



Amicable split: Mark and ex-wife Clio

The Elephant man

Camilla's brother Mark Shand, the driving force behind the funkyly designed model elephants we will soon see on London's streets, has had a colourful life of his own.

Alison Roberts finds out more

MARK SHAND, conservationist, adventurer and brother of the Duchess of Cornwall, fell in love with elephants as a teenage rebel more than 40 years ago. He had just been expelled from his Dorset public school for smoking cannabis, and his father, Major Bruce Shand, decided that what Mark needed was a bit of backbone. "I think he thought, let's put some spine in the little bugger and send him off to Australia," says Shand now, rolling up a shirt sleeve to reveal a surprising blue-green tattoo (of a serpent) and several strands of red string tied around his wrist (later identified as symbols of Hindu blessing).

"I stopped in India on the way and was supposed to stay for two days but, um, was there for considerably longer," Shand effectively went AWOL, a habit he has never really grown out of – and in India began a lifelong love affair with the noble Asian pachyderm that next month culminates in a grand public art event called Elephant Parade.

Remember the life-size fibreglass cows that suddenly appeared across London in 2002? Now it's the turn of 260 big, bright, funky elephants. Designed and decorated by artists and celebrities, they will stand in prime locations across London for two months before their auction in July. Some have already been bought for £5,000 and the proceeds will then go to 20 wildlife charities actively working to protect the endangered Asian elephant – the smaller, forest-dwelling cousin to the better-known African – in India and across the continent.

At the moment the elephants, which are made of fibreglass, are housed in a warehouse in Acton: "And 260 Asian elephants probably constitutes the largest herd in the world today," says Shand.

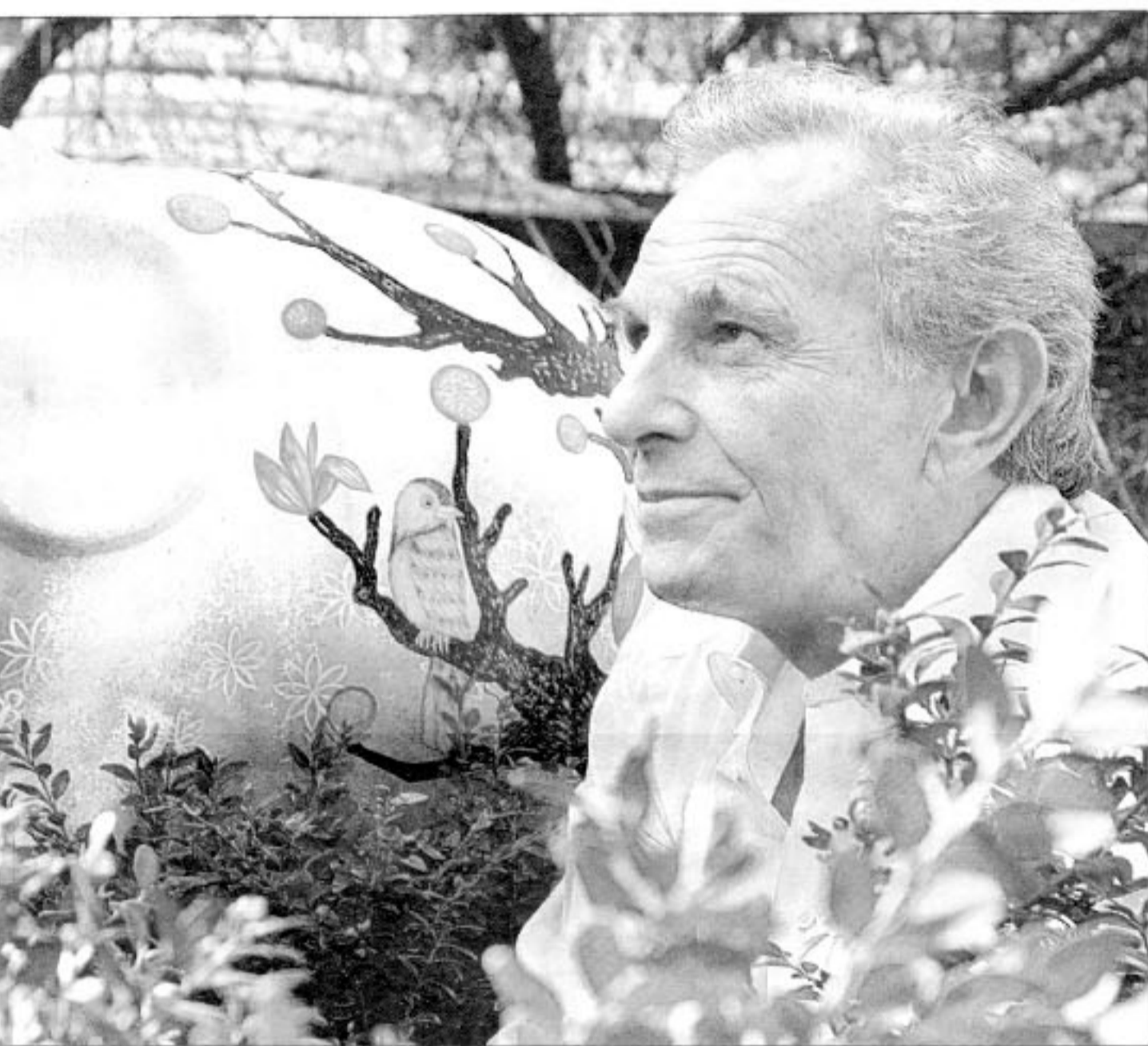
For Shand and his team of young interns at the garret-like Bloomsbury offices of his own conservation charity



