

# WORD FROM THE CLOISTERS

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## School for scandal

IT'S NOT EASY to get an appointment to visit the apartment over Coco Chanel's flagship shop at 31 Rue Cambon in Paris. The three small rooms, filled with books (St Augustine, Voltaire, Montaigne, Casanova), lacquered Coromandel screens and an eccentric mix of objects, have been kept intact since the death of the haute couturière in 1971. In the centre of the mantelpiece in the dining room there's a white marble bust of a prelate wearing a Kentucky-style bow tie. "She used to pretend the bust was of a relative – in fact, she picked it up in an antique shop," the director of the Chanel archive once explained to a journalist.

Actually, the sagacious-looking clergyman is Mgr Capel, preacher, pamphleteer, evangeliser, entertainer, seducer and fabulist. Capel was the uncle of one of Chanel's many lovers, the polo player, shipowner and tycoon Arthur "Boy" Capel, who lent her the money to buy the shop and whose blazers were an inspiration for the Chanel look.

**MONSIGNOR THOMAS** John Capel ("TJ") was born in 1836 in the Waterford seaside village of Ardmore, the son of an English father, a coastguard, and a local woman, Mary



Fitzgerald. The family moved to England, where Arthur, "Boy" Capel's father, would be born. Ordained in London, TJ's mission work among English speakers in Pau in the French Pyrenees led to meetings with Bernadette Soubirous, then a novice with the Sisters of Charity. Huge crowds rolled up to his lectures about her and the miracles at Lourdes.

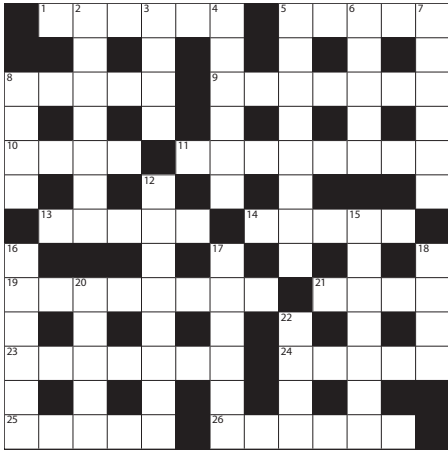
His most celebrated triumph was the "perversion" of the wealthy Marquess of Bute, which earned him a niche in English literature as the suave Mgr Catesby in Disraeli's *Lothair*. At Bute's wedding in 1872 he celebrated the nuptial Mass while Cardinal Manning solemnised the

marriage. When Manning established a Catholic University College to provide "for more advanced studies for the higher classes of the laity", he turned to Capel to head it up. The project proved a disaster. Rumours were surfacing about the monsignor's lavish lifestyle. Students failed to appear. The money ran out. In 1879, Manning set up a secret commission, which found that Capel had been guilty of "acts of criminal intercourse". The bankrupt monsignor disappeared, and his pictures, fine wine and the candlesticks from his private chapel all went on the market – as did the white marble bust that eventually made its way to Paris. He died in California, a destination which, like his cameo appearance in Coco Chanel's dining room, was perhaps written in the stars.

Colm Keane and Una O'Hagan came across Capel when researching a book on Ireland's many connections with Lourdes. "We kept coming across veiled references to scandal as well as reports of his bankruptcy," O'Hagan told us. They rummaged assiduously through newspaper clippings and archives to produce an extraordinary story with chilling contemporary resonances. What mattered above all to Manning was to get Capel away and to avoid a scandal. *The Monsignor* is published by Capel Island Press and is available from colmkeane.com for €16.50 including postage.

## PUZZLES

### PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 886 Enigma



#### Across

- 1 These little devils, abandoning pantheism, confused the Scottish noblemen (6)
- 5 Go! You have permission (5)
- 8 The king dined on the contents of this container (5)
- 9 Dancing at the geologists' ball? (7)
- 10 Chooses to post randomly (4)
- 11 & 14 Shamed by the hilarity of those in the sale (8, 5)
- 13 Garden ornament has a disturbing effect on Meg (5)
- 14 See 11 Across
- 19 A stupid compiler might produce such a crossword (8)
- 21 A poor alternative, this type of examination (4)

23 You'll find lots here! (7)

- 24 Alcohol brings expressions of disapproval (5)
- 25 Clumsily grips a decorative twig adorned with flowers or leaves (5)
- 26 Expands in the south-east wind (6)

#### Down

- 2 Listen to a decade being said. It will give encouragement (7)
- 3 ABCDEFGHIJKM. That's Christmas, they say (4)
- 4 Ryan is from the Middle East (6)
- 5 To get into the church garden, initially, the London Youth Choir gathered at the entrance (8)
- 6 I get bail to prove I wasn't there (5)

7 Participate! Don't let the heathen gag everyone! (6)

- 8 Firm to back bird (4)
- 12 Hinting that the devil is deceiving us (8)
- 15 Is able to root round inside and find a funny drawing (7)
- 16 Canoes tossing on mighty waters (8)
- 17 Today's date on packaged food? We French and we English know what to do! (3, 3)
- 18 It's sad to hear what the wind did (4)
- 20 A terribly cruel consequence of unhealthy eating (5)
- 22 I do exactly the same at auctions (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 13 January 2024, The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. Email: thetablet@thetablet.co.uk, with Crossword in the subject field. Please include your full name, telephone number and email address, and a mailing address. Three books – on Paul, The Hebrew Bible as Literature and Christian Ethics – from OUP's Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random.

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### SUDOKU | Easy

5	8			7		2
2		9		3		
	1			4		3
1	3					8
	7				3	
8					4	1
3			6			1
			4		8	6
	2		1			7
					7	9

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

#### Solution to the 16 December 2023 puzzle

5	1	3	8	2	9	6	7	4
6	9	2	7	4	5	8	1	3
4	7	8	1	6	3	5	9	2
7	4	1	6	3	2	9	5	8
8	2	9	4	5	1	7	3	6
3	5	6	9	7	8	4	2	1
9	6	7	2	1	4	3	8	5
1	8	5	3	9	6	2	4	7
2	3	4	5	8	7	1	6	9

#### Solution to the 16 December 2023 crossword No. 884

- Across:** 7 Change; 8 Eloped; 10 Licence; 11 Creel; 12 Tang; 13 Scots; 17 Canal; 18 Cede; 22 Halts; 23 Lateran; 24 Cosmic; 25 Lacuna.
- Down:** 1 Acolyte; 2 Larceny; 3 Agent; 4 Placate; 5 Upset; 6 Adult; 9 Peaceable; 14 Caustic; 15 Fearful; 16 Bean bag; 19 Shack; 20 Blast; 21 Steal.