

Diarists are a breed apart says **Sebastian Shakespeare**, editor of *Londoner's Diary* in *The Evening Standard*

On 18 May the *Londoner's Diary* reported that a copy of the Hutton Report autographed by Cherie Blair and Alastair Campbell had been auctioned for £400 at a Labour fund-raising party hosted by Pensions Minister James Purnell MP. Other papers were slow to pick up on the significance of this crass and insensitive act but within seven days it had turned into a major political row. It was a classic diary tale which was anecdotal and emblematic. What better illustration of an arrogant government which had lost touch with reality. Diarists pride themselves on being insiders. They get access to all the best parties while the photographers and news reporters are left on the doorstep. And we also gently nibble the hand that feeds us canapés. Every food chain needs its scavengers. Mischief is our mission and mockery is our weapon. In this age of spin, diarists have never been more

important. We are not part of any lobby system, we are not spoon-fed stories by Downing Street, we are not beholden to any clients. We are the antithesis of PR. To be insulted by a politician is a badge of honour. Alan Clark once described me in his Diaries as a "tricky little prick". You can't get higher praise than that. Peter Mandelson and Alastair Campbell never speak to diarists (by speak, read "brief"). Because, to give them credit, they know only too well that we are beyond their control. Every newspaper has an editorial line whereas diarists tend to be off message and are more independent minded, if not contrarian. When a public figure protests "that's not a story" down the line, you know you are onto a winner. Nicholas Tomalin said the only qualities for real success in journalism are rat like cunning, a plausible manner and a little literary ability. The successful diarist has all those qualities in abundance.