is it?

The fact of the matter is that this show is merely another formulaic vehicle for actor Nick Berry. Fed up

with pounding the (*Heart*)beat in Yorkshire, he has exchanged his police uniform for a set of waterproofs and sailed off to rule the waves at the fictional Dorset port of Brideshaven. Unfortunately, a change of costume is about all we can expect from Mr Berry, whose speciality on screen is playing himself.

"I don't do range," he recently admitted, speaking of his acting ability. Quite...

And that's about all there is to

say. The action in future storylines will doubtlessly make the sleepy fishing village resemble Detroit-by-the-Sea, and Berry's character will fall in and out of

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love like Casanova on viagra. Apparently, the Beeb are so sure of its success that another series has already been commissioned.

I think their confidence may prove to be ill-founded in this case.

Over on the other side, Fred Dibnah's *Industrial Age* (BBC2, 8pm) was a real gem of watchable telly.

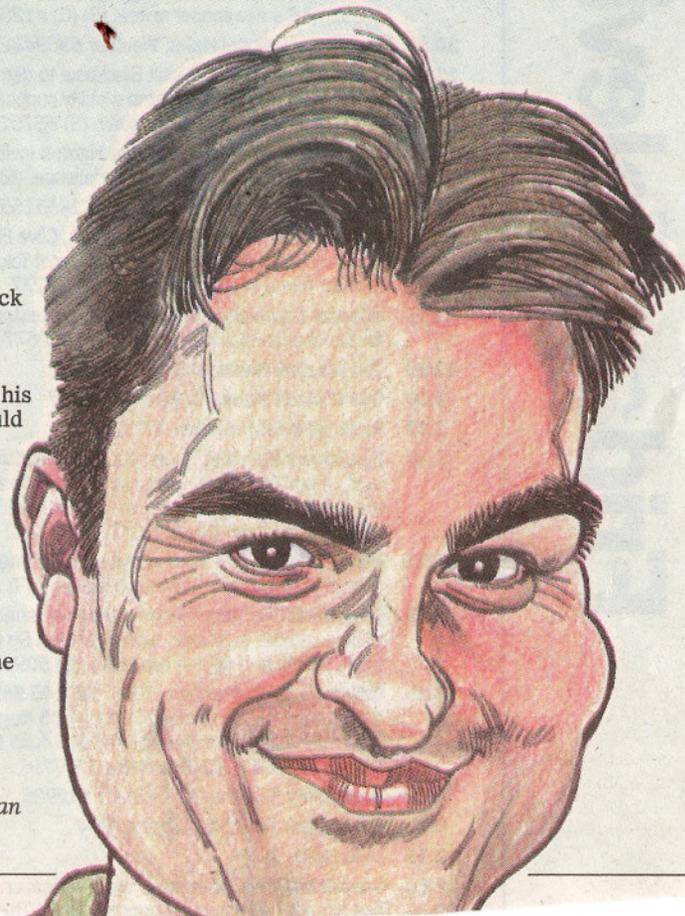
Antique steam engines and abandoned mills are hardly edge-of-the-seat stuff, but

whoever discovered the legendary Bolton steeplejack knew a natural born TV personality when they saw one.

With cloth cap welded to his head and an accent you could flavour soup with, Dibnah has more character in the tip of one of his oil-stained fingers than all of the cardboard cut-out action men played by Nick Berry put together.

Small wonder that documentaries (faked or otherwise) based around the working lives of ordinary people are becoming more popular than dramas.

● Christopher Goulding is an actor and writer.



KO'd by Eubank's swagger

AS popular history programming goes, *Leviathan* (BBC2, 7.30pm) has always been one of the better offerings to hit our screens.

In the first edition of a new series, last night's one show maintained the house style of presenting the past to us in a light but intelligent and informative way.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this show is its use of guest presenters to introduce each item.

While there are always the academics, writers and experts one might expect, they always throw in the odd surprise to keep us on our toes.

Thus, with the London Marathon coming up next weekend, they sent Chris Eubank off to Greece to seek out the classical origins

of the race. Dressed in a mustard-coloured suit, correspondent shoes and carrying a swagger-stick, Eubank looked more like Bertie Wooster than a boxer, though on this occasion he'd left his monocle at home.