Elephant Family, it is all very much a labour of love. Each elephant has required a separate lengthy planning permission, while Shand himself has squabbled with the Mayor's office over some of London's most desirable pavement locations. "Boris wants bloody bicycle racks everywhere! We want elephants. Elephants are much nicer."

The elephant designers, many from Shand's own circle of friends, include a sprinkling of London's up-and-coming young artists alongside the already very famous. Sacha Jafri, Tommy Hilfiter, Peter Beard, Sir Terence Conran and Marc Quinn (he of the blood head) have all decorated an animal – though the cleverest design is surely by Benjamin Shine, who has rendered his elephant in glossy black cab paint and stuck a London taxi sign on the top. Princess Michael of Kent apparently designed her elephant in the Shoreditch studio of her friend Tracey Emin, while rock 'n' roll jeweller designer Johnny Rocket has covered his in Swarovski crystals. Did Shand ask his brother-in-law to paint one?

"He does paint very well," he replies, "and Camilla always says she does too... But they're terribly busy..." He professes great admiration for Prince Charles's eco-campaigning and his "real passion for all things green" – though in fact the true pioneer was Shand's former father-in-law Teddy Goldsmith, the late founder of The Ecologist magazine and uncle to environmentalist Zac. Shand confirms recent rumours that his marriage to Teddy's actress daughter, Clio Goldsmith, has ended, but says he still frequently sees their 15-year-old daughter Ayesha,



who lives in Italy. "[Clio and I] are divorced, yes. But I won't talk about it, do you mind? I do gab about all sorts of things, but not that."

In many ways Shand is a throwback, a grizzled old swashbuckler whose exploits are straight out of an Indiana Jones movie. Today we're used to macho, clean-cut adventurers with BBC contracts and a mission to educate – Bear Grylls, Ray Mears, Ben Fogle, even Michael Palin – but Shand, together with his great friends and mentors, photographer Don McCullin and the late writer Bruce Chatwin, travelled the world out of pure curiosity, and largely for fun.

Shand's tales, gathered in four travel books spanning more than 20 years, are often packed with danger and a highly exotic kind of glamour. He talks of tracking down cannibals in Indonesia; of long nights in Bangkok bars a decade before the tourist trail hit Thailand; of hawking art deco jewellery around Venezuela; of an expedition to Tibet to discover the



Jumbo commission: Sacha Jafri is one of the many artists decorating an animal for next month's Elephant Parade

origins of Shangri-la; of being shipwrecked in a hurricane in the South Pacific, perhaps his hairiest moment.

"I think I really did worry my family then. Apparently it appeared in the papers back home that I was dead... I lost everything in that, and I wasn't insured at all. I did go into a decline and think, my God, I've really f---ed my life up this time."

