

THE TRUTH ABOUT JADE

Jade Goody died as she lived — in the media spotlight. But did its glare obscure the fact that she could have survived?
Investigation: David James Smith

On her own account, Jade Goody's "la-la" was examined at the Princess Alexandra hospital in Harlow just before she went to India at the beginning of August last year. The hospital gave Goody the okay to travel to Mumbai, where she had been signed up to appear in the local version of the reality-television show Big Brother — known in India as Bigg Boss.

Almost as an afterthought, in Goody's version of events, the hospital invited her to have a cervical smear before she went on her way. Goody submitted to the test, but was still unhappy at the intense pains down her leg and the excessive vaginal bleeding she was suffering: on their own, either could be a warning of the cancer; taken together they ought to have been a red alert.

At the age of 27, Jade's entire existence was based on the fame her chippy cockney persona had earned her. She would say she had been "nothing" before she became famous as a Big Brother contestant in 2002. Big Brother had created Jade, and Big Brother had destroyed Jade — exposing her to public hatred and ridicule after she was accused of racism during Celebrity Big Brother in 2007. She had lost everything, was still only just clawing her way back two years later, and now here she was in a hospital. >>>→



Jade Goody on her wedding day, February 22, 2009. One month later she died in her sleep

In the brief seven-month span between her diagnosis and her death, it was repeatedly suggested that her own slapdash attitude towards her health may have contributed to the cancer that killed her. But we now know that other factors were also at play.

Jade was an easy and convenient target to blame for her dying. But could anything have been done much earlier to save her before the cancer took hold?

The radical hysterectomy that she underwent a few weeks after her return from India was only just a failure. Would it have helped if she'd had the surgery sooner? These are among the questions that arose in the aftermath of Jade's death in March — questions that The Sunday Times Magazine has set out to answer.

So who killed Jade Goody? It was much discussed and widely accepted at the time of her death this year that she herself was to blame for failing to have an earlier smear test. Yet if there was an "at risk" register for cervical cancer, Jade would have been right up there at the top of the list, from the time of an initial sexually transmitted infection in her mid-teens.

As Jade so rudely discovered, fame is all very well, but there is not much point in being dead famous. Though my, how famous-Jade loved being loved by us, as she lay dying. Jade was forgiven. And being "tragic Jade" made her more marketable than ever. She made £1m in her last days — deliberately exploiting her death to create a trust fund for Bobby and Freddie, the two sons she was



SHE WAS GENEROUS, HAD EXPENSIVE TASTES — A BERMONDSEY GIRL IN A BENTLEY. SHE WAS 'NOT VERY GOOD WITH MONEY'

leaving behind. In the end, as at the beginning, Jade had nothing to sell except herself. There was no time then for reflection or recrimination.

But now, at a distance of some months, and with future generations of young women in mind, it seems important to ask: where was the NHS in the last two years of Jade's life, during her repeated hospital admissions and sometimes hysterical attempts to seek attention for her gynaecological problems? To be sure, Jade did not always turn up when she was supposed to, for tests. But she was there at the hospital often enough — and it is still unclear what happened.

Everyone who knew her says that Jade was highly driven to escape her miserable origins in southeast London.

Her earliest memory of her father was of him injecting himself at the end of the bed. He had ended his life pretty much as she first remembered it — dying of an overdose while injecting himself in the men's toilets of a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant in Bournemouth.

I asked her last PR representative, Mark Thomas, if Jade used to talk about her father. "Yeah, she used to say it put her right off a Kentucky." Kate Jackson, a television producer who had become close to Jade, said she was making a joke of it, of course, to mask her feelings. In truth, she was very affected by her father's death and by his general absence in her life beforehand.

