

PAUL BURRELL:

'The Royal celebrations will be tinged with sadness'

Former butler Paul Burrell on how Christmas may look behind palace walls – and the special surprise he'll be celebrating following his cancer battle



This year's royal Carol service



The Waleses' card

He spent over two decades with the Royal Family, but Paul Burrell – the former butler to both the Queen and Princess Diana – says he always reminisces over "The Firm's" festive traditions at this time of year.

And despite leaving service 26 years ago, Paul says he still brings a little bit of royal magic into his own home in Cheshire, where he'll be spending Christmas with his husband of six years, Graham Cooper.

Paul, 65, says, "I always set the table with our best silver and best crystal glasses – I set it as if I'm setting it at Sandringham. [But] I'll miss the corgis at

Christmas – they always had great fun in the wrapping paper!"

Paul reveals that, under the Queen's reign, the royals' Christmas was like a "football match" of laughter and screams as the family unwrapped their presents on Christmas Eve, but he believes this year will be a quieter affair – with Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's absence.

He says, "I think the King is quite content with William, Kate and their children [George, 10, Charlotte, nine, and Louis, four] being at Sandringham and coming over to spread a little fun. It's going to be a smaller, low-key Christmas.

"But like all families, there's

always a tinge of sadness at Christmas time... thinking about the ones we've lost, or the ones who can't be with us. And the Royal Family are no exception – I'm sure they'll miss Harry, Meghan, Archie and Lilibet this Christmas – it's sad."

This Christmas will be a poignant one for Paul too. After being given the "all clear" from testicular cancer last month, the dad-of-two will be flying out to the US on Boxing Day, hoping to meet his first grandchild – who's due any day now.

He says, "Last year, when I was wrapping Christmas presents, I was crying, thinking that I might

not [live to] see this baby... I'd only just been diagnosed. This Christmas I will see him or her, and that will be my Christmas complete."



Paul with the Queen in Berlin in 1987



With William and Harry in 2003