

THE TIMES



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Breakdancing at 60? I did it

INSIDE TIMES2



Daisy Ridley Star Wars made me ill with stress

Energy bills tumble in first big election battle

● Relief for households with price cap to fall ● Net zero warning as PM and Starmer trade blows

Steven Swinford Political Editor
Chris Smyth Whitehall Editor

Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer will seek to make energy costs an electoral dividing line as household bills fall to their lowest level in two years.

After a significant drop in global prices, the energy regulator is today expected to reduce the energy price cap by £116, to £1,574, which the Conservatives will try to seize on.

They will seek to use net-zero policies to draw a key electoral distinction between the two parties, with Sunak accusing Labour of failing to be honest about the "significant costs" that its environmental pledges will impose on households.

Starmer said that bills were still £400 higher than before Russia's full invasion of Ukraine and had risen by more than in other European countries. He accused the Conservatives of leaving Britain more vulnerable to energy shocks and promised to "stop families paying over the odds" for power.

Starmer will visit Scotland today and argue that the country will be pivotal to deciding the outcome of the election on July 4. Labour has only two MPs in Scotland but is hoping to form the largest party there after the election.

Sunak will continue his two-day tour of the four nations, seeking to press his argument that the economy has "turned a corner".

In other developments on the first full day of campaigning yesterday:

- Sunak acknowledged that deportation flights for Rwanda would not take off until after the election.
- Nigel Farage said that he would not stand for Reform UK but would play a prominent role in the campaign.
- The police investigation into whether Angela Rayner broke electoral law is expected to be concluded before the election and Labour is increasingly confident she will be cleared.
- The smoking ban touted by Sunak as a key legacy appeared to be among bills killed off by the general election.



Rishi Sunak with Maggie Throup, the MP for Erewash, who brought him an umbrella after his Downing Street drenching

● Jeremy Corbyn is expected to stand as an independent in his Islington North constituency in London after he was blocked from standing for Labour, the party he once led.
The Tories are putting Labour's

environmental policies at the heart of their election campaign. Last year, Sunak watered down a series of green policies, saying that he wanted a "proportionate and pragmatic" approach to net zero.

Labour has committed itself to setting up a state-owned energy company and ushering in a new generation of onshore wind turbines as part of an attempt to decarbonise the electricity
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Hard times blamed for abortions at record high

Eleanor Hayward Health Editor

Abortions have reached the highest level on record with women being forced to "choose between financial stability and having a baby".

More than 250,000 women in England and Wales had abortions in 2022, up by 17 per cent in a year, according to annual figures published by the Department of Health.

This is the highest number of abortions since the 1967 Abortion Act and the largest single-year increase since 1971. Experts said the sharp rise reflected financial pressures that are putting women off having children, as well as improved access to at-home abortions because of a "pills by post" scheme introduced during the pandemic.

Pressures on the NHS and long GP waiting times also mean that women are struggling to get hold of contraception, women's health charities said.

The abortion data showed that there were 251,377 abortions in England and Wales in 2022. This is up from 214,256 in 2021, and 185,122 in 2012.

Although younger women had the procedure most, with 22 the most common age, there was a notable rise in abortions for women aged 35 and over. Half of those having abortions were unmarried but in a relationship, while one in four were single with no partner. Across all age groups, 18 per cent were married, although the proportion who were married rose to 38 per cent among those aged 35 and over.

Almost all abortions — 98 per cent — were performed on the grounds that continuing with the pregnancy would be a danger to the mother's mental health.

Heidi Stewart, chief executive of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, said: "No woman should have to end a pregnancy she would otherwise have continued purely for financial reasons. The stories women have shared with us are heartbreaking. The cost-of-living crisis has placed immense strain on women and families, with too many having to choose between financial stability and having a baby."

The charity said long waits for NHS
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IN THE NEWS

First millennial saint

A 15-year-old who died from leukaemia in 2006 is set to become the first millennial Catholic saint after a second miracle attributed to him was approved by the Pope. Page 3

Payout cut by £20m

Appeal court judges have trimmed £20 million from the divorce settlement paid to the ex-wife of a retired banker. It is thought to be the largest such reduction in history. Page 10

Taiwan 'punishment'

China sent warships and military jets to the waters off Taiwan as "punishment" for its new president calling the island a "sovereign and independent country". Page 26

Biden courts Kenya

President Biden welcomed Kenya's President Ruto for a state visit aimed at deepening relations with African nations and countering Chinese and Russian influence. Page 28

Trio of tyrants

In a sign the North Korean leader's personality cult is deepening, Kim Jong-un's portrait is being displayed alongside those of his father and grandfather. Page 29



News

Today's highlights

7.15am Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the Labour Party
8.30am Claire Coutinho, energy secretary
11am The comedians Lewis Macleod, Nerine Skinner and Rory Bremner, right, join Matt Chorley with their best political impressions
4.35pm Professor Katharina Hauck, expert adviser to the Infected Blood Inquiry



TIMES RADIO
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TODAY'S EDITION

NEWS



SOS FOR SITCOMS
 Classic British comedies are in danger of dying out
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SPORT



A LIFE IN SPORT
 Matt Dickinson shares his career highlights
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FANCY A STEN DO?
 Combined hen and stag parties are the big wedding trend
 PAGE 3

422 days since Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was detained in Russia

#FreeEvan



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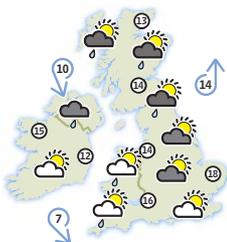
Felony or witch hunt? Trump's trial dissected

Donald Trump's "hush money" trial is in its final days, with the jury due to return on Tuesday for closing arguments. Will Pavia, The Times's New York correspondent, discusses which side told the best story.
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THE WEATHER



It will feel warm during any sunny spells but there's a risk of showers in some places **Full forecast, page 55**

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Russia will free Gershkovich if I win election, says Trump

Marc Bennetts

Donald Trump has promised that his relationship with President Putin will secure the release of Evan Gershkovich, the Wall Street Journal reporter being held in Moscow on espionage charges, if he wins the American presidential election in November.

Gershkovich, 32, was arrested in the Urals region of Russia in March last year on suspicion of seeking to obtain defence secrets for US intelligence. He faces up to 20 years in a penal camp if convicted. Gershkovich and The Wall Street Journal have denied the allegation, while the White House has classified him as "wrongfully detained".

"Evan Gershkovich, the Reporter from The Wall Street Journal, who is being held by Russia, will be released almost immediately after the Election, but definitely before I assume Office. He will be HOME, SAFE, AND WITH HIS FAMILY," Trump wrote on his Truth Social website.

"Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, will do that for me, but not for anyone else, and WE WILL BE PAYING

NOTHING!" he wrote. Trump, who will face President Biden in a rematch of the 2020 election, gave no details about how he would secure Gershkovich's release.

The Biden campaign said freeing Gershkovich remained an urgent priority and accused Trump of using him as a political prop. "Donald Trump doesn't give a damn about the innocent Americans unjustly imprisoned by Vladimir Putin," said TJ Ducklo, a Biden campaign adviser, in an email.

He added: "Trump has called journalists 'enemies of the people' and pledged to imprison reporters whose coverage he doesn't like, not all that dissimilar to what's happening right now to Evan Gershkovich in Russia."

Moscow reacted with apparent surprise. Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said Putin had "naturally not had contact with Donald Trump".

Trump has repeatedly praised Putin, calling him "smart" and "savvy" and his military action in Ukraine a "genius" move. During his single term as president, Trump also cast doubt on a report by his own intelligence agencies about

Russian meddling in the 2016 elections that brought him to power.

Trump has also vowed to end the war in Ukraine in 24 hours if he is elected, a claim met with scepticism in Kyiv.

The White House has accused Putin's regime of seeking to use Gershkovich and other US citizens languishing in Russian prisons as "bargaining chips" to secure the release of Kremlin agents jailed in the West. Moscow said last year that any deal to exchange Gershkovich would be possible only after his trial, for which no date has been set.

In February, Putin told Tucker Carlson, the former Fox News presenter, that the Kremlin would be willing to exchange Gershkovich for a "patriot" who was in prison in Germany — Vadim Krasikov, a Russian hitman who is serving a life sentence for the murder of a Chechen dissident in Berlin in 2019.

Biden and Olaf Scholz, the German chancellor, discussed a potential exchange deal for Krasikov that would have involved Gershkovich and Alexei Navalny. The jailed Russian opposition leader was found dead in an Arctic prison before a proposal could be made.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Energy bills

network by 2030. The Tories argue that Starmer will have to raise taxes to hit his target after Labour dropped its pledge to spend £28 billion a year on renewable energy.

Sunak sought to take credit for the fall in energy bills and said: "The Labour Party does not have a serious plan for Britain's energy security and are not being honest with the country about the significant costs their net-zero targets would impose on hard-working families."

"Only the Conservatives have a clear plan for a secure future where we reach net zero in a pragmatic way and without punishing families with thousands of pounds of extra costs."

Labour denies this, insisting its plans for more renewable energy will lower

suppliers to put consumers first and bring real competition back to the market, cutting bills further and improving customer service."

Labour dismissed the Tories' energy offer as a "bunch of empty buzzwords, none of which will do anything to bring down energy bills". It said the government had left Britain exposed to a £74 billion energy price shock by blocking onshore wind and failing to build nuclear power plants.

Labour is proposing to borrow an extra £4.7 billion a year for green energy infrastructure, arguing that renewables are the cheapest form of energy. Party sources insist its energy offer will be central to the campaign, with plans for ads claiming that it will cut bills by an average of £300 a year by the end of the parliament.

Does Sunak really want to be judged on the economy? Emma Duncan, page 22

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Abortions at record high

services meant 36 per cent of women were unable to get contraception or were facing delays, leading to unwanted pregnancies and abortions.

A vote is planned in parliament next week on decriminalising abortion after a rise in prosecutions for ending a pregnancy beyond the 24-week legal limit. It is not clear whether this will go ahead now that the election has been called.

In 2022 parliament voted to permanently approve "pills by post" abortions that allow women to take two medicines, mifepristone and misoprostol, to induce an abortion at home after an on-line consultation with a doctor.

The latest data suggests that most abortions happen earlier than they used to. In 2022, 88 per cent of abortions took place at under ten weeks, compared with 78 per cent in 2012.

Dr Sarah Salkeld, of MSI Reproductive Choices, the charity formerly known as Marie Stopes International, said: "Greater demand and finite resources for GPs and sexual health clinics are leaving women at risk of unintended pregnancy at a time when families are struggling to make ends meet. These pressures disproportionately impact those on the lowest incomes."

Catherine Robinson, of Right to Life UK, said the figures were a "national tragedy" and called for an end to at-home abortions.

Behind the story

One in 50 women between the ages of 15 and 44 had an abortion in 2022 — the highest level on record (Eleanor Hayward writes). The unprecedented demand reflects two key issues: barriers to accessing contraception, and financial pressures that mean many women feel unable to continue with unintended pregnancies.

Charities warn that cuts to public health budgets and long GP waiting lists have made it difficult to access contraception on the NHS. One woman described how "having to call a GP at 8am 200-plus times and [being] turned away as all slots are taken is causing

unwanted pregnancies". Another became pregnant while waiting months for an appointment to get a coil fitted.

These worsening NHS pressures have gone hand in hand with a growing trend for young women to turn away from the pill, amid rising awareness about the side effects of hormonal contraception. In 2014 there were 432,600 prescriptions for the pill in England. By 2021 this had dropped to 188,500 — a 56 per cent decrease.

Instead, many younger women are opting for "natural" alternatives, including apps that track their cycle, but provide a less reliable way of avoiding pregnancy. Financial constraints and the housing crisis also

mean young women cannot afford to have a baby. A new survey of 1,300 women by Bpas shows that 57 per cent of women cited financial reasons as contributing to their decision to end a pregnancy. As rents and energy bills soar, many do not have the space nor the funds for a child.

These pressures are acute for women in deprived areas, who are twice as likely to have an abortion as those from wealthy backgrounds.

Some 61 per cent of terminations in 2022 involved taking medications at home, under the new "pills by post" system. This is up from 52 per cent in 2021. Women have to report to a relevant abortion clinic if they decide to continue with the pregnancy.



