

Feature

Family ties:

Florence B-B, far right, with her eldest sister Alice, who is engaged to the one-time black sheep film director Nick Love



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Team B-B

(and they're more than a match for the Middletons)

The relationship between Prince Harry and Florence Brudenell-Bruce has thrown this impeccably connected London family into the spotlight, reports **Jenni Marsh**

WHEN blue-blooded, blonde-haired beauties were being given odds on who would win Prince Harry's heart, the name Florence Brudenell-Bruce was never even mentioned.

But perhaps she was expected to be snapped up already. For Florence Anne-Marie Brudenell-Bruce is a pedigree-perfect socialite who has spent her life mixing with royals and celebrities.

Florence, 25, is the lingerie model who dated Formula 1 driver Jenson Button and is descended from the seventh Earl of Cardigan, who led the Charge of the Light Brigade against Russian forces during the Crimean War.

Her parents are Old Etonian wine merchant Andrew and French artist Sophie. Her sister Christabel, 29, is married to financier Edward Lawson-Johnston, a scion of the Baron Luke and descendant of the Bovril dynasty, while eldest sibling Alice, 36, is a former Tatler style editor, and brother Henry Robert Woolf is a successful sculptor.

Nearly all the men in the Brudenell-Bruce line are Old Etonians and their ties to politics run back to the 1800s.

In fact, after Harry's penchant for dating minor celebrities and his seven-year on-off relationship with Zimbabwean-born Chelsy Davy, "Flee", as she is known, is the best-connected girlfriend the playboy prince has ever had.

As with Kate and William, the pair – who are cousins, eight times removed – are said to have been friends for years before dating.

A contemporary of Flee's at Bristol University, where, like Kate, she studied history of art, says, "Flee was always far cooler than anyone else, very bohemian and had the most beautiful hair. One of Harry's best friends from Eton was also studying history of art at the same time. Harry would come to visit regularly and they'd all go out partying together.

"But Flee only had eyes for Jenson in those days – she spent most of her time on the Formula 1 circuit with him, commuting to Bris-

tol from around the world for lectures. But I can imagine her going for Harry – she likes strong men."

After calling off her romance with the "untameable" Button in 2008, she dated financier Henry St George and a gambling friend of Tom Parker Bowles, Iain Russell.

Meanwhile, the modelling she had done part-time at university flourished into a career, with campaigns for Knickerbox and Ann Summers. Acting roles in Bollywood blockbuster Love Aaj Kal and TV series Luther followed.

This September, she had planned to quit her £2.5 million Notting Hill home to move to Hollywood, taking inspiration from fellow upper-crust model-turned-actress Transformers star Rosie Huntington-Whiteley.

While Flee is more career-minded than Kate ever was, she is now considering delaying her move to see how things pan out with Harry – who knows all too well long-distance love doesn't work.

Where the Middletons and Brudenell-Bruces share common ground is in the skeletons in their cupboards.

While the Middletons have had to contend with the drugs scandals of Kate's uncle Gary Goldsmith, Flee's family bust-ups are of Spencer-like proportions – combustible and conducted in the glare of the public eye.

The most likely contender to displease Her Majesty is Catherine Brudenell-Bruce, Flee's feisty 26-year-old cousin, who checked into rehab after a public falling out with her father, Lord Cardigan, 58 – heir to the marquessate of Ailesbury.

The 27-year Cardigan marriage disintegrated after Lord Cardigan began an affair with a woman he met in an Arizona clinic where he was being treated for depression.

Bo, as Catherine is known, suffered from post-traumatic stress after her parents announced their acrimonious divorce. A rock musician who was at Marlborough College at the same time as Pippa Middleton but now lives in New York, she wrote a song about her father, entitled The Fool.

Meanwhile, Flee's eldest sister, journalist Alice, is

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