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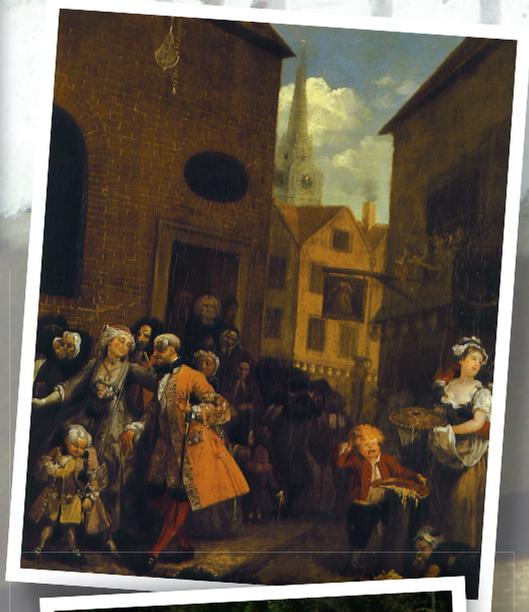


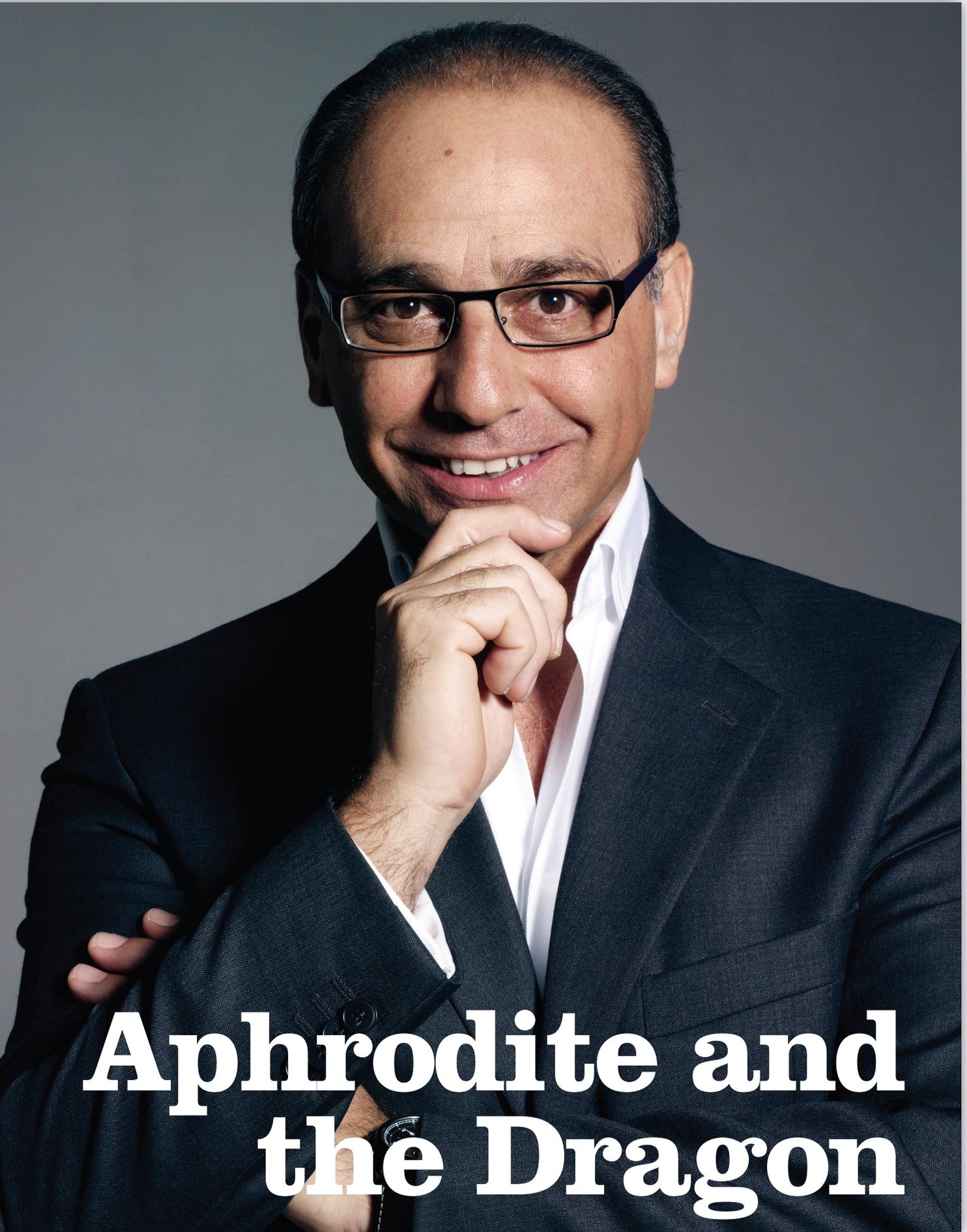
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Aphrodite and the Dragon