First millennial saint will be London-born teenager Carlo

The PlayStation fan who was devoted to the church and helped the poor is to be canonised, writes **Kaya Burgess**

Less than 35 years after he was born and baptised in London in 1991, a teenage boy is set to become the Catholic Church's first millennial saint.

Pope Francis has canonised hundreds of medieval martyrs, Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II, but will now bestow the honour on a much more modern miracle-worker, Carlo Acutis, a boy who loved playing on his PlayStation and died from leukaemia aged 15 in 2006.

The Pope decreed yesterday that he had approved a second posthumous miracle attributed to Carlo, qualifying the teenager for canonisation.

The Vatican has declared that two people, a Brazilian boy and a Costa Rican woman, owe their lives to miraculous recoveries that took place after their families prayed to Carlo for healing. Of 912 people canonised by Francis, the most recent birth date was 1926.

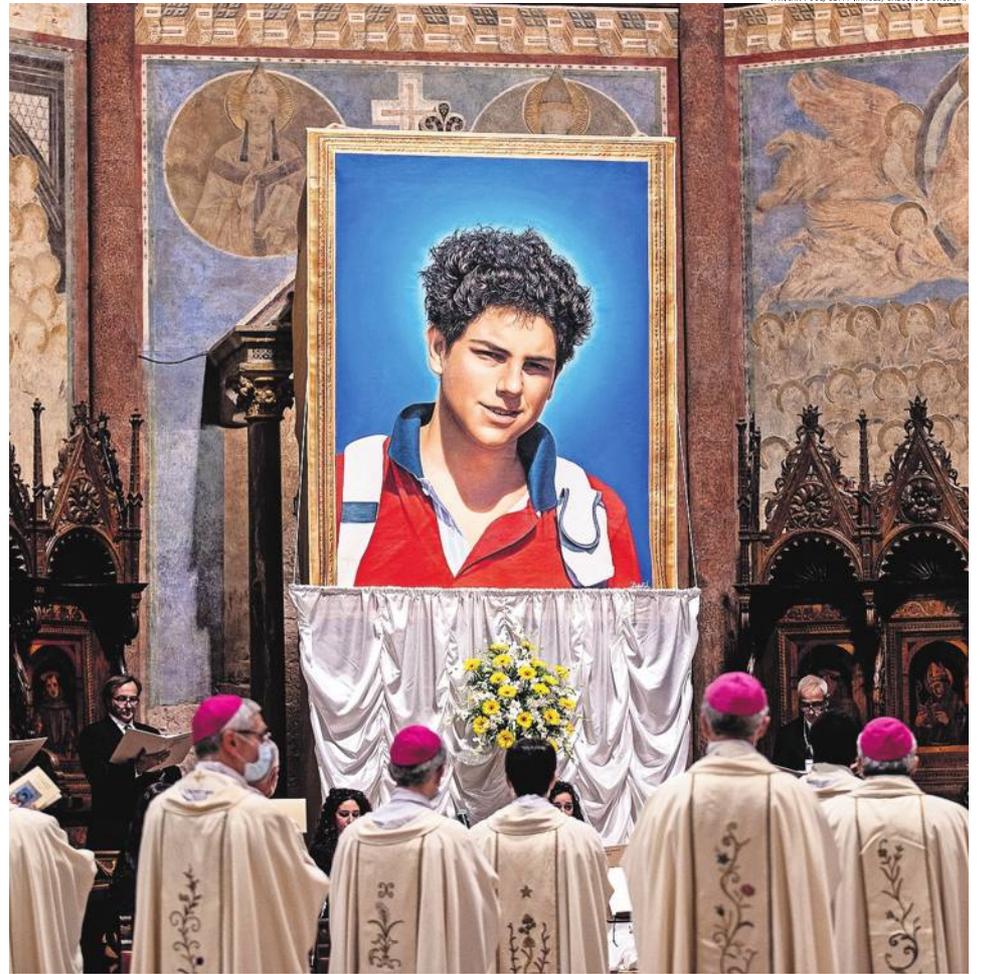
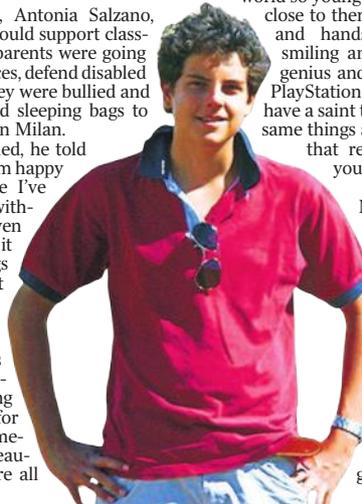
Carlo has been hailed as a "patron saint of the internet" because of his love of computer programming and his work building a website to document

miracles. He was born in London to an Italian mother and a half-English, half-Italian father who was working in the UK as a merchant banker. He was baptised at the Church of Our Lady of Dolours in Fulham Road. His family moved to Milan when he was young and he was devout from an early age, taking communion every day. He helped to rekindle his parents' faith and inspired his au pair to convert from Hinduism to Catholicism.

His mother, Antonia Salzano, said her son would support classmates whose parents were going through divorces, defend disabled peers when they were bullied and take meals and sleeping bags to the homeless in Milan.

Before he died, he told his parents: "I'm happy to die because I've lived my life without wasting even a minute of it doing things that wouldn't have pleased God."

Salzano told The Times that when Carlo was being considered for sainthood "sometimes these beautiful [saints] are all



The beatification ceremony for Carlo Acutis at the St Francis Basilica in Assisi in 2020, at which he lay in state, top left

old and used to live in a very different world so young people don't feel so close to them. Carlo was young and handsome and always smiling and was a computer genius and would play on his PlayStation and Game Boy. To have a saint that played with the same things as you is something that really touches these young people."

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster and most senior Catholic in England and Wales, told The Times that Carlo enjoyed a "fast-track to sainthood. He lived each day cheerfully, always united with Jesus. A joyful, courageous, generous,

Blessed Britons

Candidates for sainthood are first declared a "servant of God", then "venerable". When a miracle is attributed to them, they are beatified and declared "blessed". They are canonised and made a saint when a second miracle is confirmed.

John Henry Newman (1801-1890) was canonised in 2019.

Elizabeth Prout (1820-1864), the "Mother Teresa of Manchester", who founded schools for children of industrial workers, is venerable.

Ignatius Spencer (1799-1864) was a missionary in England and Ireland – and great-great-uncle of Diana, Princess of Wales. He was declared venerable in 2021.

Frances Taylor (1832-1900) was a nurse who served with Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War. She was declared venerable in 2014.

faith-filled teenager. A saint for our day and everyday. And a Londoner! A star."

Since his death, Carlo has built up a global following of young devotees who see him as a role model.

In 2020, the church dispatched its unit for investigating miracles to Brazil to examine claims that a child was cured of a pancreatic disease in 2013 after his family prayed to Carlo. This led to him being beatified.

The Vatican examined claims that a 21-year-old Costa Rican woman miraculously recovered from a brain injury suffered in a bicycle accident in Florence in 2022 after her family prayed at Carlo's tomb in Assisi. Francis has rubber-stamped this as a valid miracle. The canonisation is expected to take place next year.

The Archbishop of Southwark, the Most Rev John Wilson, said: "Carlo's love and devotion to the Eucharist is a wonderful witness of God's love for all people, and it is especially good for young people to see a person of their generation being declared a saint."

Big nose makes proboscis monkey a big noise on mating front

Tom Whipple Science Editor

Everyone knows that the big, bulbous, drooping nose of the male proboscis monkey is irresistibly sexy. The question is, is it sexy because of how it looks? Or because of how it sounds?

A study has tried to answer that question and concluded it is a bit of both.

The proboscis monkey is named because of its most notable feature, though that oversized snout is only present in the male. Just as with the mane of the lion, the tail of the peacock and the feathers of the bird of paradise, this suggests that its wobbly and fleshy purpose is in attracting a female.

Research in the journal *Scientific Reports* has tried to investigate how, by measuring its dimensions in museum specimens. Firstly, scientists confirmed that the nose was indeed unusual. In proboscis monkeys, the nasal aperture and nasal cavity are about 25-30 per cent bigger in males than females, compared with a 7-15 per cent difference in other species. What is more, the difference was accentuated when they became more sexually mature.

This implied that it was indeed "sexually selected", meaning that its purpose was for gaining sexual partners rather than helping the monkey survive.

The next question was, what is the

mechanism by which the nose lures the females? The larger cavity was the first clue. Dr Katharine Balolia, from the Australian National University, said that it was also differently shaped and this helped it act a little like a trumpet, emitting the characteristic "honks and nasal roars" that are so seductive.

"Proboscis monkeys live in coastal mangroves and forested environments and often can't see each other through the trees. So loud, nasalised calls are important to communicate with each other, especially amongst males," she said. "Being able to emit louder and deeper calls thanks to a longer and larger nasal cavity helps male monkeys



The extended nose allows the monkey to show off its quality and status

... show off their quality and status to prospective female partners."

However, the dimorphism in the nasal aperture was greater than in the sound-producing cavity. This implied something else was going on. This feature forms the scaffold on which the monkey can hang its fleshy nose. The fact it was even more pronounced suggested that it had become something of value in itself. If females knew bigger-nosed males got more mates, then they might have started to want mates with bigger noses — so that their big-nosed sons could get more mates. That is when runaway sexual selection takes over — and noses get a bit ridiculous.

News Election

Sunak: No Rwanda flights until

Matt Dathan Home Affairs Editor

Flights deporting migrants to Rwanda will not take off before the election on July 4, Rishi Sunak has admitted.

The prime minister insisted "all the plans are in place to get flights off in July" but they would only take off if he remained in No 10 after the election as he put the policy at the centre of his strategy.

In an attempt to create a clear dividing line between himself and Sir Keir Starmer, Sunak told LBC: "I've said the first flights will go in July. If I'm elected, we will get the flights off." He said the Home Office had migrants in detention awaiting removal, an airfield had been booked and extra caseworkers hired to hear final cases, but the question of whether flights would take off would be determined by the election.

The Home Office insisted the process and timeline would continue unchanged despite the election campaign. The Times reported yesterday that ministers had been warned it was "very unlikely" flights could take off during the campaign.

Pressed on why he had chosen not to wait until he could show the Rwanda scheme was working before calling an election, Sunak told Channel 4 News: "I believe in a deterrent. I believe that if people come here illegally they shouldn't be able to stay, we should be able to remove them to a safe third country like Rwanda.

"And now, 15 other European countries have signed a statement that they agree. Across Europe, the penny is dropping but at this election, Keir Starmer doesn't believe in that."

However, Starmer claimed Sunak's admission that flights would not take off before the election showed he never believed the scheme would work deterring migrants crossing the Channel in small boats. Speaking on a visit to Gillingham in Kent, the Labour leader said: "I don't think he's ever believed that plan is going to work, and so he has called an election ... to have it not tested. We have to deal with the terrible loss of control of the border under this government, we have to tackle the small boats that are coming but nobody should be making that journey."

Laura Trott, the chief secretary to the Treasury and a close ally of Sunak, said comments from the two party leaders showed that the Rwanda plan was "a really important dividing line".

Piers Morgan, the broadcaster, said Sunak owed the British Red Cross £1,000 after his admission that no flights would take off to Rwanda before the election. The prime minister agreed to a wager with Morgan that flights would take off before the election.

Sunak's comments confirming that flights would not take off until July 5 at the earliest raises the prospect of the courts granting bail to more than 100 detained migrants. Individuals can only be detained for immigration purposes if there is a reasonable prospect of their removal from the UK in the near future.

Steve Smith, chief executive of Care4Calais, said: "To keep people locked up in a detention centre for the ... campaign would be ... human cruelty."

New Home Office figures revealed only 3 per cent of more than 106,000 migrants who have arrived by small boat since 2018 have been removed from the UK. The vast majority, 2,178, were removed over the past year and most of them were Albanians who were returned to Tirana under a fast-track agreement signed in December 2022. A total of 2,762 unaccompanied children crossed the Channel in small boats last year and claimed asylum.

A record 68,564 migrants were granted asylum in the year to March 2024 as a result of Sunak's drive to clear the "legacy" backlog of claims made by those arriving before June 2022. The asylum backlog stood at 118,329 by the end of March, down by a third from 172,758 compared with the previous 12 months. Separate data published by the Office for National Statistics revealed net migration to the UK stood at 685,000 at the end of last year, a 10 per cent drop on 2022. The ONS revealed the record-breaking year of 2022 was higher than previously thought as it upgraded its estimate from 745,000 to 764,000.

