

The butler's done it: Diana's friends trash tell-all book

By Audrey Wods
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — Princess Diana's friends call her ex-butler a vulture. He accuses royal courtiers of poisoning the minds of princes William and Harry. The butler's wife aims brickbats at Buckingham Palace.

And that's only so far: Paul Burrell's memoirs don't hit British bookstores until Monday.

Burrell is a "runaway train" with much distance yet to travel, former Buckingham Palace press spokesman Dickie Arbiter said in a weekend exchange of unpleasanties by all sides in the latest Diana dustup.

The Daily Mirror's serialization of Burrell's "A Royal Duty" has treated millions of readers to his intimate view of Princess Diana's life, including private correspondence from her former father-in-law, Prince Philip, and her brother, Earl Spencer.

Prince William and Prince Harry, who have known Burrell since early childhood, issued a strong statement Friday, accusing him of a "cold and overt betrayal" of their mother that would have mortified Diana were she alive.

"My only intention in writing this book was to defend the princess and stand in her corner," Burrell replied.

In an interview published in The Sunday Times, the ex-butler

was quoted as saying, "The princes' little minds were poisoned. I don't know what courtiers have said to them."

The Sunday Times quoted an unidentified spokeswoman for Clarence House, the London home of Prince Charles and his sons, as saying their statement was "a heartfelt reaction by two young men who cannot take any more."

In the months after Diana's fatal August 1997 car crash in Paris, Burrell vowed repeatedly never to divulge her secrets. One of the first to appear in the Daily Mirror serialization last week was a letter he said Diana had written to him, saying she feared someone wanted to harm her and was going to tamper with the brakes of her car.

Although a French judge ruled that the car crashed due to its high speed and the effect of alcohol and drugs on fatally injured driver Henri Paul, some insist the crash was not an accident.

Publication of the letter prompted Mohammed Al Fayed, father of Diana's companion Dodi Fayed, who died in the crash with her, to renew his allegations that they

were murdered. Rosa Monckton, one of Diana's closest friends, who rarely comments publicly about the princess, wrote in The Sunday Telegraph about that letter.

"This was by no means the only time that ludicrous ideas were put into her head by the sort of people who always prey upon vulnerable women in high places — astrologers, so-called mystics and other pagan riff raff," Monckton said.

She said Burrell, better than most, knew how hounded the princess was during her life, "and yet now he joins the rest of the vultures who had the task of looking after her, in picking over the bones of her existence in his book."

The letters said to be from Prince Philip held Diana partly responsible for the breakdown of her marriage. He also purportedly wrote to tell her he "never dreamed" Prince Charles would leave her for his longtime companion, Camilla Parker Bowles.

Vivienne Parry, another friend and a former trustee of Princess Diana's memorial fund, described Burrell's book as "cynical."

"I think there has been a wrestling with his conscience. The only thing he has been wrestling with is which letter to draw from the captioned file marked 'P' for permission plan," Parry told BBC television Sunday.

Burrell spent nearly two years fighting accusations that he stole more than 300 letters from the princess and other royals, and went on trial last year.

He was exonerated in November when Queen Elizabeth II announced the servant had told her five years earlier that he'd taken some of Diana's papers for safekeeping.

Now, Burrell's wife, Marina, is getting into the fray. In the Sunday Mirror, she was quoted as saying, "The Royal Household wants everyone to focus on the plight of William and Harry, but what about my boys? No one gives them any consideration when their dad was dragged to court and threatened with prison while all he did was protect Princess Diana's world."

Arbiter, the former palace spokesman, predicted Burrell was not finished with his revelations — even with the publishing of his book.

"We have got a runaway train here and it is not going to stop until it hits the buffers, and the buffers are a long way off," Arbiter said Saturday.

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— Paul Burrell
Princess Diana's butler

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