James Stroud/courtesy of Theo Paphitis

Genealogist **Anthony Adolph** explores Theo Paphitis' roots in Cyprus, and how the country's history affected his family...

Theo Paphitis has become a household name in Britain through his appearances on the BBC TV series *Dragon's Den*, where inventors and small business owners pitch their ideas to a panel of multi-millionaire investors. Theo has also run a series of successful companies including Ryman, Red Letter Days, La Senza and Contessa. He was chairman of Millwall Football Club for eight years, during which it won its first ever FA Cup final.

But though he is famous in Britain, Theo Paphitis is not from Britain. Though a multi-millionaire, his wealth is proudly self-made. And most interestingly, from a family history point of view, his real family name wasn't even Paphitis.

I met Theo in his office in Wimbledon. Passing a branch of Ryman on the way from the station, I spotted a cheery cardboard cut-out of him training for Sport Relief. His office foyer was tastefully dotted with products that seemed familiar from *Dragon's Den* – a teddy bear-cum-voice recorder, and a pair of decorative wellington boots.

He was immediately familiar from the television, though a greater presence in real life – a slim, olive-skinned man exuding health, success and confidence, immediately friendly, and clearly extremely interested in his family history. He had already made a good start. And, as ever in family history, what he had found out had not been entirely as he had expected.

Names are the key to everything in family history and from Theo's name it was clear that his origins lay somewhere in Greece or the parts of the world which the Greeks colonised. In fact, his family were Greek Cypriots, from the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, the island



Theo in Cyprus, aged five

famed as the mythical birthplace of Aphrodite, goddess of love.

Theo was born in Lemessos (Limassol), one of the island's main port towns. This much he knew, but when he applied for a passport as an adult he was surprised to discover that he had been born there on 24 September 1959 – surprised, because he had always thought his birthday was 25 September. Unlike most British families, his Cypriot family made very little fuss about birthdays, so his misapprehension about his birth date had simply gone unnoticed.

A greater surprise awaited Theo as he delved deeper into his past, as he describes in his 2008 autobiography, *Enter the Dragon*. His family's surname was not Paphitis at all – it was Charalambos.

Or was it? In Britain, we are used to surnames having been fixed and hereditary for a very long time, maybe for up to a thousand years.

But until very recently many Greek families, and their Greek Cypriot cousins (and many Welsh families too, as it happens) gave their children a patronymic surname derived from their father's Christian name. So the son of Theodoros would be surnamed Theodoros, and the son of Charalambos would be surnamed Charalambos.

In Britain, we are lucky in being able to find out virtually anything we want from public records, but the records for Greek Cypriots are so scant that family knowledge becomes irreplaceable. Until Cyprus became independent in 1960, Cypriot births, marriages and deaths were not registered officially and, while baptisms, marriages and burials were performed constantly by the Greek Orthodox Church, it was down to each priest to record these. Many did not and some of the records kept by those who did are now missing. ►