There was a lingering mystery about the origins of Jade's cancer. Like many young women, she carried inside her a latent risk of developing cervical cancer because of an earlier infection from the sexually transmitted disease HPV — human papilloma virus. It is a matter of medical fact that

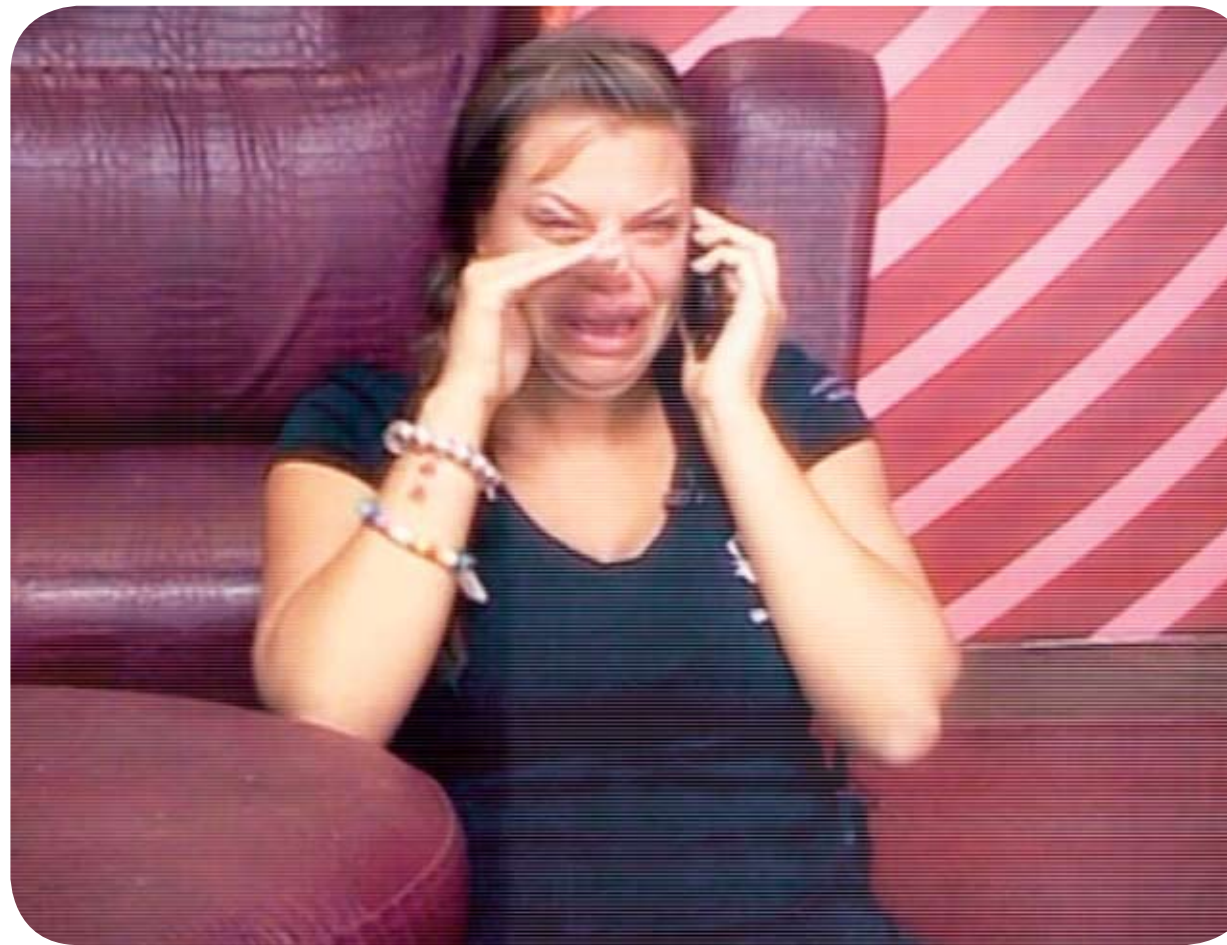


the disease could only be caught from sexual contact, but Jade recalled in her autobiography catching the disease and having it treated *before* she began having consensual sex at the age of 16. That raised the possibility of something happening to Jade before she became sexually active. Perhaps she had been abused during this vulnerable period of her life.