Labour's biggest obstacle is itself, Patrick Maguire, page 21
Sunak's decision, letters, page 24

TIMES RADIO

Keir Starmer live

Hear the Labour leader make his case to be prime minister from 7:15am, or listen back on catch-up

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Bill on smoking ban to be extinguished Leaders debate how often they will go head to head

Chris Smyth Whitehall Editor

Rishi Sunak's smoking ban appears to have become a casualty of the general election because the government is running out of time to rush through a series of promised laws.

Despite the prime minister trumpeting the legislation while announcing the election in Downing Street, the Tobacco and Vapes Bill has not been included in legislation being fast-tracked before parliament is dissolved. Labour said Sunak had "killed his own legacy by mistake".

Laws to compensate victims of the infected blood scandal and quash convictions of sub-postmasters caught up in the Horizon scandal are among a handful of measures that will be squeezed through parliament after an agreement between the Conservatives and Labour. A bill giving legal rights to victims of crime is also being passed.

However, other measures, including protections for renters and leaseholders and plans for an independent

football regulator look likely to be killed off.

Last year Sunak used his only party conference speech as prime minister to promise to save thousands of lives by stopping anyone aged under 14 from ever buying cigarettes.

On Wednesday, listing his successes in Downing Street, he said the government would "ensure the next generation grows up smoke free". The measure has since been included among achievements on election material. However, government sources said the bill had not progressed far enough, having yet to pass some Commons stages and the House of Lords.

Labour sources insisted they had been willing to allow the smoking ban through. Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, said: "If you thought Rishi Sunak getting soaked outside Downing Street was incompetent, today he has killed his own legacy by mistake."

Penny Mordaunt, the leader of the Commons, acknowledged that "this

bill ... is clearly something the prime minister feels very passionately about" but yesterday was running out of time to revive it. Both main parties could include the measure in their manifestos but Michelle Mitchell of Cancer Research UK said it was "a disheartening day for people affected by cancer".

Lucy Powell, the shadow Commons leader, said Sunak's decision to call an election "means he will start the campaign leaving many government commitments in the bin". Marty's Law, introduced after the Manchester Arena bombing to ensure that venues have better procedures to deal with terrorist attacks, will also not be passed.

The Digital Markets Bill, which could force tech companies to pay news companies for content, was approved.

Ministers were making concessions in the Lords to pass the Media Bill, which overhauls regulation of broadcasters and streaming services, while repealing laws that could force news publishers to pay all court costs if they did not join an approved regulator.

Leaders debate how often they will go head to head

Kieran Andrews

Scottish Political Editor

Rishi Sunak has suggested that Sir Keir Starmer is scared to take part in televised debates in the run-up to the general election.

The prime minister said that he wanted to go "head to head as many times as possible over the next few weeks" with the Labour leader in a sign he believes Starmer may struggle to connect with voters under the spotlight.

Asked during a visit to Nigg Energy Park in the Highlands whether that meant he thought Starmer was fearful of debates, Sunak said: "People can read into that all they want. But he's had however many years to think about what he wants to do for the country and as I said the other day, he doesn't seem to be able to tell people what he wants to do, doesn't have a plan, doesn't have the courage of his convictions. But

that's why we need to have these debates, so we can actually debate these issues and people can make a decision on who they think it's going to provide a secure future for our country."

Starmer's team are understood to believe he will agree to only two debates, one on ITV and one on the BBC. He responded to Sunak's challenge last week by saying: "Bring it on."

Negotiations have been under way with broadcasters for months on the number of debates and what they would look like. At the 2019 election Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn went head to head twice. Other debates featured leaders of the smaller parties.

Sunak also ruled out a deal with the Reform Party to try to stay in power. He said he was "not really focused on personalities elsewhere" when asked about Nigel Farage's decision not to stand. Asked about the prospect of a pact, he said: "Of course I can rule that out."

after the election

Digital arms race fires up in clash of the big spenders

On the first day of the campaign trail, Rishi Sunak arrived at Inverness airport to meet Scottish Conservatives, Sir Ed Davey spoke to Lib Dem supporters in Cheltenham, and Sir Keir Starmer indulged in some traditional baby-greeting at Gillingham Football Club in Kent



STEFAN ROUSSEAU, ANDREW MATTHEWS/PA; STEVE FINN



Lara Spirit Red Box Editor

The Conservatives and Labour have launched a multimillion-pound digital campaign blitz as they take advantage of newly relaxed election spending limits before the most expensive poll in British history.

The parties have begun the digital arms race after a raised spending cap meant they could pour millions more pounds into adverts on social media in this election than was permitted in 2019. Parties can spend £35 million in this election, up from £19.5 million in 2019. The limit was changed in November to take into account rising inflation.

It raises the importance of digital advertising campaigns for parties, which can target voters more directly and inexpensively than traditional face-to-face canvassing.

On Facebook, where the Tories launched advertisements after Rishi Sunak announced the general election for July 4, the party has concentrated attention on attacking Sir Keir Starmer. Graphics featuring images of Sunak and Starmer show the prime minister in a suit and tie whereas Starmer is pictured in a casual T-shirt. Some have the words “stick with Rishi’s clear plan” above Sunak and “risk it all with no plan” above the Labour leader.

The graphics contrast Tory claims of progress on bringing down NHS waiting lists, small-boat crossings and inflation with the words: “Keir has had five years to tell us what he stands for.”

Yesterday the Tories launched adverts attacking Labour’s commitment to scrap the Rwanda plan if it wins the election. The video features Starmer stating the policy followed by the Tory campaign message “Keir Starmer would stop the planes, not the boats”.

Meanwhile, Labour looks like it will opt for a digital campaign focused more heavily on the testimony of voters who have changed their minds, with messages suggesting a strategy aimed more at reassuring would-be Tory voters than mobilising its own core vote.

In one video, which is now inactive, a woman called Sheelagh tells the camera that “the country isn’t being



Tory advertisements claim that unlike Labour the party has a “clear plan”

governed”, with the caption also explaining that she will be voting for Labour “unlike in past general elections”. Another reads: “As a small-business owner, Kevin has voted Conservative all his life but next time he’s voting Labour. Here’s why.”

The videos are expected to form part of a diverse package of content, sitting alongside conventional clips calling for volunteers and repeating the party’s campaign messages.

Labour also released a graphic calling for donations with the words “the Tories have outspent Labour at every election”, with a graph showing the higher Tory spending in the 2015, 2017 and 2019 general elections.

That is despite hopes among senior Labour figures that fundraising will not be a problem in the campaign. Labour received its highest-ever figure of private donations last year after three major donors gave significant sums. Gary Lubner, the former Autoglass boss, gave £4.5 million, while the largest single donation of £3 million was provided by Lord Sainsbury of Turville. Dale Vince, the Ecotricity boss, gave more than £1 million. Even so, Labour received about £19 million in cash donations to the central party overall, well below the £42 million secured by the Tories.

The Liberal Democrats also have numerous digital advertisements active with some including graphs seeking to maximise tactical voting against the Tories in target seats, claiming that “Labour can’t beat the Tories here”.

Drizzled PM dries out and heads for a cheer-up in a brewery

Patrick Kidd
Political Sketch

After the deluge in Downing Street that launched his election campaign, Rishi Sunak hoped for better optics at a brewery in south Wales yesterday. A brave move, given there are many who think he can’t organise the proverbial beer-fest in such a location. And so it proved. The Inverse Midas really does have rotten luck.

Sitting at a table with a bevy of brewers, the prime minister eagerly asked if they were looking forward to “all the football”. There was an awkward pause. “Not so much my bag,” one Barry brewer said. Sunak smiled, perhaps wondering if this was a rigger crowd, until another brewer, whose accent suggested he was from the other side of Offa’s Dyke, explained why. “That’s

because you guys aren’t in it,” he said, a touch too cheerfully. Wales went out of qualifying for Euro 2024 on penalties in March.

The prime minister could only laugh and say that surely people would still be watching the games and drinking, failing to understand Welsh tribalism. “Some people will be supporting anyone that plays England,” Alun Cairns, the local MP, said. Sunak gulped. “There’s also some cricket before then,” he suggested. So that’s the rest of the season washed out.

He’d had an easier ride that morning, when he visited a distribution centre in Derbyshire and was asked a couple of soft questions about improving people’s finances and stopping the boats. And what good fortune, for a change, that two of the workers he picked at random turned out to be Conservative councillors. Given Sunak’s luck, I’m surprised he didn’t call on Dennis Skinner.

Back in Westminster, there had been a discussion that morning in the Reform UK team about whether Richard Tice should describe Sunak’s soggy election launch as being “more Dignitas than dignity”. They decided against it but there was still plenty of exuberant crowing from the party leader. “He’s bottled it,” he declared, describing the PM as “wee Rishi” taking orders from “Big Lord Dave”.

Tice was buoyed by the news that Nigel Farage, the party’s Eternal Leader, would not be making an eighth attempt to get elected as an MP but would be an active part of the campaign, when American TV commitments allowed. Tice is a sleeker figure than his

party’s honorary president, more fox than toad, but if you close your eyes when he speaks there is a good dose of Farage in his mock-shock mannerisms. “Goodness me! You couldn’t make it up! Call yourselves experts?”

If Reform leaders have their way, this election will be all about immigrants. A big graph behind Tice apparently showed there was no increase in migration to Britain from the dawn of history until 1997 when there was an enormous whoosh. The dawn of history, incidentally, was set at 1066, a year when some think that Britain experienced quite a significant influx of foreigners. People with French-sounding names. Like Farage.



Meanwhile, Labour was playing it safe by going to a small football ground in Kent, where Sir Keir Starmer rubbed the first baby’s head of his campaign and spoke about the “power of democracy” in front of a few dozen supporters as they cheered and waved placards that said “Change”. Is this as difficult as it gets? Campaigning on cruise-control.

While Sunak was visiting Conservative-held seats, Starmer was parking his electric car on the enemy lawn, since Gillingham is represented, with a 15,000 majority, by Rehman Chishty, a man often talked about as a future Tory leader, if only by himself. Starmer noted that when Gillingham had a Labour MP, the football team had been in the same league as Manchester City. This was slight sophistry — City were down in the old third division in 1999 — but raised a laugh. For some reason he didn’t mention that the town’s last Labour MP wound up in prison.

News Election

Farage to do his bit for Reform while on the Trump trail

Geraldine Scott
Senior Political Correspondent

Nigel Farage will be “highly active” on the campaign trail for Reform UK despite not standing as an MP, helping the successor to Ukip and the Brexit Party train its sights on moderate Tories.

Farage, the former Reform UK leader, yesterday ruled out returning to frontline politics, instead focusing his efforts on helping Donald Trump in the American election in November. He is, however, expected to appear on doorsteps and at rallies, having given up his programme on GB News for six weeks.

Richard Tice, who became Reform UK's leader in 2021, said he was “thrilled” Farage would be helping out. “He’ll be pushing the same message and helping us get seats elected,” Tice said. “He’ll be everywhere. You won’t be able to hold him back.”

However, Ben Habib, the party's co-deputy leader who will stand in Wellingborough, appeared to have a coded dig at Farage's decision not to stand.

Speaking at the party's election launch, he said: “For any political movement to succeed, it needs a leader who is prepared to absolutely stay the distance and make the fight.” He said Tice “has the moral courage not to vacate either when the going gets tough, or when it might suit him”. Asked if he was referring to Farage, Habib said: “You interpret as you see fit. In any walk of life, you have to stay the distance.”

Farage, Reform UK's honorary president, was said to be ready to announce his candidacy before Rishi Sunak called the election, but decided that the date meant he would be more effective in a roving role. He said: “I will do my bit to help in the campaign, but it is not the right time for me to go any further.”

He added in a video: “For those who think, thank goodness, he's gone away, no, I haven't gone away. And at some point, I'll be back as a candidate as well. This is just not the right time for me. I've got one more big card to play in politics in my life. It's not now.” He has unsuccessfully stood for parliament several times, most recently in 2015.

Tice will stand in Boston and Skeg-

Behind the story

Nigel Farage's decision not to lead Reform into the election is without doubt a relief for Tory strategists (Geraldine Scott and Oliver Wright write).