He supplied us with insights into the sporting aspect of the story, while questioning expert classicists about its historical origins.

Most of us probably already knew that the race commemorates the messenger who ran to Athens to report the Greek victory over the Persians near the Bay of Marathon in

490 BC, and that Baron de Coubertin revived it as part of the modern Olympics in 1896.

But I didn't know that de Coubertin's inclusion of the marathon in particular was

very probably influenced by his reading of a poem on the subject by Robert Browning. You live and learn!

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This was followed by a new cookery programme called *The Naked Chef* (BBC2, 8pm).

As you doubtlessly already know, the title refers to the fact that in this show, the cooking is stripped down to its "bare" essentials. Geddit?

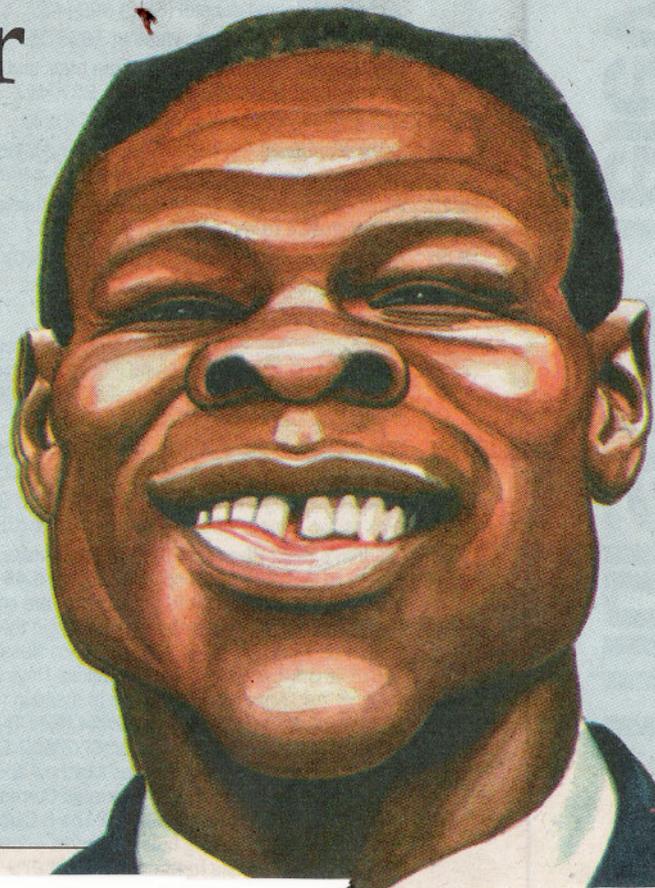
(Ooh-er, missis!) That just about says it all, really.

We've had the *Galloping Gourmet* (remember him?), the *Two Fat Ladies*, and Keith Floyd – now we have 23-year-old Jamie Oliver, obviously picked to appeal to the "yoof" audience.

He is an engaging enough lad, who undoubtedly knows his stuff, and his habit of sliding down the banister of the spiral staircase in his house is "bloody" impressive.

However, the pacy style of the show is sometimes just too fast for comfort and the zoom-in-zoom-out antics of the hand-held camera are often plain irritating.

Christopher Goulding is an actor and writer.



television and radio

Please keep it quiet in the family

TELEVISION history was made back in 1974 when the BBC broadcast a fly-on-the-wall documentary entitled *The Family*.

The more innocent and reserved viewing public of those days was both shocked and enthralled by the seedy goings-on in the household of the Wilkins family in Reading.

So strong were the feelings aroused in some people, that Mr Wilkins, a bus driver, was beaten up for bringing "shame" upon his home town.

It says much for the tawdry telly age we live in now that I hardly raised an eyebrow whilst watching the present-day equivalent, *Family Life* (ITV, 8pm) which started last night.

The world of the Henry

family of Leeds is apparently one of relentless arguing, a continuous failure of anyone to communicate with one another, and shouting, shouting, shouting.