Jade used to talk as if her life began when she became famous after winning Big Brother 3 in 2002. She had come of age in the Big Brother house, literally, celebrating her 21st birthday there on day 13. She had entered as a dental nurse from Bermondsey, but was on her way to becoming a tabloid phenomenon long before she left.

The talent agent John Noel had been connected to Big Brother through his representation of the host Davina McCall, and early on Noel began to "pick up" many of the young people emerging from the Big Brother house to enjoy a brief moment in the celebrity sun. Usually they were quickly forgotten — who now remembered Craig Phillips, Brian Dowling or Kate Lawler, the successive winners of the first three series? None of them were quite like Jade; none were quite as enduring. Yet it was easy to forget how unwelcome Jade had initially been on the national stage.

Within months of leaving the house, Jade was voted the fourth-worst person in Britain in a poll for Channel 4, only just behind Tony Blair, Jordan and Margaret Thatcher. Somehow, Jade rose above the tabloid abuse and endeared herself to millions of tabloid and celebrity-magazine readers. Her life then seemed to be a never-ending story to be packaged and sold. Her father is released from jail (March 2003); her father is back in jail (May 2003); there is a bidding war for pictures of her first-born son, Bobby (June 2003); Jade and her baby's father — a young television presenter, Jeff Brazier — are arrested for drunk driving after



arguing in a car (July 2003); they split up (May 2004); their second child, Freddie, is born (September 2004); and Jade's father dies in a KFC toilet (August 2005).

She had been barely literate in the early days, could not even read the figures on her first contract, and had no idea how much it was worth. John Noel had brought in a tutor to help teach her to read and write. It really had been that basic, though what she lacked in academic skills she made up for with native intelligence. And she soon caught on about the money. At first she had been shocked at her new-found earning power: "Ow much?!" But soon it was: "Is that all? Can't they give me a bit more?"

Noel's agency felt that it had been fair to Jade, and did not always feel honourably or indeed honestly treated in return. She swore blind to them that she hadn't had liposuction when she had, and the agency once briefed libel lawyers when she denied a tabloid report that she had been having sex with a professional footballer, before she admitted that it was true after all. You have to be able to trust your clients in this business. They suspected Jade was selling stories on the side, too — articles that would appear about her, apparently with her connivance, without the agency's knowledge.

Noel reckoned Jade had earned around £2.5m during her time with him, from Big Brother 2002 to Celebrity Big Brother 2007, when the bottom dropped out of the Jade market so suddenly and completely. She had been his agency's biggest earner in some of those years, the agency in turn making a tidy profit in commission.

Nobody I asked seemed quite sure where Jade's money had actually gone, except that she was generous, had expensive tastes — a Bermondsey girl in a Bentley — and was "not very good with money". She had once hired a baby-sitter, Luke Rustem, who razored cheques out of her chequebook and stole thousands to sustain his online

Above left: Jade with Davina on Big Brother in 2002. Above: finding out she has cancer on Bigg Boss on TV in India, 2008

gambling addiction ("Jade gutted over chequebook fraud" — April 2006). Apparently, he had been a friend of her mother's and, indeed, the crime — "kiting": stealing cheques, forging signatures — was something that Jade's mother had done while her daughter was a child. Jade was always looking after her mother, Jackie, and was endlessly forgiving where she was concerned. "Jackie's bonkers," said Max Clifford. "Yeah, but lovely bonkers," said Max's colleague in the PR game, Mark Thomas.

Jade might have carried on earning millions, but for her ill-starred decision to go on Celebrity Big Brother in January 2007, when she had become the object of national revulsion, after much-publicised on-screen outbursts and widely perceived racism against the Indian cinema actress Shilpa Shetty. If you didn't know better, you might have thought the whole Shilpa Shetty thing had been orchestrated by Max — he had taken Shilpa on as a client just before the start of Celebrity Big Brother. She had entered the house unknown outside the Bollywood audience and, thanks to Jade's unpleasant outbursts, had emerged a winner, and, more significantly from Max's point of view, far more famous than when she went in.