Polling by YouGov for *The Times* last week found that if Farage had decided to join the fight, support for Reform would have increased by three points, from 13 per cent. The former Ukip leader is a formidable campaigner with a proven record of shaping the political debate in a way that Reform's leader, Richard Tice, is not.

The hope in Tory HQ is that, without a charismatic frontman, Reform will struggle to get its message across and will see its vote squeezed.

Reform wants to make the election solely about immigration, replicating its position in recent by-elections in which, if Reform voters had backed the Tories instead, the latter would have won.

There is a world, however, in which Farage's refusal to take a dedicated position could still hurt Rishi Sunak. If Farage had become

leader, he would have had to stand as an MP and run a local campaign. As it is, his ability to pop up at any time anywhere in the country may mean that he remains a cloud over the Tory campaign — and he said yesterday that he had not gone away.

Even without Farage, Reform is a significant threat to Conservatives in red wall seats, which they need to hold if they are to have any chance of remaining in power. To put it in context, in the 2019 election the Brexit party won 2 per cent of the vote. The Tories will have to pull off a remarkable feat to squeeze Reform's support to anywhere near that level.

The message from the Conservatives will be that a vote for Reform is a vote for Labour and an end to the Rwandan deportation scheme. Tory strategists also hope that the snap election will be problematic for Reform, which lacks funding and a well-organised campaign structure.

Although Reform will be standing 630 candidates in England, Wales and Scotland, it was not able to register in time to stand its own

candidates in Northern Ireland and has instead teamed up with the Traditional Unionist Voice, or TUV.

Reform also faces a financial problem. In the last year it has reported only £255,000 worth of donations, far short of the kind of war chest it will need to fight a national campaign. Candidates have been asked to stump up their own £500 deposits, although they will be reimbursed if they get less than 5 per cent of the votes and therefore lose the money.

In the past Farage had been a magnet for right-of-centre donors such as Arron Banks, Stuart Wheeler and Paul Sykes, but Banks said that Reform's “entire vote was dependent on Nigel returning”. Tice has put in a significant amount of his own money, saying that nobody likes backing a party or company more than when the leader “puts the money where your mouth is”.

As one Conservative MP put it, however: “We're saying Labour doesn't have a plan, but if you really want to see a party without a plan, look at Reform.”



Nigel Farage, honorary president of Reform UK, said he would not stand in the

ness, where the Tory Matt Warman is the MP. Warman is the deputy chairman of the One Nation Caucus of moderate Conservatives, and Tice said he was standing there because Warman was “not a real Conservative”. Tice told *The Times*: “I call him a socialist, that's

the truth. He voted for all the things that have broken Britain.”

Warman said Tice would be bad for voters. He said: “I'm not complacent about Reform standing in this constituency — there is a real risk you could end up with someone who isn't interest-

Johnson wrecked Tories, says donor

David Byers

One of the Conservatives' most generous and longstanding multimillionaire donors has said he feels let down by the party, stating that its period in government has gone “tits up”.

Sir John Griffin, 81, the minicab tycoon who gave £4.08 million to the party between 2013 and 2019, blames Boris Johnson for its downfall through his “stupid” approach to leadership.

Griffin, who left school with no qualifications and survived childhood tuberculosis, founded the taxi firm Addison Lee. His son Liam, 51, is now chief executive.

In an interview at Griffin's central London mansion next to Regent's Park, which he is trying to sell for £22.5 million, he said he had always

supported the party because of its pro-business attitude and was close to Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton as prime minister. But that had changed, particularly since Johnson's attendance at parties during the Covid-19 lockdown.

“I tell you what, they've gone a bit tits up, that's all I can say,” he said.

Speaking the day before the general election was called, Griffin added: “I got to know Boris [Johnson] and, you know, I'm not overly impressed.

“As a politician, when ... people are really suffering badly, you don't go out and have a drink. I think it was stupid. So I really lost my taste for him ... I think that it has been damaging.”

He did not rule out making any donations to the Conservatives in future, saying that the party's pro-business instincts were “the way forward” and

some members of the Labour Party “have never impressed me”.

Griffin was giving the interview to discuss a two-year effort to sell his mansion, which was built in 1822.

His real estate agents called in a feng shui master, a process chronicled in the Channel 4 documentary *Britain's Most Expensive Houses*. The gamble failed and the property's asking price has since been reduced, first to £27 million and now to £22.5 million. Griffin said he did not know whether the furniture was still feng shui-compatible, adding: “It's all bullshit really.”

When approached again after the election announcement, Griffin said he believed Rishi Sunak was “a good man” and he would vote Conservative even though Johnson had left him “very annoyed” with the party.

Corbyn likely to stand as an independent against Labour

Max Kendix

Jeremy Corbyn is expected to announce that he is standing against Labour as an independent candidate in his north London constituency.

Corbyn, 74, who led the party between 2015 and 2020, faces expulsion as a Labour member.

He has been the MP for Islington North since 1983 but had the party whip removed in November 2020 after claiming that accusations of antisemitism under his leadership had been “dramatically overstated for political reasons”. He is thought to enjoy widespread support among local activists.

The Conservatives will be hoping

that the presence of the former Labour leader in the campaign will provide voters with a reminder of Sir Keir Starmer's loyalty to him in the shadow cabinet.

However, a Labour source said: “We are very happy to stand up and say that Keir's predecessor will not be a Labour candidate whereas Rishi Sunak's predecessor, who crashed the economy, will be a [Conservative] candidate and is still trying to be a backseat driver. So we are happy to draw that comparison.”

Praful Nargund, a local councillor, and Sem Moema, a former councillor who now sits on the London Assembly, are the only candidates to be presented to local Labour Party members.



STEVE FINN; TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER JACK HILL

election but would help its campaign. Richard Tice, the party leader, top left, will stand as a candidate in Boston & Skegness

ed in the local issues and hasn't got a track record — that's bad for people in the area and bad for parliament. Over the next six weeks I'll ... make the case on every doorstep: a vote for Richard Tice is a vote for Keir Starmer."

Tice said that Boston and Skegness

was a "great constituency" and was "nice and close" to Ashfield, where the Tory defector Lee Anderson, Reform UK's only MP, will stand. He will not campaign in Tory-held seats where the MPs are "friends" — Ben Bradley (Mansfield), Brendan Clarke-Smith

(Bassetlaw), Marco Longhi (Dudley North) and Nick Fletcher (Don Valley). Tice said: "It's really nice ... to have a bit of ... loyalty in the broken world of politics."

Voters should be aware what Reform UK is offering, leading article, page 25

Why 'tough boy' Sunak stood in rain

Steven Swinford Political Editor

Rishi Sunak decided to make his election address outside No10 in the pouring rain because he believed that it was in keeping with tradition.

The prime minister made clear to aides before going out that he wanted to make the address without an umbrella or any cover. He also ruled out delaying the address.

Sunak told LBC Radio: "I'm not going to deny that it was a bit wet. I'm not a fair-weather politician."

"I believe very strongly in the traditions of our country. And when you're making a statement of that magnitude as prime minister, I believe in just doing it in the traditional way, come rain and shine, in front of the steps of Downing Street."

Asked on BBC Radio 4's *Today* whether colleagues did not warn him he would get drenched, Sunak said: "I don't think people are focused on the weather."

"I mean, you know, we're British, we talk about the weather a lot, but I think this election will be more focused on the issues that you and I have been talking about. People will be pleased to know that I have got an umbrella with me today just in case."

An ally of Sunak said that he was "very clear" that he was going to make the address regardless of the weather.

As he gave his speech in the rain Sunak had to battle the sounds of the New Labour anthem *Things Can Only Get Better* being blasted from beyond the Downing Street gates. It led to headlines joking that "things can only

get wetter" for the prime minister.

Sir Keir Starmer, the labour leader, chose to stay out of the rain to respond to the election announcement, making a speech inside while flanked by Union Jacks.

James Cleverly, the home secretary, suggested that Sunak was "a tough boy" for braving the wet weather. He told ITV's *Peston*: "The fact is the prime minister has demonstrated throughout his career he's been willing to make the tough calls ..."

"Doing a speech in the rain with some idiot blaring some music is one of the easier things he's had to do. Keir Starmer had to do it indoors."

"He's a tough boy, he's a tough guy. And Keir Starmer had to run off inside to do his speech, and there you go — there's your choice."

Tories are in 'big trouble' but result is not clear cut

Tom Calver Data Editor

In some ways general election campaigns are full of surprises. In others, particularly in the age of daily opinion polling, they can feel predictable.

Whether it is the 21-point Labour lead or the countless Tory by-election defeats, there is a tendency among political commentators to conclude that the next six weeks will be the final leg of a procession towards an inevitable Labour victory.

But how do Britain's pollsters really think the campaign will pan out and who do they think will win?

First, some data. According to The Times poll tracker, which combines figures from several pollsters, the Tories are 21 points behind Labour with 42 days to go. To spell it out, no party has overturned such a deficit this close to an election. Labour has roughly the same lead as it had at the same stage leading up to the 1997 landslide.

For the Tories to win, two things probably have to happen: one, the polls need to narrow; two, the polls need to be wrong.

"We can pretty much guarantee that, right now anyway, the Tories are indeed in big trouble," said Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London. There may be big differences between pollsters in the size of the Labour lead, some have it on 16, others closer to 30 points, but all are "pointing in the same direction".

Professor Colin Rallings, who along with Professor Michael Thrasher has been producing election analysis for decades, thinks that voters will ultimately peel away from other parties such as Reform. "My suspicion is that as usual in British elections, because of our electoral system, at the sharp end of the campaign the question of 'who you want to run the country' pushes people back into two camps: Tory and Labour." He thinks current Tory poll ratings of 23 per cent will no doubt improve because of that.

For the electorate, there are a few unanswered questions that could change things between now and July 4, says Rob Ford, professor of political science at the University of Manchester. "It's unusual to have elections where neither major party's leader has fought a general election campaign. For many voters, this will actually be their introduction to Keir Starmer." Media coverage, including any TV debates, could be crucial.

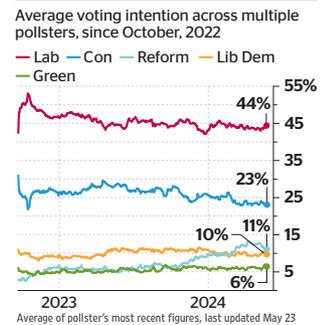
Mondeo Man, Waitrose Woman: in every election there is a model voter whose favour both parties must apparently curry in order to win. Who is this year's Workington Man?

In some ways, when there is such a gap between the parties, the very idea of a key swing voter is slightly redundant. "I'm not sure how useful the battleground approach is at this election," said the election night veteran Professor Sir John Curtice. "Labour are so far ahead that the Conservative-Labour frontline is seats with a Tory majority of 30 per cent."

But some groups are likely to be more important than others. Those who have switched from Tory to Labour are going to be hard to win back, yet about 15 per cent of the electorate remain undecided, according to YouGov, including 20 per cent who voted Tory in 2019.

To Luke Tryl, UK director of More In

UK general election poll tracker



Common, undecided voters who backed the Tories in 2019 will be key to minimising Tory damages. "We know from focus groups that these voters are the most receptive to the 'we've turned a corner' message," he said.

These undecided voters are 70 per cent female, tend to live in small towns, are homeowners and typically in their early 60s. "They live in places like Whitby, and Scarborough & Whitby is one of the seats that could get Labour the majority," Tryl added.

Whitby Woman, then, could hold the key to this election.

Another way of looking at the key areas, says Rallings, is by breaking the path to a Starmer premiership into three stages. "The first thing that the Tories have to do is lose their majority," he said. "That happens on a relatively small swing." The Liberal Democrats will help, pushing in former Tory strongholds.

The next stage is getting Labour to be the biggest party, which requires it winning back seats it recently lost. "The first places you begin to look are the seats held narrowly by the Tories, or those in the red wall, places that Labour lost in 2019 and 2017."

The final stage, which gets Labour to a majority, is winning some of the seats that Tony Blair's Labour could rely upon. "Places like Worcester, Nuneaton and Dover, which typically back the election winner, are exactly where Labour needs to win in order to build up a majority."

Looking at these stages, and where the seats are, it becomes clear the scale of Starmer's challenge. "It's not like Labour can concentrate their campaign in the north or the south. They've got to go everywhere and win seats back all over," said Rallings.