He says the problem was he never knew how to do it. "I had on my grandmother's side all these extraordinary nautical relations – like Admiral [Henry] Keppel, who wiped out piracy in Borneo – and because of that I thought sailing must just be in my genes. So I took off with no idea of how to do it. I was always ringing up my sisters, saying: 'Can you sell something? I'm off the coast of Fiji, and I can't afford to buy a new sail.' And then the telephone would go down."

Did his sisters, Camilla and Annabel, regard him as the black sheep of the family? "People have often said that about

me but I don't think so really. I was probably spoilt, if I'm being totally honest. I had the means to do it and the support from my father, who told me that if I was going to travel the best thing I could do was keep a diary."

A businessman and wine merchant, Bruce Shand died four years ago. "I spent a lot of time with him while he was dying," muses Mark. "We talked an awful lot and I probably understood him better than I ever had. He didn't like to travel because he'd been a PoW during the war and he'd suffered quite a lot of trauma."

Meanwhile, Shand's mother, the Hon Rosalind Cubitt, barely batted an eyelid when he told her where he was off to next. Once he and McCullin walked and canoed for 12 days across Indonesia to make phone calls back to the UK – "and after all this enormous trouble I got through to the home number and said, 'Hi, ma, it's me', and she said, 'I can't talk to you now, I'm watching Coronation Street.'"

Shand's adventures continued in London and New York, where he was regarded as something of a playboy. He once proposed to the model Marie Helvin (who described him as "impulsive, emotional and open-hearted, with the most beautiful body I had ever seen") but nevertheless turned him down and danced until dawn at society parties with JFK's daughter Caroline Kennedy, who was said to be deeply in love with him.

In New York he was a regular at Andy Warhol's Studio 54, where he admits veering off the rails in a fairly major fashion.



Trunk call: left, Mark Shand with one of the colourfully decorated pachyderms due to be put out on the streets of London next month. Above, Mark Shand's sisters, Camilla Parker Bowles and Annabel Elliot

'Boris wants bloody bicycle racks everywhere! We want elephants. Elephants are much nicer'

looked-after elephant I've ever known." By contrast, the wild Asian elephant is in great day-to-day peril. Shand maintains that human encroachment on elephant territory across Asia is fundamentally changing the character and personality of the giant beasts. "I've been documenting it for about 15 years and it's extraordinary to see how we've turned what's essentially a peaceful herbivore into a very cunning animal that's almost at war with humans."

The challenge in India lies in maintaining the elephants' migratory routes through ever-shrinking forests. "India has lost 95 per cent of its forestry in the past 50 or 60 years," says Shand. "Within what's left of it, people have mapped 80 migratory routes, or corridors, which elephants use to find food. They might only be a quarter of a kilometre wide, but the elephants have been using them for thousands of years and they won't veer off them."

"That means if there's human habitation in the way, they'll just go through it. But that's a battle – between humans and elephants – that of course the animals won't in the end win."

Shand's charity is working with others in India to clear some of these corridors. They have just spent £1 million on a route in Kerala, just 6km long by half a kilometre wide. "We moved more than 300 people off the corridor, and you have to negotiate with each family on an individual basis. Some are tribal, some are forest-dwellers, but none of them actually wants to live on the route, where their crops are getting trashed and their children are in danger. It's a long process. What we need is a treasure trove of £50-£70 million to maintain all the routes."

Yet Elephant Family is also pragmatic in its aims, he insists. "If you've got three or four big viable populations left in India because we've cleared these corridors, then that's pretty bloody good. At the same time you probably have to accept that quite soon there aren't going to be any elephants left in China, or possibly Sri Lanka." Elephant Parade hopes to raise a further £1 million towards conservation work, and then to travel the world, exhibiting elephant statues from New York to Delhi.

As for Shand, he's itching to go AWOL again. "Don McCullin rings me up and growls, 'Where are we off to, then?' But now, the elephants are my priority."

"You know, the other morning I woke up and thought, my God, the opportunities I've had, if I was a businessman I could have made a huge amount of money. The things I could have bought and sold, the people I've known... And I felt a bit sorry for myself for a while."

"But none of that really crossed my mind while I was young and travelling. I don't regret any of it. In the end I'd rather be a whore for elephants than a whore for business. They really are the best of causes."