None of Jade's friends or colleagues were prepared to concede to me that she had been racist. In their view, that ugly display of Jade's in the Celebrity Big Brother house had been all about class. It was Shilpa Shetty, with her snooty Indian middle-class airs and graces, and her petty lies and concerns, winding up the common-or-garden Jade. Jade had black friends. Jade was mixed-race herself (her late father had been half-Jamaican). How could she be racist?

Here was one part of Jade's invective stream from the programme transcript:

"I'm common and I need... I need to go and get elocution lessons because I'm common? How dare she turn her nose up at me? I'm not one of her pissing servants. She's in a house with nine other people, which are normal people. Jermaine Jackson is a f***ing legend — you don't hear him talking down to people. You don't hear him turning his nose up to people."

But here, too, was another extract with a more overtly racist tone:

"I don't know her surname. Shilpa Pashwa f***ing whoever you are, Shilpa Poppadom, I f***ing... Oooh."

To be fair, it was not just Jade. A model, Danielle Lloyd, and a singer, Jo O'Meara, had also been involved. Lloyd had called Shilpa Shetty a dog and said she should f*** off home. O'Meara had mocked Shetty's accent and made comments of the Indian-racist-stereotype variety.

A star is born — Shilpa; a star plummets — Jade. John Noel remembered how everything had come to a shuddering halt as the racism row spiralled out of his control. As Noel put it, he couldn't even get Jade arrested. He couldn't even get her a visa to India when she first applied to go there to do penance. Her initial visa application had been rejected. Noel had watched in the embassy as staff passed Jade's photo to each other, laughing and shaking their heads. ("Jade we hate you — the nation turns on thick racist bully!" — Now magazine, January 2007.)

Jade eventually went into the Priory, while John Noel stood by her and did his best to nurse her through. ➤➤➤



PREVIOUS PAGES: PA; THESE PAGES: TOP RIGHT: LIVING TV/RUCKAS PICTURES; BOTTOM LEFT: NOW MAGAZINE



Jade as a toddler with her parents, Jackie Budden and Andrew Goody

Then she rounded on Noel and his agency, blaming them for her going on the show in the first place. Max Clifford later told me he thought it was a big mistake, that Jade had nothing to gain and everything to lose from appearing on *Celebrity Big Brother*, and wondered if Noel was getting kickbacks from Endemol in return for getting her on the show. But Noel said absolutely not. He simply thought she would win and that it was worth the risk.

Noel remembered a meeting with Endemol around this time where Jade said they should buy her a house, as they owed her one for all they had put her through. Instead, Endemol paid for her stay in the Priory, where she really had been in a bad way, but soon got bored and left.

It was not long after the Endemol meeting that she and Noel parted ways. There hadn't been a row so much as a breakdown in the relationship. She had turned up late to a meeting once too often, and Noel had said it probably made more sense for her to go and find someone else to represent her. Jade said: "Well, you could've told me before I got here; I wouldn't have needed to come to the meeting." Noel gave her a hug and off she went. They were all very sad about it at his agency. Some cried and were upset for a long time afterwards. But as Noel said, you had to see eye to eye with the talent.

Jade cried too. No celebrity likes being dumped by their agent. It dents their ego. "He's been like a father figure to me," she said of John Noel. Jade was certainly in need of a father. Fortunately, there was silver-haired Max Clifford.

Max Clifford remembered how Jade had been at rock bottom when she came to see him some time later at his Surrey home. Clifford was especially proud of the fact that he had never pitched for work. Sinatra, Ali, all of them — they all came to him. And now here on his doorstep was Jade Goody.

Personally, Max hated reality television and had never watched *Big Brother* in his life: just a lot of people showing off, as far as he was concerned. Jade, he quickly decided, was different. Jade was real.

"Max," Jade had said — in the world of celebrity everyone is always on first-name terms from the off — "I've lost everything." As Max put it, she had poured her heart out and blamed herself for her predicament. In the end, he had taken her on because he loves a challenge, and his friend

Simon Cowell had told him: "Max, even you can't do this." What had Cowell meant? "Bring her back to life. She was dead." Not really dead, of course, not at that time. Just dead professionally.