But there is another factor on Labour's side: demography. The young vote Labour, and the old Tory. According to figures by the election researcher Dylan Difford, by doing nothing, Labour has gained 800,000 new voters who came of age since 2019; some 1.35 million Conservative voters, on the other hand, have died.

Curtice is "all too wary" of making seat projections, but has put the Tories' chance of being the largest party at one in 100. To Bale, prediction is a mug's game, but he says that "unless things change really drastically, Labour's lead will be comfortable". Ford agrees that a "comfortable majority" is likely.

The public, meanwhile, appear to have made up their minds: 57 per cent of voters, according to YouGov, believe Labour will win an overall majority.

News Election

From immigration to crime, how the battle lines are being drawn

Oliver Wright, Chris Smyth
Steven Swinford

Over the next six weeks, Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer will set out their contrasting plans for Britain, competing for votes on July 4. What do we know of the battle lines so far, and which issues will define the campaign?

The economy

CONSERVATIVES
Rishi Sunak wants to put the economy — and most importantly his handling of it — front and centre of the Conservative campaign for another five years in power.

The key Tory argument is that Sunak

inherited a financial crisis caused by Covid and the war in Ukraine but has since, with the help of Jeremy Hunt, his chancellor, returned the economy to growth, brought down inflation and started cutting taxes. The Conservative manifesto is likely to go further with the promise of more tax cuts, in the hope that Labour will not follow suit and

create a key dividing line between the two parties.

Tory strategists also hope that over a six-week campaign, voters will begin to question whether they can really trust Labour with the economic stewardship of the country and conclude that it is Sunak rather than Starmer who is best placed to make them better off over the coming years.

LABOUR

For very different reasons, Labour also wants to put the economy at the centre of their campaign. Their polling and focus groups show that voters largely do not give Sunak credit for falling inflation and, critically, are yet to see benefits of nascent economic growth in their personal finances.

Labour's strategy is to lump Sunak in with Liz Truss and squarely blame the Tories for the cost of living crisis. They will also attack Sunak for being insensitive when he says that things are improving, pointing out that most families are much worse off than they were five years ago.

But as well as attacking the Tories, Labour knows it also has to reassure voters about its own plans for the economy. There will be no big new spending pledges in the manifesto, and a clear promise not to "raise taxes on working people".

Immigration

CONSERVATIVES

The Tories are trying to make migration a key dividing line of the campaign. Their hopes of doing so, however, got off to a difficult start after Sunak admitted that deportation flights to Rwanda would not take off before voters go to the polls on July 4.

Given that the Tories have spent months arguing that flights will go — and that even Starmer accepted that they were likely to do so — not having proof of concept before polling day is likely to mean a difficult sell for the Tories. But the concern among Sunak's allies was that the Tories would have been in a far worse position before the election if they had promised flights that had failed to take off.

Government lawyers had said that there was an increasing likelihood that legal challenges — which have already been submitted — would delay the first flight beyond Sunak's plans for early July. The fact that flights are unlikely to take off will not stop Rwanda being an election issue.

The Tories will argue that Labour has no real deterrent to offer and that small boats will come in record numbers. Sunak has claimed that under Labour Britain will become a "magnet" for migrants from all over Europe.

On legal migration, Sunak has pointed to figures showing that he has turned the tide on record net migration levels, which fell by 10 per cent last year from an all-time high of 764,000 in 2022 to 685,000 — although this is still three times more than in 2019, when the Conservatives pledged to reduce numbers.

LABOUR

Labour has branded the Rwanda scheme an expensive "gimmick" that will not work in deterring small-boat crossings. Starmer has tried to pitch a more pragmatic and sensible approach that is not reliant on an untested policy that is not sure to work.

He has pledged to pour resources into targeting people-smuggling gangs, focusing on the supply side of the issue.

Labour says it will set up a new Border Security Command that will bring together police, the Border Force, prosecutors and MI5 agents to ensure a more co-ordinated and efficient approach to closing down illegal routes into Britain.

The defection of Natalie Elphicke, the MP for Dover, helped Starmer in his goal of trying to neutralise small boats as an issue that the Tories hope to weaponise as it is one of the few big dividing lines between the two parties. When Sunak accuses him of lacking a plan to stop the boats, Starmer can hit back by pointing to the fact that Sunak's own MP for Dover concluded that his plan was so incompetent she decided to defect. On legal migration, which has traditionally been a sticky wicket for Labour, the party has accused the Conservatives of losing control of the numbers as they have presided over record levels in the past three years.

It has pledged to introduce formal controls linking the points-based immigration system with the availability of skills among the domestic workforce, but has refused to set out any rough target figure for what it wants net migration to be in the longer term.

Security and defence

CONSERVATIVES

This will be the first election since the Cold War in which defence and security will be a key battleground issue. Sunak intends to use the threats posed by Russia and China, as well as the crisis in the Middle East, to reinforce the Tories' election message that it is too risky to elect an untested Labour Party into power.

In particular, Sunak will use his pledge to increase defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2030 as a dividing line with Labour. He will also deploy the former prime minister and now foreign secretary Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton to make the argument that only the Tories have the experienced leadership to navigate the UK through a period of global uncertainty.

Also expect attacks on Starmer's role in Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet to make the point that the Labour leader cannot be trusted on defence, and will say or do anything to win power.

LABOUR

Labour realise that they are potentially vulnerable on defence and security and intend to neutralise it as an issue as much as possible.

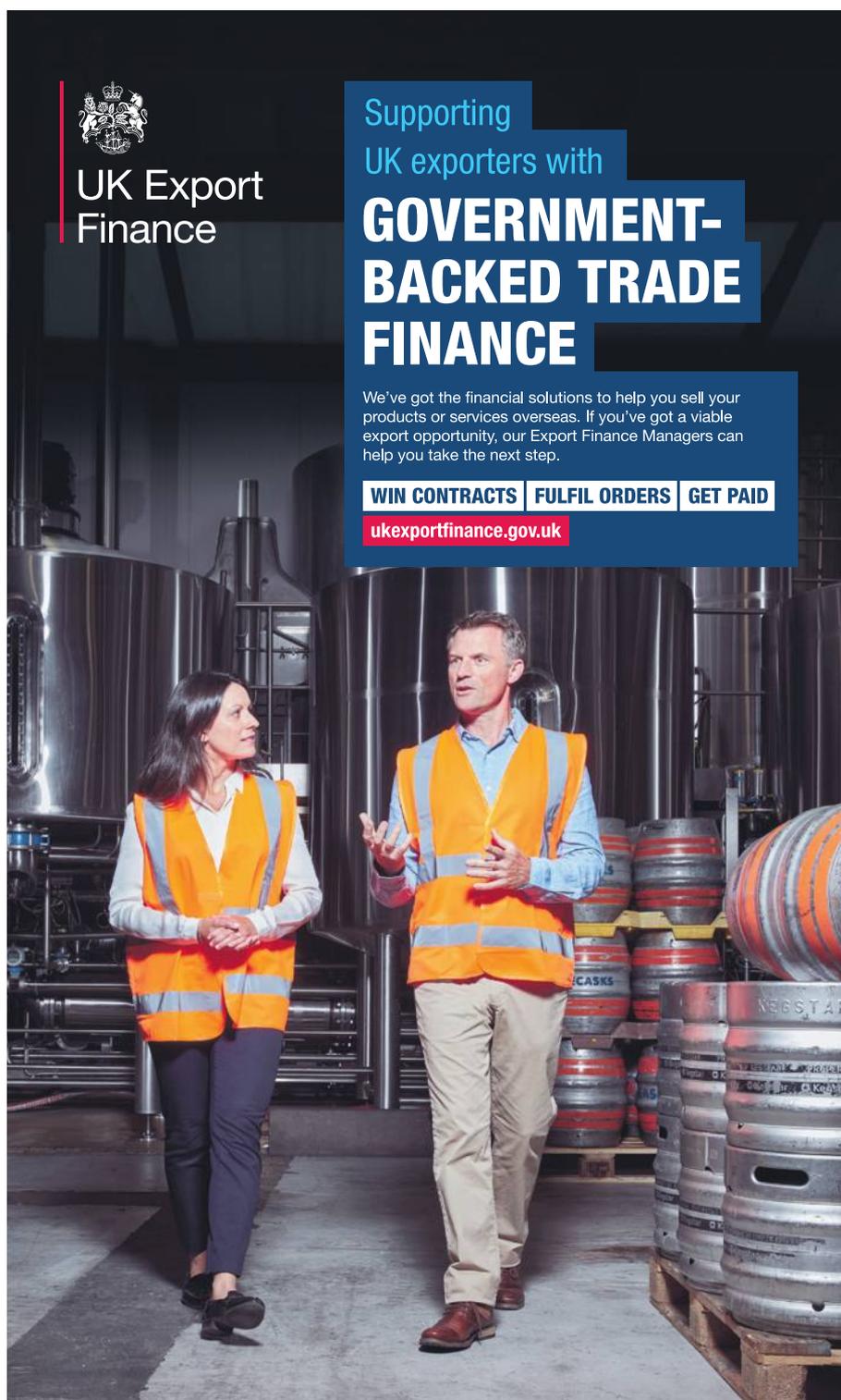
So far Labour have refused to match Sunak's pledge to raise defence spending to 2.5 per cent, but have said that in principle they support the policy and will commit to a timescale when it is affordable to do so. However, depending on how the campaign goes it is possible that this stance will be hardened in the Labour manifesto.

Labour are also nervous about Tory attacks on Starmer in this area. This is part of the reason why the Labour leader has been emphasising that he will put "country first and party second".

Net zero

CONSERVATIVES

The Conservatives sense an opportunity to exploit voters' concern that Britain's transition to net zero will put added costs on to their already stretched finances. To this end Sunak has already pushed back the complete ban on the sales on new petrol and die-




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DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

Angela Rayner, Labour's deputy leader, says she will resign if she is found to have committed a crime



Rayner inquiry to end before election

The investigation by police into Angela Rayner is expected to be concluded before the election, with Labour increasingly confident she will be cleared, The Times understands (Fiona Hamilton and Steven Swinford write).

An announcement on the fate of the Labour deputy leader, who has faced questions over where she lived in the 2010s and the sale of her former council house in Stockport, is expected within a week or so. Rayner's allies hope that Greater Manchester police will make a clear statement so that questions about the investigation do not plague her campaign for re-election.

Detectives have focused on whether Rayner, 44, gave false information for the electoral register when she lived between two former council houses in Stockport. She has been accused of potential breaches of the Representation of the People Act 1983. But the police are unlikely to send a file to the Crown Prosecution Service because charges must be brought within 12 months of an alleged offence. Police are investigating other allegations, beyond electoral offences, and have not ruled out referrals to agencies such as HMRC.

Rayner has insisted she lived primarily in her own home, in Vicarage Road, while her then husband, and father to two of her three children, lived a mile away. This has been contradicted by former neighbours, who said she lived with her husband and children, and a political aide who gave a statement to police.

It has prompted questions over whether she failed to pay capital gains tax on the sale of the house she owned, and also about her council tax arrangements, after neighbours claimed her

brother lived there and Rayner had described herself as the "landlord".

Rayner has been under investigation for six weeks. Her spokesman previously said she "looks forward to sitting down with the appropriate authorities, including the police and HMRC, to set out the facts and draw a line under this matter". However, Labour has refused to say whether a formal interview has taken place. The Times understands that detectives first sent Rayner a series of questions which were answered in writing.

Rayner, 44, has promised to resign if she is found to have committed a crime but has said she took legal and tax advice and is confident she has done nothing wrong. Sir Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, has backed her and said he does not need to see the advice.

Last week Stephen Watson, the Greater Manchester police chief, defended the decision to investigate Rayner and said that the police would not get drawn into "political spats". He added that "we should just simply play that stuff with a straight bat ..."

Labour are keen for police to make an announcement before the election campaign gets into full swing.

Other recent inquiries into politicians have been affected by purdah — the period before an election when ministers and civil servants must take care about announcements or decisions that might affect the campaign. But while the police will want to avoid any possible prejudice to the election, criminal investigations and other police work can continue during the campaign.