To be fair, the programme's editors probably have a brief to keep the pace of the action fast, but after about 10 minutes it just became a whole load of ear-ache.

In half an hour with an extended family of 16 people (including six young children) there was hardly so much as a laugh or a smile to be seen. Sad, that.

There was laughter a-plenty over on BBC1 at 8.30pm in *The World of the Secret Camera*.

Unfortunately it was that rather mocking and mean-spirited laughter associated with the studio audiences of TV shows hosted by Noel Edmonds. Yes folks, with his ghastly House Party terminally pooped a bare month or so ago, he's back again already.

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This latest vehicle for his irritating 'clown prince' personality is a compilation made up of clips from *Candid Camera*-type TV shows from around the world.

Oh, how Mr Edmonds and his audience howled at some wretched man who had been deliberately trapped in a telephone box in which a firecracker and a smoke bomb were set off.

They even showed a slow-

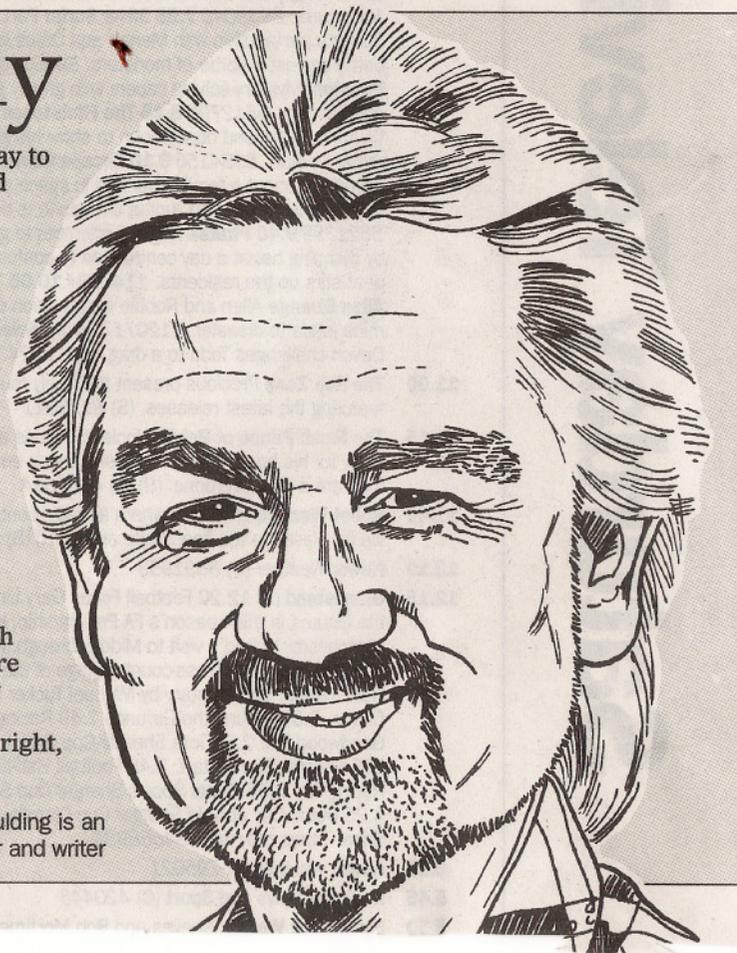
motion close-up replay to ensure that we would see the man was actually coughing smoke back out of his mouth as he choked.

As if by way of justification, Edmonds explained to us that the film clip had come from Japan, where TV producers are a bit more cavalier about taking liberties with the public.

It was okay to laugh at it because, "They're all a bit whacky over there!" he said.

Oh, well - that's all right, then....

Christopher Goulding is an actor and writer



Food for thought in kidney dish

AS so many of the medical dramas on TV pride themselves on procedural accuracy, I thought I'd call in some technical help myself when I tuned in to the first episode of *Always and Everyone* (ITV, 9pm).

Thus, I cuddled up with my best friend Bonny Spice (a consultant surgeon) who cast her expert eye over the proceedings.

As expected, the medical aspects of the drama were right up to scratch.