Max had a problem, however, with Jade, as he was already representing Kerry Katona, another celebrity suffering a career crisis, and with the two young women trying to swim in the same pond, as it were, he didn't want to be caught suffering a conflict of interest, so he handed Jade on to a fellow publicist, Mark Thomas.

Thomas had once been a tabloid editor and Jade had once been suing him and his paper, *The People*, but that did not get in the way of their working relationship. Thomas said it had been an uphill struggle finding gainful employment for Jade, but slowly things were beginning to get easier. People were starting to forget how much they had hated Jade.

By August 2008, Jade was booked to play the Wicked Witch in the Christmas pantomime *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* at the Theatre Royal, Lincoln. She had been filming a programme for Living TV, a channel on the outer reaches of the solar system of television.

Thomas had initially thought it was a wind-up when the call came from *Bigg Boss*: an old tabloid colleague perhaps having a joke. He had checked it out carefully before realising that it was a genuine, heaven-sent opportunity, albeit several thousand miles away from Jade's mainstream British market. Apart from anything else, Jade was broke and needed the money.

Nobody knew that, by now, the cervical cancer was growing aggressively inside her. Jade was given the okay to go to India — this time the visa was no problem. By the time

AN ULTRASOUND TEST WAS ABOUT TO SHOW A LESION THE SIZE OF A TANGERINE APPARENTLY UNNOTICED BY HARLOW HOSPITAL



the results of the smear test reached the hands of the consultant at the Harlow hospital, it was day one of *Bigg Boss* and Jade was already back in that familiar parallel universe, being watched by the outside world but entirely isolated from it; isolated even from the news that she might be dying of cancer — though of course not even reality television could protect Jade from the illness itself.

How fitting that the Harlow consultant, at a loss as to how to reach his patient with news of the grim discovery that the hospital appeared to have missed some days earlier, should turn to the hospital press officer for help. It may just be the first time that an NHS diagnosis of serious illness has reached a patient via the machinery of public relations, but on reflection the hospital probably had no choice. It was certainly a first for the Harlow hospital press officer Mark Purcell, when his help was enlisted by the consultant Mohammed Al-Samarrai. Purcell was told that Al-Samarrai needed to speak to Jade urgently, so he in turn tracked down and called Mark Thomas.

A bizarre series of phone calls now ensued. The consultant wanted to protect Jade's patient confidentiality, while Thomas was not going to interrupt a live television programme for a routine medical matter. The consultant eventually conveyed the urgency without revealing the reason, and Jade was called into the *Bigg Boss* diary room and handed a mobile phone. First Thomas called, then



Jade and Jack Tweed at their wedding ceremony in Hertfordshire

the consultant, who told Jade she had cervical cancer and needed to come home. Then Thomas again. *Bigg Boss* agreed not to film those conversations but turned the cameras back on for the third call, between Jade and Thomas. Jade was in a terrible state, sobbing so much that she could barely talk, Thomas trying to be reassuring, telling her everything would be okay.

Thomas thought Jade would leave the house, but she initially wanted to stay, and went back in for a while before she broke down and left, spending a lonely night in a hotel before flying home the following day. Thomas complained that *Bigg Boss* had "stung" Jade for the flight home, never reimbursing her for the cost.

Jade left the *Bigg Boss* house on August 18, 2008, and three days later, on August 21, just over two weeks after her hospital checkup, she was in the Harley Street consulting rooms of Dr Ann Coxon, with her young boyfriend, Jack Tweed, beside her for moral support. Dr Coxon already knew Max Clifford, and he had called her in to try and find out what was going on with Jade.

Even though an ultrasound test was about to show a lesion the size of a "large tangerine" — a lesion apparently unnoticed by the Harlow hospital a few days earlier — Dr Coxon was still optimistic that they had caught the cancer in time and that Jade would survive.

She would need a "radical hysterectomy" to clear the cancer out — but if it had not spread further, she would probably be okay. That operation would be quite an ordeal, lasting several hours — according to Dr Coxon it is second in scale only to heart-bypass surgery.

