

REVIEW

Department store or dating agency?

Michael Deacon

that's the British way.

Speaking of Americans: Liberty seems to attract plenty of their celebrities. One assistant recalled Jerry Hall staggering up to the till with an armful of shoulder pads. Also: "Michelle Pfeiffer. I've served her. She's nice. Really into the knitting."

Imagine: Who's Afraid of Machiavelli? (Tuesday, BBC One) marked 500 years since the Florentine arch-pragmatist wrote *The Prince*, his guidebook for contemporary Mandelsons. I particularly enjoyed the readings by Peter Capaldi, now of *Doctor Who*, but formerly of *The Thick of*

Mussolini (who wrote a dissertation on it), *The Prince* must be one of history's most influential books. Tony Blair even visited Machiavelli's house in 1998. If he was looking for guidance, he was out of luck, because the old guru wasn't in, but he did pick up a copy of the book, and it seems he took it to heart. Jonathan Powell, his former Chief of Staff, recalled how, during a speech Blair gave on immigration in 2005, he kept looking down at his script for long spells. Odd – after all, he had an autocue.

Afterwards, Powell asked why. Blair told him that there were



A CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY Two of Liberty's haberdashery staff

It, in which he played the Machiavellian spin doctor Malcolm Tucker. Every now and then the programme would cut back to him stalking round London in a long coat, glaring down the lens and reciting.

As far as I know, Capaldi has never played the Devil. I've no idea why. His face is perfect. The hard, cruel nose; the fizzing blue vein in the right temple; the sunken eye sockets, permanently in shadow. The scrawny throat, the hollow cheeks, even the sweep of his hair: all speak of eternal evil. And then there's his voice, cold, harsh, austere, like a sudden blast of Arctic air. (I've interviewed him. He's terribly nice really.)

Having been studied by, among countless others, Stalin, Napoleon, Nixon, Kissinger and

certain passages of the speech he didn't want to appear on the TV news bulletins – so, while delivering them, he'd deliberately spoiled the shot.

Ever wondered how Australians see us, apart from as hopeless cricketers? There was a telling little moment in episode two of **Kangaroo Dundee** (Friday, BBC Two), the documentary series about a man who lives in the Outback and cares for orphaned kangaroos. He was telling a local radio DJ about the fan mail he gets from Britain. Adopting his finest cut-glass English accent, the DJ chirruped, "Come and have high tea and scones down Essex way!"

I didn't realise Essex was so posh. Maybe Liberty should open a branch there.