

Politics

## Four things you didn't know about Thatcher

**J**onathan Aitken's life of Margaret Thatcher is the latest in a string of biographies following the Iron Lady's death earlier this year. It is also splendidly honest. The former MP and cabinet minister counted himself a friend. It hasn't stopped him dishing some fascinating dirt ...

### 1 It didn't do to diss her, even at a distance

Soon after she was elected party leader, Aitken was forced by Airey Neave, head of Thatcher's private office, to apologise formally for his disloyalty over remarks he made at a dinner party in Beirut that were reported in *Private Eye*. Discussing the 1975 Sinai accord between Israel and Egypt, Aitken told the gathering that "the boss" knew "so little about the Middle East, she probably thinks that Sinai is the plural of sinus". Result: a carpeting.

### 2 Not everyone always knew who she was

On holiday on the Islay estate of her aide Peter Morrison, Thatcher - wishing to avoid post-dinner party games - went for a nocturnal walk. Her protection officers, thinking her asleep, were in the pub, but one policeman was still on duty. Suspecting the unknown figure, in a long, hooded cloak, was an intruder, he unleashed his alsatian, who knocked Thatcher down and pinned her to the muddy turf. "The incident passed into legend among her inner circle," writes Aitken, "with the

punchline question: 'How on earth did the dog dare?'"

### 3 She personally scuppered a Falklands settlement

Thatcher was "appalled" by a Foreign Office suggestion as early as 1979 to explore with Argentina the idea of resolving the growing Falklands problem through "a leaseback arrangement similar to what we have in Hong Kong". She was not just appalled, "she erupted in anger" during a "thermonuclear" lunch at Chequers. And for the next three years, Aitken writes: "The stubbornness of her attitude and her inexperience in foreign affairs killed off all opportunities for the conflict to be avoided."

### 4 Readjusting to the real world was not easy

When she left No 10 and moved into her new home in Dulwich, Thatcher didn't know how to dial a phone, send a fax or use the washing machine, and was once reduced to calling out on a police line from the garage, where her Special Branch protection team was installed. She was also very, very angry; Aitken was privy to an hour-long "hysterical rant" on the "spineless, gutless Judases" and "turncoats and traitors" who she believed had betrayed her.

**Jon Henley**

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