Niamh Cusack (pictured right) confidently reeled off the alphabet soup of Accident & Emergency acronyms and terminology.

You know the sort of thing - RTA! ECG! "Pass the crocodile forceps, nurse, and make it snappy!"

She seems to have carved

out a niche for herself playing doctors of late, and very convincing she was, too.

I worked with Ms Cusack once in one of the Catherine Cooksons, and I know how seriously she approaches her characterisations.

But it was on the domestic side of hospital life that the show's producers fell down.

According to Bonny Spice, the surgeons' scrub suits were far too pretty a shade of blue, and the fact that they all appeared to be the right size for everyone was laughable.

Nurses passing chocolates around in a steel kidney dish was certainly out of order -

they might be mistaken for the removed contents of someone's stomach.

And even I doubted if an Accident & Emergency doctor would have the time to indulge in a lingering and thoughtful mid-shift shower, as Cusack did at one point.

That being said, the show had its interesting bits.

There was some arty cross-editing such as the bit where they cut from the butcher's shop imagery of a bleeding leg to a pepperoni pizza in a microwave.

Also, the two security guards who watch over the whole proceedings on the hospital's internal CCTV

system were a clever post-modernist touch, isolated from the rest of the action, they are as much viewers as we are - us, watching them, watching the story unfold.

Indeed, it seems that the world of telly can't resist the urge to look inwardly upon itself these days.

Earlier in the evening, *It Happened to Me* (C5, 8.30pm) saw Kirsty Young interviewing people who had found themselves part of real-life news events. People who normally just watch the news had become part of it themselves.

It seems life and drama are all about the detail of personal experience.

As Bonny Spice said of *A & E*: "Once they've learned how to cope with the chocolates, they'll be fine."

Christopher Goulding is an actor and writer.

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Harmon makes his

Food's an afterthought with chefs

WITH DIY threatening to topple cookery from its position as holder of the fickle and much-vaunted title of being 'the new rock & roll', TV skillet-wielders are having to go to great lengths to keep themselves fashionable.

But I'm afraid Ainsley Harriott is a bit too much for me.

In the trailers for *Ainsley's Big Cook Out* (BBC2, 8.30pm) they actually refer to him as a "celebrity" chef, and that basically says it all about this show.

The food and its preparation take a poor second place, to his larger than life personality, and when not being overwhelmed by him, the cookery was getting lost amidst

the exotic globe-trotting locations and Harriott's travelogue narration.

I mean, why bother carting all that food around at all?

If big budget production values are all that counts, you might just as well have Michael Caine train-spotting in Brazil. Perhaps then that would be the new rock & roll.

Not that travel and cookery don't mix.

On a much more modest scale *Cook's Tour* (ITV, 7.30pm) combined an interesting jaunt around Weardale with chef Pete Zulu's simple but creative cuisine.

Pausing for the odd chat with local farmers, food

suppliers, and fellow cooks, Zulu used easily obtainable ingredients to make exotic dishes that any of us might knock up in the kitchen.

And as far as picturesque locations go, my oh my, how western Durham has changed. Stopping off at a rural

roadside diner near Bishop Auckland, Zulu helped the resident chef prepare the local speciality of chicken and mushroom quiche with garlic and nutmeg.

Twenty years ago the place had been a transport cafe dishing out bacon sarnies to lorry drivers.

Now that's rock & roll.

The only fault I would pick with this show was that the pace sometimes dragged a

bit. Showing us detail is all well and good, but do we really need to see every second of a trout being gutted in close-up? Zulu did his best to fill the gaps by keeping the banter going as he merrily filleted away, but a bit more judicious cutting on the part of the film editor would have been better.

But when all's said and done, I really do think cookery is better on the plate than on the TV screen.

My friend Bonny Spice is no slouch with the salmon steak and coriander - and anyway, she prefers salsa to rock & roll,

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www.northeastonline.co.uk

This is net what it's all about

MORE than 12 million of us Brits are on the internet, and it's estimated that another million will be going on-line during Christmas.

I filed the article you are currently reading via e-mail, and you probably know that *The Journal* has its own all singing, all dancing website.