For the moment, Dr Coxon tried to concentrate on obtaining Jade's medical history. How could her cancer have advanced so far without being spotted? Jade was not good at the long words, so the conversation focused on the nitty-gritty — had the hospital used a speculum to visualise her cervix on internal examination? "Is that where they stick something in your la-la?" Jade's "la-la", of course, was her vagina.

Dr Coxon made some attempt to obtain Jade's history from her GP, but it was never forthcoming. He did tell her that Jade had missed smear appointments. This only fuelled Dr Coxon's anger. Young women — young working-class

women especially — were so vulnerable and so easy to forget. Nobody looked forward with enthusiasm to a smear test, and sexually active young women, the most at-risk group, were the least likely to respond to appointments.

In Finland, according to Dr Coxon, they had support teams whose job was to contact women individually and offer them encouragement and support to attend for tests. It was proactive, where the NHS was largely inactive.

Dr Coxon had dealt with a few celebrities herself, often after they had experienced disastrous treatment at the hands of others. Michael Jackson was the most blatant example. But there was the unnamed "drop-dead-gorgeous top actress" who came to Dr Coxon with unresolved stomach pains. Male doctors' eyes opened like saucers, she said, whenever she appeared before them; they never took her seriously and told her to take some Gaviscon. Turned out she had a huge stomach ulcer.

Now came Jade, and she too, Dr Coxon was sure, was not being taken entirely seriously because of her class and her fame. Her celebrity had got in the way. She says that Jade recalled being told that she was an "attention-seeking hysteric" who "wouldn't know a normal period if it bit her". Nobody, says Dr Coxon, had the right to pass comment on Jade because of her class or her fame.

She was allowed to go to India for *Bigg Boss* when the disease was already rampaging inside her. Her boyfriend, Jack Tweed, and his mum, no experts themselves, noted when she came back from the hospital that Jade was carrying an "offensive female smell" — that would be the rotting odour of the cervical cancer that finally killed her on March 22, 2009.

The Princess Alexandra hospital would not discuss its care of Jade with me, would not even confirm or correct the schedule of Jade's hospital admissions that I tried to piece together with Dr Coxon's help. The hospital said it was respecting Jade's confidentiality. There had been discussions while Jade was alive about the possibility of legal action against the NHS. Jade had said she didn't want to sue and win public funds.

Jade had difficulties requiring a hospital admission during her second pregnancy in 2004. There had been further admissions in 2006 with an abnormal smear test and reported fears that Jade could be suffering from bowel cancer, before she was given the "all clear". She had a miscarriage in June 2007, 14 months before the cancer was finally diagnosed. Jack Tweed's mother thought there



JADE SAID SHE HAD BEEN TOLD SHE WAS AN 'ATTENTION-SEEKING HYSTERIC' WHO 'WOULDN'T KNOW A PERIOD IF IT BIT HER'



was another stay in hospital after that, but if so it was undocumented, and without the hospital's co-operation it was hard to know the precise truth, or indeed to be sure how long the cancer could have been growing undetected inside her. At least a year, Dr Coxon thought, perhaps longer. She was in no doubt that if that was the case, the NHS should have been able to prevent Jade from dying.

The radical hysterectomy surgery took place at the Royal Marsden, the country's leading cancer hospital, on September 12 last year. It lasted for some eight hours and seemed successful until right at the end, when the surgeon pulled the uterus forward and found behind it that



there had been some escape of cancerous cells into the local tissue. Those escaped cells told the surgeon all he needed to know. He spoke to Dr Coxon afterwards and told her “she’s not going to do”, meaning she would not survive.

This news was initially kept from Jade. She had learnt to live with her chances of survival at 50-50, found it hard when it was downgraded to 40-60 and, it was judged, she would not have coped well with knowing then that there was no longer any chance at all.

They kept the cells at bay as best they could with chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Jade’s hair fell out, and she was much weakened, but the cancer was rampant. She was said to have screamed and cried when finally told it was terminal, but began to adjust after a few days and to think about her last weeks and her children’s future. She began planning her funeral in a notebook.

