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Keira the dazzling duchess

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Hollywood royalty: Keira Knightley prepares to play the fifth Duchess of Devonshire

Keira Knightley will portray one of the most hunted women of her age, a celebrity who married an aristocrat - and just about the only man alive who wasn't in love with her.

No, not Diana, Princess of Wales, but one of her distant kin.

The fifth Duchess of Devonshire was a social powerhouse of the 18th century and Keira will portray her (and this column is the first to bring you this news!) when cameras roll on *The Duchess* in October.

Born Lady Georgiana Spencer, a great-great-great-great aunt of Diana's, she married the fifth Duke of Devonshire in an arranged marriage, becoming one of the great political hostesses of the era.

She was a smart, ambitious woman who lived life to the full, took lovers and gambled heavily.

According to Amanda Foreman's mouth-watering biography of Georgiana, upon which the film will be based, the duchess's closest friend Lady Elizabeth Foster (known as Bess) became the duke's mistress.

For two decades, Georgiana and Bess shared favours with the duke.

There are other fascinating tales of Georgiana's aristocratic lifestyle, but to learn more you'll have to either read Foreman's award-winning book or wait till director Saul Dibbs's film comes out next year.

Keira had been hoping to have time off this autumn, but couldn't resist the part when she was sent the script, written by Jeffrey Hatcher with some revisions by Dibbs.

Dibbs, by the way, is the man who made the much talked about BBC film *Bullet Boy*.

He also discovered Hayley Atwell for the BBC drama *The Line Of Beauty*.

Keira has just completed filming *The Edge Of Love* for director John Maybury and she stars with James McAvoy in Joe Wright's heartbreakingly brilliant film *Atonement*, which opens the Venice Film Festival late next month.

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