So it was with some degree of interest that I tuned into watch *www.internet Night* (Channel 5, 7pm) last night.

Unfortunately, for the first half hour we were presented with the all too familiar tawdry collection of weirdos, conspiracy theorists, would-be alien abductees and other assorted sad cases who have become associated with the worldwide web by sensation seeking TV producers.

Thus, a potentially marvellous medium capable of providing fingertip access

to the world's museums, art galleries, libraries and news, was reduced to a peep-show featuring loony religious cults, porn sites, dancing hamsters, and an extremely bizarre on-line Banana museum.

Later on in the evening, they did manage to touch upon the more practical uses of the internet such as e-mail and on-line shopping and banking.

But in a week that has seen anti-capitalism protests in Britain and America which were organised on the net, the producers failed to convey any sense of the way this technology is on the verge of changing forever the way that we all communicate.

Over on the Beeb, the

relentless dumbing down continued in the same fashion.

Born to be Wild (BBC1, 8pm) was one of those new breeds of wildlife shows that has replaced the more traditional

science-based documentary.

Gone are the days of David Attenborough speaking in an awed, but

informed, whisper as he crouched in the undergrowth only feet away from a lion tucking into its breakfast of wildebeest.

This is the age of the celebrity, so the Beeb's profile of chimpanzees in Uganda was presented by Nicholas Lyndhurst, pictured right, better known to us as Rodney in the brilliant series *Only Fools and Horses*.

Quite clearly he was giving

us a performance rather than straight commentary.

It was very much Lyndhurst who was the star of the show, rather than the chimps, that we were supposed to be focusing upon.

Footage of our hairy cousins was thickly interspersed with shots of the actor smiling, Nick looking concerned, Nick scared stiff – you know the sort of thing.

There was even incidental music that wouldn't have sounded out of place in the soap *Neighbours*.

So, what next? David Beckham's *Guide to Renaissance Tapestries?*, Vanessa Feltz on *Quantum Theory?* Just watch this space...

Christopher Goulding is an actor and writer

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Casualty Mike has

Past delights, future nightmare

OUR understanding of the past comes from relics that time leaves behind.

Last night's episode of the series *Renaissance Secrets* (BBC2, 7.30 pm) followed a detective trail across Europe from Krakow to Leiden in search of the story behind a collection of exquisite 16th Century botanical paintings.

The vivid detail of these delicately rendered watercolours beautifully illustrated the fascination with nature that was a feature of that age of discovery.

By looking at these marvellous works we were given a glimpse of a time when our society delighted in beauty, knowledge, and the search for truth.

As we were shown, in those

radical times the wisdom of classical antiquity was being swept aside by the talented hands and inquiring eyes of artists and scientists alike.

This series is something of a coming of age for the Open University, who produced it. Hidden for so long in the wilderness of early morning or late-night TV schedules, they are now starting to make their mark in prime time.

We're all a bit more cynical nowadays, and later on in the evening, we were given a satirical glimpse of what ratings-driven tabloid telly might be like in the very near future.

In *Sex 'n' Death* (BBC2, 9.30 pm) Martin Clunes, pictured right, played Ben Black - presenter of the eponymous show, which was a sort of

pervert's nightmare version of *TFI Friday*.

The title sequence presented us with the show's name written on

a line of naked bums, shown amidst a series of rapidly edited clips featuring car smashes, topless models, and mating stoats. Hmmm... more tea, vicar?

The atmosphere was dark and apocalyptic.

The setting was a neon-lit, semi-tropical London that sweltered in a globally

warming world.

As Black's show descended further and further into the abyss of bad taste in search of an audience, he became disillusioned, urging viewers to switch off their TVs and look out of their windows instead.

(Strange - I get that feeling sometimes..)

In a rare romantic moment, one character quoted Robert Browning to the woman he loved: "Tread softly, for you tread on my dreams."

I suspect the show's writers were giving a veiled warning to those who would debase their beloved medium.

Chris Evans and Jeremy Beadle, take note.

● Christopher Goulding is an actor and writer.

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Goulding