Labour said: "We remain ... confident that Angela has complied with the rules at all times and it's now appropriate to let the police do their work."

pledge card. Labour will also promise to broaden the curriculum to put more emphasis on creative subjects such as music, art and sport which they argue have been deprioritised by the government. On childcare, Labour are likely to ultimately endorse the government's free hours offer to neutralise the issue.

Work and benefits

CONSERVATIVES

In recent months, Sunak has increasingly been stressing welfare reform as an election dividing line. In a speech last month, he set out a "moral mission" to get people back to work by overhauling the benefits system. This is likely to involve removing disability benefits payments from people with a range of mental-health conditions, as well as taking responsibility for sick notes away from GPs so that people are referred to occupational health services rather than signed off.

Sunak will argue that only the Conservatives are able to make tough decisions to get people back to work and control "spiralling" welfare spending, which he has said is "obviously financially unsustainable" and will suck money from other public services.

Mel Stride, the work and pensions secretary, has accused Labour of refusing to say whether they back the reforms in a "Ming vase" strategy designed to avoid controversy.

LABOUR

As in so many other areas, Labour's strategy is to blame the Conservatives for pushing up economic inactivity since the pandemic and long-term sickness to a record 2.8 million. Liz Kendall, the shadow work and pensions secretary, accepts that with sickness benefit spending projected to rise by £20 billion over the next parliament, reversing the rise will be "central" to Labour's hopes to fund better public services.

However, the party has carefully avoided committing itself either way on Tory reforms. Instead, Labour seeks to argue that improving the NHS and mental healthcare in school will deal with the "root causes" of rising claims for sickness benefits.

Crime

CONSERVATIVES

Crime, and the police response to it, have been rising up the agenda for voters. Sunak is likely to make tougher sentencing and a crackdown on antisocial behaviour a key part of the Conservative manifesto. He is also likely to promise more restrictions on disruptive protests in response to concerns over Gaza rallies.

LABOUR

Labour also sees crime as an area in which it can win votes, not least by playing on perceptions that crime has got worse in recent years. They are promising to halve incidents of knife crime and reverse the decline in the proportions of crimes that are unsolved.

Starmer is also promising to put 13,000 more neighbourhood police and support officers on the streets with increased penalties for shoplifting and new "zero-tolerance zones" in town centres to stop antisocial behaviour.

The leaders

CONSERVATIVES

Sunak wants to put Starmer at the front and centre of his own campaign. For him, it is personal. Sunak argues that Starmer has shown "time and time again" that he would "take the easy way out" and "do anything" to win power.

LABOUR

As Sunak is going personal, Starmer is taking a different approach. Rather than targeting Sunak directly, the Labour leader is trying to tie him in with all those who have gone before him, particularly Truss. Starmer is saying that this is a choice not between two men, but between a more stable future under Labour or more Tory chaos.

sel cars from 2030 to 2035, and delayed the so-called boiler tax that was designed to force manufacturers to install more heat pumps.

He will contrast these moves with Labour's climate change plans, which he will depict as ideologically driven and unaffordable — pushing up energy bills and the cost of driving.

However, well aware that most voters support net zero ambitions, Sunak will argue that the UK will still meet its international obligations, just in a way that protects family finances.

LABOUR

Labour is also keen to campaign on net zero, but from a different perspective.

Starmer and Rachel Reeves, his shadow chancellor, will argue that investing in renewable energy is critical to boosting economic growth and bringing high-paying jobs into "red wall" areas of the country that the party wants to retake from the Tories. They say that their plans to borrow money to invest in green technology will reduce energy

bills by £93 billion and make the UK more secure. To this end Labour is pledging to bring forward the date by which the UK's power system is to be decarbonised, from 2035 to 2030.

The NHS

CONSERVATIVES

The Conservatives start on the defensive over the health service, given that waiting lists have risen since Sunak promised to bring them down. He was forced to start the campaign acknowledging that "we haven't made as much progress on NHS waiting lists as I would have liked", with waiting lists 300,000 higher than when he pledged to reduce them. His strategy is to point to a reduction of more than 200,000 in the past six months and suggest that more could have been done without doctors' strikes. Sunak will blame Covid for the struggles of the NHS and ask people to stick with incremental progress, pointing to record numbers of

doctors and nurses to counter accusations of Conservative neglect.

LABOUR

Voter dissatisfaction with long waits for all types of NHS care is a key electoral weapon for Labour. Starmer will seek to ensure that the Conservatives get the blame, pointing out that waiting times were rising well before Covid and targets have not been hit for more than a decade.

Although Starmer is not promising huge amounts of cash, he is offering targeted injections such as £1 billion for more evening and weekend treatment, hoping that voters will see this as a down payment on future progress. Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, argues that reform rather than cash is the best way to improve the NHS.

Education

CONSERVATIVES

Sunak is keen to highlight the Conservatives' record on education, dating back

to Cameron's time in power. He used his speech outside Downing Street to point to the fact that UK children are now the best readers in the western world.

The Tories also sense an opportunity in more affluent areas to campaign on Labour plans to impose VAT on private schools. They will argue that this will penalise normal families who make sacrifices to do the best for their children, and put more pressure on the state system. Sunak is also keen to highlight the government's roll-out of up to 30 free hours of childcare a week for pre-school children. Labour have still not confirmed whether they will stick with this plan.

LABOUR

Labour is equally happy to have a battle with the Tories over its private school plan, believing that it will win them more votes than it will lose them.

Starmer intends to focus on what the new tax will pay for — namely 6,500 new teachers in the state sector, which is one of the promises on Labour's

ROGER ARBON/SOLENT



The couple lived at Moundsmere Manor in Hampshire, which has 18 bedrooms

Retired banker wins back £20m as divorce payout cut

Jonathan Ames Legal Editor
Catherine Baksi

Judges have cut £20 million from a divorce award to the ex-wife of a retired banker in a ruling believed to involve the biggest reduction to such a settlement in legal history.

Lawyers for Clive Standish, 70, a former chief financial officer at the global investment bank UBS, convinced three appeal judges the original award of £45 million should be reduced

to £25 million. Both the percentage cut — 45 — and the total are said to be the largest such figures for a divorce ordered by a Court of Appeal judge.

However, the legal battle is likely to continue: Standish's ex-wife, Anna, 55, said she would take her fight to the Supreme Court.

In a unanimous ruling handed down yesterday, the appeal court said an earlier High Court judge's application of "the sharing principle" had been "flawed". That had resulted in "an unjustified division of the family's wealth in the wife's favour".

In backing the husband's arguments, the appeal judges also rejected an attempt by the ex-wife to increase the award to £66 million. Giving the main ruling, Lord Justice Moylan, who was sitting with Lady Justice King and Lord Justice Phillips, said "a fair application of the sharing principle would have resulted in the wife receiving/retaining wealth of approximately £25 million".

The case will return to the High Court where a judge will be required to conduct a "needs assessment".

The ruling was centred on a division of assets and did not hear arguments from the ex-wife's lawyers.

The judge noted that lawyers for the retired banker had argued in court that £25 million would more than cover his ex-wife's needs. Nonetheless, he said that "very regrettably" it was necessary for the case to be sent back to the High Court.

At the appeal hearing, lawyers for the husband argued he had

earned the vast majority of the wealth before marrying in 2005. The court was told that towards the end of the marriage, he had transferred substantial wealth to his wife as part of an estate planning arrangement though it was never implemented.

Anna Standish described the ruling as "unfair", saying it created "an extraordinary precedent". She argued in court that in 2017 her ex-husband gave her £80 million as an irrevocable gift to minimise a tax liability.

The court battle pitted two lawyers against each other who had once both represented Sir Paul McCartney in his acrimonious divorce in 2008 from Heather Mills. McCartney's solicitor, Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia, advised Anna Standish while Tim Bishop KC, who was instructed by Shackleton in the McCartney divorce, was representing Clive Standish.

Clive Standish retired from UBS in 2007 and the couple, who lived at Moundsmere Manor, an 18-bedroom mansion with 83 acres of land near the village of Preston Candover,

Hampshire, lived off the profits of a sheep farm in Australia. The High Court was told that after Anna Standish filed for divorce she told her husband she would "get him out" of their home.

Clive Standish was later cleared of assaulting his wife after she accused him of "barging" through a door she had tried to lock behind her and raising his fists at a bystander.

Anna Standish said she would take the fight with her ex-husband, Clive, to the Supreme Court



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Russia spy suspect 'had MP details'

Ben Ellery Crime Editor

A man appeared in court yesterday charged with disclosing details about an MP to undercover officers posing as agents of Russia's intelligence service.

Howard Phillips, 64, from Harlow, Essex, is accused of assisting Russians, contrary to section 3 of the National Security Act. He was arrested in central London last week.

Mark Lockett, for the prosecution, told Westminster magistrates' court that Phillips had "sensitive information" about an MP which he passed to people he believed were working for "foreign powers".

Phillips, who wore a grey tracksuit and spoke only to confirm his name and date of birth, is alleged to have booked a hotel and bought a mobile phone for a foreign intelligence service.

He was also alleged to have acquired the personal details of an MP, which he disclosed to a foreign intelligence service. The MP was not named in court.

District judge Daniel Sternberg remanded Phillips in custody before a preliminary hearing at the Old Bailey on June 14. The Met said the inquiry was led by counterterrorism officers.

Morale of troops falls to new low

Larisa Brown Defence Editor

Morale among the armed forces is worsening, with new data showing almost six in ten personnel rate spirits as "low".

The armed forces continuous attitude survey, published yesterday, found 58 per cent of those questioned rated morale this year as low. This has risen for the third consecutive year and is up 16 percentage points since 2021. Just one in ten rate morale as high.

The survey noted that for the first time since 2020, service morale is one of the top five factors influencing intentions to leave.

MPs say the Ministry of Defence is facing a recruitment and retention crisis. Recruits are signing to join but many withdraw their applications because the process takes too long.

The survey indicated that 23 per cent of service personnel plan to leave, with 6 per cent intending to go as soon as they can. Three per cent have already submitted their notice to leave.

An MoD spokeswoman said: "We want our armed forces personnel to feel properly rewarded ... and their views are not only valued but intrinsic to how we shape service life."

Save our sitcoms, pleads BBC chief

Alex Farber Media Correspondent

The BBC's director of comedy has issued a plea to television producers to "save our sitcom" as he warned that the genre faces extinction.

Jon Petrie said the triple-whammy effect of strikes, inflation and recession had negatively affected the next generation of the classic British sitcom that should follow successes such as *Gavin and Stacey*, *Only Fools and Horses*, *This Country* and *Ghosts*.

"Audiences want to laugh about things they see in their own lives — relatable characters, recognisable worlds, familiar voices. That's why workplace and family sitcoms are so enduring and are watched again and again. They're the bedrock of the UK's incredible sitcom landscape," Petrie said.

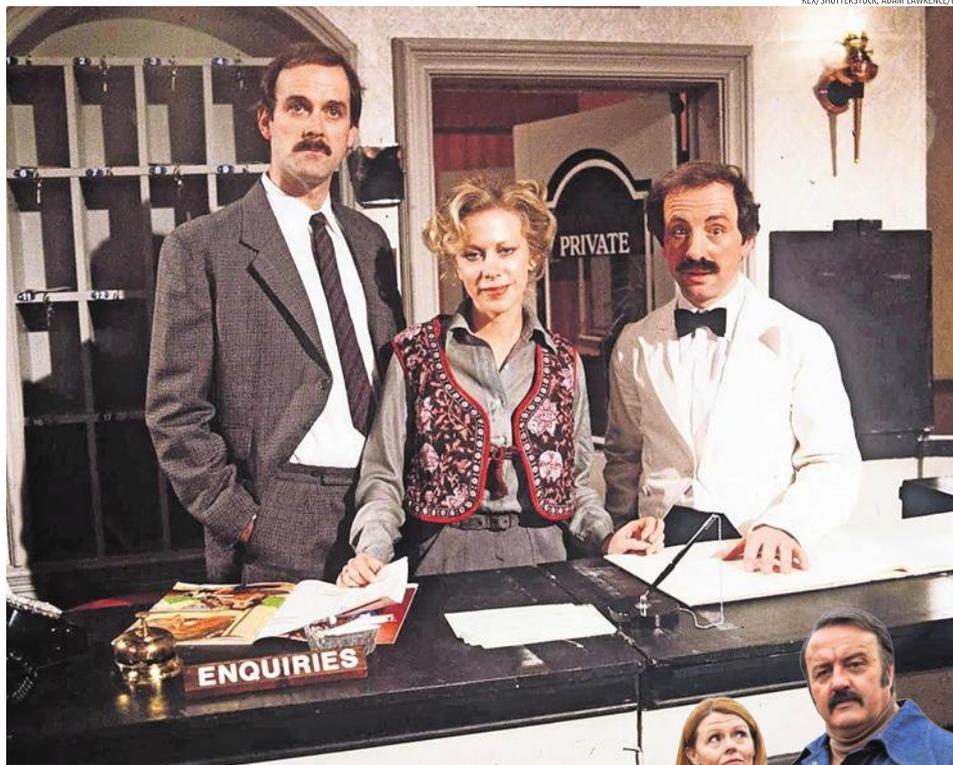
"But the truth is we're still not getting pitched enough of the comedy we need to keep people happy. The sitcom isn't dead but it needs a couple of Berocca [energy boost supplements]. And a black americano with two sugars."