Her television-producer friend, Kate Jackson, told me she had been at the Marsden one day and ended up lying with Jade on her bed while Jade stroked her hand and said: “Shall we go through everything I’ve done wrong to find out which one it is that has made this happen?” Kate tried to tell her there was no rhyme or reason behind it, but Jade would not be soothed. “No, I must have done something wrong for this to happen. Why would He give me two lovely boys and then take me away from them?” She began reviewing the incidents in her past, including the Shilpa episode, but there was no real conclusion.

Kate Jackson had never seen Jade as a “bad” person anyway. She had a gob on her, for sure, but she never failed to win you over when you met her.

Max reckoned he had fielded 50, 60 calls a day from the media. As he said, he could have told them all to f*** off — there was nothing in it for him, so why should he bother? But that was not how he saw it. Max had lost his wife, Liz, to lung cancer in 2003, at the time of his 60th birthday. More recently, he had his own scare with prostate cancer, which had been caught early and successfully treated. Max wanted to get the message out about cancer. It was Jade’s message as well. It might be too late for her, but it was not too late for others. Get regular checks; take nothing for granted. The hypocrisy was immense — the papers criticising Max

Jack Tweed reflects among the tributes at his wife’s grave on April 9

for cashing in on Jade’s death, while expecting him to be available 24/7 to act as a free news service. And what a grubby, nasty load of little bastards many of those newspaper people were, in Max’s view. They would sell their own mothers, he said.

Clifford still hoped Jade would survive. He practically thinks in tabloidese and so, as he put it, this was all part and parcel of making Jade a bigger star — which it did — and having a happy ending — which it didn’t.

And then there were the deals and the exclusives, the last big paydays to negotiate. Even before the illness, Jade had dreamt of an OK! wedding, and Max had an offer on the table. All Jade had needed was a reliable husband to bring to the altar and, when she became ill it became apparent that was Jack Tweed, who stood by her and never asked for any of the money.

Of course, the OK! deal was even bigger now than it had been before she had become ill. The price had gone up, though Max was careful not to increase his commission. He made money during Jade’s death but not *out of* Jade’s death. He also discreetly paid her private medical bills. People who only read about him often imagine Max Clifford is greedy and unscrupulous. In fact, he can be unexpectedly moral and fair. While, of course, newspapers rarely write about their own lack of scruples.

MAX WANTED TO GET THE MESSAGE OUT THAT IT MIGHT BE TOO LATE FOR HER, BUT IT WAS NOT TOO LATE FOR OTHERS

There was the great irony, that in dying Jade had achieved a turnaround, her old sins were instantly forgiven or forgotten and she had become a bigger star than ever. She had always hoped to become successful on an international scale, or go to Hollywood at least — had she lived, she would have made that programme for Living TV: Jade Goes Hollywood — but now she had gone even further. Max would give her the daily reports of the interviews he had given on her behalf to Australia, Canada, South Africa, South America. She had gone global.

Kate was with Jade in an ambulance one day leaving the hospice, heading for the Royal Marsden. Kate had intended a quiet drive into town, but the next thing she knew, there was a police escort and the M11 was shut for them. Jade said: “I can’t believe how big this thing has got. Them shutting the M11 for me.” Jade loved being in the limelight. She was lapping it up.

Kate filmed Jade through her illness, but they had always agreed they would stop before the end, and Max assured me there had never been any talk of filming Jade dying.

Jade died quietly at home with Jack by her side. She was so ill at the end, she could not even do a last television interview with Piers Morgan. Jade’s dying was not just big — it was huge. Unnecessary, perhaps; preventable, for sure, but certainly not unnoticed. (“Jade Goody dies in her sleep” — March 22, 2009).

I went to her funeral and stood among the many hundreds of mourners on the grassy verges of Buckhurst Hill in Essex. There I saw a broadsheet colour writer dispatched by his office to describe Jade’s final journey.

“No sneering,” he had been warned by his editor.

Jade had come a long way. She was going no further, but at least she was finally being treated with respect ■