Addressing television producers at the BBC Comedy Festival in Glasgow yesterday morning, Petrie chastised them for failing to pitch "enough sitcom ideas with big laughs".

He announced a revival after eight years of the "family favourite" *Outnumbered*, starring Hugh Dennis — a Christmas special will air alongside James Corden and Ruth Jones's *Gavin & Stacey*, which will return for a festive finale after a five-year hiatus. The shows will help plug the gap left by *Ghosts*, which bowed out on Christmas Day after five series.

As he seeks a new crop of programmes, Petrie urged producers to be braver, concerned that they were dodging mass-appeal shows out of a fear of failure and bad reviews.

"We know nothing can get hammered like a new sitcom, even shows



Classic sitcoms such as *Fawlty Towers* have a long shelf life. *Outnumbered*, top, is to return at Christmas while *Mammoth*, right, is getting a second series

that have gone on to become massive hits," he said. "But it's worth facing those fears because mainstream comedy is what audiences love best. It's written right through our comedy heritage and is so close to our hearts. It can

tell our stories and bring us together like nothing else. That's why audiences and critics feel so passionately about it and have such a strong sense of ownership."

Before the return next week of *The*



Outlaws, which stars Stephen Merchant and Christopher Walken, Petrie said the BBC was "oversupplied" with comedy dramas, which are considered easier to sell to international broadcasters. He highlighted *Here We Go*, *Not Going Out* and *Two Doors Down* as examples of cheaper programmes that could be fully funded by the BBC and were quicker and easier to make as a result.

Petrie is pinning his hopes on *Mammoth*, which stars Mike Bubbins as a PE teacher from the 1970s who is brought back to life after being discovered frozen in ice. One of Bubbins's co-stars in the show, Sian Gibson, also appears in *The Power of Parker*. Both are returning for second series.

Petrie cited the success of the BBC comedies *Black Ops* and *Such Brave Girls* at the Bafta television awards as he argued that the broadcaster had been responsible for eight of the most-watched scripted comedies on television last year.

According to a Radio Times survey published in September, people's happiness increases by 22 per cent after watching a good comedy — Petrie noted that it was "the same percentage of happiness [experienced by] people who think they've lost their keys and then find their keys".

More risks will keep the sitcom alive, leading article, page 25

Are we having a laugh? No, we're only mildly amused

Ben Dowell
Comment

Warnings about the dire state of TV comedy are nearly as old as the television set. Comedy ignites passion. Viewers react — or should react — with a physical response.

In a world where television is increasingly streamed, comedy has a long shelf life, as repeats of *Dad's Army* and *Fawlty Towers* show.

Jon Petrie, the BBC head of comedy, is right to want more sitcoms aimed at being funny rather than at telling stories. Live comedy is thriving but many funny people are not finding their way on to the small screen.

And when their ideas do make it, they don't want to write broad appeal sitcoms. It is a frustration of many

executives at the BBC and Channel 4 — the seedbed of so many great comedies — that so many ideas are personal stories.

Wariness about "cancellation" doesn't help original voices to succeed in a form where breaking taboos is often the way to make things funny.

One senses young comedians tend to look inside themselves. I don't want to sound like an old fogey but past successes tended to look joyously outward, whether it was character comedies such as *Alan Partridge* or vicious satires such as *The Day Today*.

Breakthrough hits today are often mildly amusing personal tales, such as the new BBC comedies *Juice* — about the star's work and boyfriend struggles — or *Dinosaur* about a young neurodivergent woman. Perhaps it's the *Fleabag* effect but a change is overdue.

One brilliant BBC success was *Such Brave Girls*, which won a Bafta script award. Yes, it was partly based on the writer Kat Sadler's anxiety. But every sequence was designed to make laugh-out-loud comedy.

Another big problem is financial, which Petrie alludes to. It is virtually impossible to fund TV sketch shows these days given the budgets they require for sets and costumes.

Many producers tell me they don't pitch as much to the BBC and Channel 4 because comedy development can move at a glacial pace. And when they send in good scripts, they don't feel the broadcasters have the resources to be as supportive as possible. One could say Petrie sounds like a manager blaming the referee.

There is a lot of work to do but it sounds as if he is at least on the right track. Ben Dowell is deputy TV editor

NS&I interest rate changes

NS
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Definitions

Gross is the taxable rate of interest payable without the deduction of UK Income Tax. AER (Annual Equivalent Rate) illustrates what the annual rate of interest would be if the interest was compounded each time it was paid. Where interest is paid annually, the quoted rate and the AER are the same.

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News

Euthanasia Briton dies on the beach

Kieran Gair

A terminally ill British woman who moved to New Zealand and planned to take her own life has died "on a beach in the sunshine", as her family urged politicians in Britain to change the law on assisted dying.

Tracy Hickman, who had terminal breast cancer, died aged 57 on Wednesday at a secluded beach in New Zealand, where it is legal for people to end their lives in certain circumstances.

Dom Harvey, a close friend, said: "Tracy Hickman passed away peacefully today. She was on a beach in the sunshine, surrounded by her loved ones. It was exactly what she wanted. It was an honour being able to share her story."

Hickman, who held dual British and New Zealand nationality, had chosen to die under a law that allows competent adults to choose an assisted death if they have a terminal illness, have less than six months to live, are in an "advanced state of irreversible decline in physical capability" and are experiencing "unbearable suffering" that cannot be relieved. Assisted dying on the grounds of mental illness, disability or advanced age are ruled out.

The law came into effect in 2021, a year after almost two thirds of voters supported

assisted dying in a referendum. On Harvey's podcast this month, Hickman described how she wanted to spend her last day. She said: "I will hopefully have some chocolate for breakfast because I'm a real chocoholic."

"And then I'm going to go to a beach with the people I really love... and listen to the waves, see the sea and put the rest of the medicine in."

She added: "I feel privileged in the last few months, I've said goodbye to so many people. How many people get a chance to do that when they pass away? Just feeling very fortunate to be in the position I'm in."

Her partner, Paul Qualtrough, thanked Harvey for handling her story "without sensationalising it".

Linda Clarke, Hickman's sister who lives in Britain, told The Guardian: "If Tracy was still in the UK, I'd have to watch her go through a horrific death."

Clarke said that it was painful to watch her sister's health deteriorate. "Anyone who doesn't agree with assisted dying hasn't watched a loved one go through this — the pain, the humiliation, everything taken away," she said.

Clarke was also diagnosed with breast cancer in 2015 and Parkinson's disease in 2020. "My cancer could come back. I don't know what my future is. I live in the UK but I want the same choices that Tracy has. I want the right to choose," she said.



Tracy Hickman, 57, died on a New Zealand beach



TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER JAMES GLOSSOP

Hot to trot Broomfield Samson, a rare Suffolk punch, and his rider, Alison Carroll, cool off by the grade II listed Loyne Bridge near Gressingham in Lancashire

Quintagram® No 1950

Solve all five concise clues using each letter underneath once only

1 Reference line on a graph (4)

2 Wallace ---, US poet (1879-1955) (7)

3 Item of bedtime womenswear (7)

4 Interactive radio show (5-2)

5 Strong smelling (7)

A	E	E	E	E	E	G	G
H	H	I	I	I	I	N	N
N	N	N	N	O	P	P	S
S	S	T	T	T	U	V	X

Solutions see T2 MindGames p15
Cryptic clues T2 MindGames p14

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Vennells ditched review after PR advice

Tom Witherow, Mario Ledwith

A major review of past Horizon convictions was dropped after the Post Office's chief spin doctor warned Paula Vennells not to make it front page news.

The former chief executive asked senior colleagues why independent investigators were not reviewing "all cases of false accounting ... over the last five to ten years", in July 2013.

Mark Davies, the communications director at the time, replied that a review would have a "ballistic impact". "We will open this up very significantly, into front page news," he wrote. "In media terms it becomes mainstream, very high profile."

Vennells, 65, was giving evidence at

the public inquiry into the Post Office IT scandal for the second day.

There were groans in the public gallery when she was caught out by her email reply to Davies. She told the inquiry she "would never have taken a decision based on the advice of one colleague". Seconds later her email response to Davies's advice was shown on screen: "You are right to call this out. And I will take your steer. No issue."

She went on to tell Davies the "most urgent objective" was to "manage the media", before addressing the concerns of Alan Bates and other campaigners.

Jason Beer KC, counsel to the inquiry, asked: "You did take the advice of the PR guy, didn't you?"

Vennells said: "I understand how this

reads, but I don't recall making any conscious decision not to go back and put in place a review of all past criminal cases."

She later agreed that the decision not to specifically review criminal cases may have resulted in a "lost decade" in exposing miscarriages of justice.

In September 2011 she told senior staff that she wanted her press team to "scour" the press for negative comment and "refute" it. "We need to be on the front foot and counter anything that has a reputational impact," she wrote.

At the inquiry she claimed she was referring to the reputation of individual branches rather than the company.

She told the board in 2019 that "we hold the ground" and used injunctions as a "tool in the box". Vennells wrote to



Paula Vennells arrives with a police escort to the Post Office inquiry

Tom Cooper, a civil servant who represented the government on the board, saying: "The strategy has worked well so far, which is to minimise coverage in mainstream media" and "we add no

oxygen by commenting or engaging". She continued: "We have used injunctions and demanded apologies in the past. They are both to be used with caution ... but they are tools in the box."

She admitted to the inquiry that a dictat in the Post Office to use non-emotive words such as "anomaly" or "exception", in the place of bugs, was to "manipulate language".

Vennells avoided a question asking if she was close to Davies, but admitted she kept in touch with him after they left the Post Office, and he helped her with media statements as the scandal exploded in 2020. She will continue to give evidence today.

Vennells's tears, letters, page 24; divine retribution, leading article, page 25



Harrison stars on blue plaque trail

They could have been a local hero or a global megastar. Whether famous or overlooked, if you think someone deserves the honour of a blue plaque, the time has come to put their name in the hat (Jack Blackburn writes).

Today, as George Harrison, the former Beatle, becomes the third person to be commemorated with a blue plaque outside London, Historic England is opening public nominations —

until July 19 — for who should come next.

To qualify, nominees must have been dead for more than 20 years, made a "significant contribution to human welfare or happiness" and have a surviving building associated with them and visible from a public highway.

The new national blue plaque scheme was inspired by the one run by English Heritage in London, which has honoured more than 1,000 people. Harrison's is the final plaque in the initial batch, which



launched the scheme. The others were put up in honour of Daphne Steele, the first black matron in the NHS, in Ilkley, West Yorkshire,

and the pottery designer Clarice Cliff, in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire.

Lucy Frazer, the culture secretary, said: "For almost 150 years

the London blue plaque scheme has celebrated figures from the past, helping the public to learn about and honour the rich history of the



George Harrison, the former Beatle, has been honoured with a blue plaque at his childhood home in Liverpool as the Historic England scheme expands beyond London

capital. Now everyone across the country has the opportunity to nominate the people who shaped their area."

The plaque for Harrison, who died aged 58 in 2001, is being put up at 12 Arnold Grove in Wavertree, Liverpool, where he was born. The youngest of four children, he lived there until he was about seven years old, when his parents reached the top of their housing list. Wavertree was a key part of the family's history, with his parents having been born and raised in the area, and his grandparents lived round the corner.

In his memoir, *I, Me, Mine*, Harrison said of the house: "To look at, it is just like *Coronation Street*: no garden, door straight on to the street ... It was OK that house, very pleasant being little and it was always sunny in summer." The plaque will be unveiled by Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, the minister for arts and heritage, and Harrison's widow, Olivia, 76, who said: "So much of who George was came from being born and spending his earliest years at Arnold Grove. He left a footprint on this world, on this country, in this city and on this street."

Johnson's opposition to lockdown caused 'total chaos' inside No 10

Chris Smyth Whitehall Editor

Boris Johnson could not stick to a decision on Covid because he was opposed to lockdown on a "deep ideological level", Britain's top civil servant has said.

Simon Case, the cabinet secretary, told the Covid inquiry that "good people were just being smashed to pieces" because of the "dysfunctional" structure in No 10 under the former prime minister.

Case said that he found it "incredibly frustrating" to see Johnson change his mind constantly, in evidence during which he acknowledged serious failings in government.

Revelations of Downing Street parties and other rule-breaking felt like a "terrible insult" to bereaved families and undermined public compliance with Covid rules, Case added. He was

shown WhatsApp messages in which he described a U-turn on exam results as "the most awful governing I think I've ever seen" and said after the second lockdown: "The state has failed and we have some massive questions to ask ourselves."

In evidence that has been delayed by illness, Case also revealed how he tried to stop Johnson repeatedly caving in to Rishi Sunak's pressure to ease restrictions.

Case was forced to apologise for profane WhatsApps in which he described senior government figures as "feral", likened them to wild animals and No 10 to a "rat's nest" and a "terrible, tragic joke".

He described the messages as "very raw, in-the-moment, human expressions" which told only part of the story, but insisted that they were helpful to



Simon Case told the Covid inquiry that rule-breaking was an insult to families

the inquiry in providing "colour" lacking from official archives.

"The best you get [in official documents] is a handwritten note from Churchill or Clement Attlee in the margins. You don't get the sort of

material that this inquiry has got through WhatsApps."

Case said that Johnson's No 10 was "inefficient and sometimes ineffective", describing it as "total chaos" and "definitely dysfunctional" as he insisted that he had tried unsuccessfully to instil discipline. "It was difficult to settle on a course of action and be sure that the course of action would be consistent."

At times he became emotional and accepted: "There were some dark days when it felt that we just couldn't get it right." Case said that initially he did not understand "how at quite a deep ideological level, the prime minister found the mass locking-up of the population" difficult to accept. "I didn't think I understood at the time in a way that I do now quite how personally difficult that was for him," Case said. He contrasted this to Johnson's ability to act with

"absolute clarity" on issues such as vaccines and Ukraine.

Case said he was not consulted on Sunak's eat-out-to-help-out scheme, saying that he was not aware of scientific concerns that it might spread the virus until it was nearly over.

He said Sunak and Johnson, who later fell out, had a good relationship at the start of Covid. He was shown evidence of him telling Johnson "it can't always be you agreeing with Rishi" and trying to arrange for the prime minister to agree a course with scientific advisers before speaking to the chancellor.

He said that it was easier "getting the chancellor to agree with something he might not like if the prime minister is proposing it, rather than [if] Chris [Whitty, chief medical officer for England] and Patrick [Vallance, then chief scientific adviser] are proposing it."

OWEN HUMPHREYS/PA; SCOTT HEPPELL/NORTH NEWS



The landslide occurred close to Carlton Bank and killed Leah Harrison, below right

'Bubbly' girl, 10, died in mudslide on school trip

Ali Mitib

The family of a ten-year-old girl who died in a "freak accident" mudslide while on a school trip have paid tribute to their "happy, bubbly, go-lucky little girl".

Leah Harrison, a year 6 pupil at Mount Pleasant Primary School in Darlington, was killed in Carlton-in-Cleveland, on the edge of North York

Moors National Park, on Wednesday. She had been on a forest walk at Carlton Adventure outdoor education centre and was on a path in woodland when the slide occurred. It is understood it took place close to Carlton Bank, a steep hill which is on Wainwright's Coast to Coast and Cleveland Way walking routes.

The site operators, Hartlepool borough council, said activities had been suspended. An investigation is being conducted by police and the Health and Safety Executive.

Thirty mountain rescuers responded to the disaster, which happened at about 1.15pm. The area was cordoned off throughout the afternoon. North Yorkshire police later confirmed that one person had died and that nobody else had been injured. There had been heavy rain in the area at the time.

In a statement, Leah's family said: "Leah Harrison, the happy, bubbly, go-lucky little girl. The beautiful smile, the giddy laugh, the silly jokes. You will never ever be forgotten baby girl. You will achieve your dream and become a player for the Lionesses. Spread those wings. May you rest in paradise."

Nick Blackburn, chief executive of Lingfield Education Trust, which manages Mount Pleasant Primary School, paid tribute to the "much-loved" girl and said that pupils and staff would receive counselling. He said: "This is clearly a heartbreaking tragedy. Leah was a much-loved part of our school and our thoughts and prayers are with her family, friends and the school staff ... We are all in a state of shock."

Blackburn described the mudslide as a "freak accident" and said that the walk had been risk-assessed by trained instructors. He said: "The activity that Leah was involved in was a walk on a normal path to a woodland area. They were on their way back from the woods having made shelters when the mudslide happened."

"There was a mudslide, so the weather has had an effect on what happened but the cause and effect bit of the incident is difficult to understand. This isn't a group of kids just walking off into the moors somewhere ... They are with trained instructors."

"They wouldn't look out the window and say, 'Let's go out there' if it's torrential. It's a designated route. It is a planned event and a risk-assessed event. We don't take our children knowingly into unsafe territory."

Denise McGuckin, managing director of Hartlepool council said: "We are utterly devastated and heartbroken ...

We are working closely with our partner agencies to carry out a full investigation and we are temporarily suspending all outdoor activities and residential breaks managed by the council."

A person who lives close to where the mudslide happened said: "It's a devastating situation ... It was pouring with rain [on Wednesday], which would have made the area sloppy and the rescue quite difficult."

Tributes including flowers, balloons and a toy football that read "Leah No 1 goal" were left at Leah's school.



Man stabbed three others days before killing woman

David Woode Crime Correspondent

A woman was murdered in a "vicious and horrifying" attack two days after her assailant stabbed three strangers in south London, a court has been told.

Johanita Dogbey, 31, was ambushed by Mohamed Nur, 34, and stabbed three times in the neck with a makeshift blade near the O2 Academy in Brixton on May 1 last year.

Dogbey, who had created a foundation to support people with sickle cell disease, had been on the phone to her grandmother. She shouted at Nur to leave her alone before collapsing, prosecutors said. Bystanders came to her aid but Dogbey died at the scene.

Nur was arrested the next day and he was later charged with slashing Rebecca Wilkes, Tomasz Kmiecik and Katie Matthews with a weapon of broken glass and rubber bands.

The attacks took place between 11.25pm and 11.30pm on April 29, also in Brixton. Nur admitted Dogbey's murder, possessing an offensive weapon and a bladed article. He denied three charges of unlawful wounding but was found guilty after a trial this month.

Jurors became distressed after the judge disclosed that Nur had also com-

mitted Dogbey's murder, which was not revealed during the trial. He refused to attend and told Judge Angela Rafferty KC there was "no point" appearing at the Old Bailey for sentencing yesterday when she jailed him for life with a minimum term of 32 years.

Dogbey's mother, father, brother, sister and uncle were in court but most left when CCTV footage of her murder was played. Her mother sobbed as prosecutors described the attack.

Yao Dogbey described his oldest child as "loving, kind and humble". He told the court: "She was much loved not only by her family but also her many friends and people she helped. She created a charity to support people suffering from sickle cell. Having had sickle cell she was devoted to this cause and made a great change to many people's lives. She loved making jokes and always had a smile on her face."

The judge criticised Nur's refusal to attend court. "He has in effect committed a number of contempt of court offences and so he could face consecutive sentences for a number of years ... We cannot have defendants in a case like this just not turning up to court without any penalty." She directed that a prison officer read her remarks to Nur.

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Top civil servant apologises amid claims of university nepotism

David Brown

The head of human resources for Britain's 500,000 civil servants has been accused of suppressing findings of a report on allegations of nepotism at one of the country's leading universities.

Fiona Ryland, Whitehall's chief people officer, produced a misleading statement about an investigation into a whistleblower's complaint to her former employer, University College London (UCL), judges have ruled.

She has apologised for "inaccuracies" after The Times was informed of concern about her role in the case. Last

month Ryland assured MPs that she wanted civil servants to feel confident in using whistleblower procedures to report wrongdoing.

Ryland, 51, was vice-principal in charge of operations at UCL when a whistleblower raised concerns about the appointment of the wife of Professor Christoph Lindner in 2022. He was appointed dean of the Bartlett faculty of the built environment in 2019 and is now head of the Royal College of Art.

Three months after Lindner joined UCL, his wife, Rebecca, was appointed principal research fellow in the university's doctoral school with a salary of up

to £75,000. Rebecca Lindner, an expert in diversity policies in higher education, was later seconded to a senior role in the university's professional development programme.

The whistleblower complained that there was "an 'unethical practice of appointment through nepotism' with public funds being used without following due process", according to the Information Rights Tribunal. The university, which is ninth in the QS world university rankings, ordered an investigation by the law firm Pinsent Masons.

Ryland refused to release the lawyers' report, but on her last day at the

Fiona Ryland has apologised for "inaccuracies"



able to the university were presented in full, while unfavourable findings were omitted or re-phrased".

The tribunal said that her summary "raised further concerns about a lack of transparency and accountability at the university". The lawyers' report will now be released.

UCL said: "Ms Ryland was not involved in the appointment but did instigate the investigation into it. When communicating the findings, she accepts there were some inaccuracies and apologises for this error."

Ryland and the Lindners did not respond to requests for comment.



Oxford condemns 'violent' protesters

At least 16 student protesters have been arrested at Oxford University after forcing their way into the vice-chancellor's office in what the university described as a "violent" demonstration (Kieran Gair and Laurence Sleator write).

Pro-Palestinian protests saw a series of clashes with police yesterday in what was a significant escalation of continuing campus protests across the UK.

At about 9am, the group of activists from Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) entered an administrative office in

Wellington Square and refused to leave. Several protesters, some wearing keffiyeh scarves, surrounded desks and lay down on the floor.

The group said it entered "with the intention to remain until we could engage in dialogue with the vice-chancellor" about the university's investment in companies linked to Israel.

Activists have been staying in an encampment in front of the Pitt Rivers Museum as part of a call in response to the war in Gaza for Oxford



Police were called after pro-Palestinian protesters staged a sit-in and demanded the vice-chancellor speak to them

to boycott Israeli-linked companies.

Last night, Oxford University criticised OA4P, accusing the demonstrators of "forcibly overpowering" a receptionist in what it described as

a "violent" attempt to occupy the vice-chancellor's office. In a statement, a spokesman accused the group of spreading lies about the university and defaming the vice-chancellor, and suggested that it had resorted to waging a campaign of

intimidation that was causing "significant distress" to staff members.

A spokesman for OA4P said: "Today Oxford students staged a peaceful sit-in to demand that the university meet with us after two weeks of

non-response. Instead of engaging in dialogue with her students, the vice-chancellor chose to evacuate the building, place it on lockdown, and call the police. We demand the administration meet with us to negotiate immediately."

Forced retirement revolt at Cambridge

Charlie Parker, Felix Armstrong

Cambridge academics facing forced retirement at the age of 67 have accused the university of discrimination and stunting innovation.

Dozens of leading professors and researchers, including a Nobel prize-winner, have called for the university to abolish a rule requiring them to abandon their posts when they turn 67.

The measure is designed to "ensure intergenerational fairness and career progression" by opening up opportunities to younger scholars, to "promote innovation... and knowledge creation".

However, a group of 35 academics has attacked the policy, arguing that attempts to remove "dead wood" from faculties instead creates a "brain drain" and disproportionately harms women whose careers often develop later.

Some professors have said the policy may be illegal, after Oxford, the only other British university to adopt similar rules, lost an employment tribunal last year. A judge ruled that Oxford was not "legally justified" in forcing four academics to retire at the age of 68.

In an attempt to address staff anger at the "employer justified retirement age" (EJRA), last week Cambridge proposed increasing the cut-off to 69 and abolishing it for administrative and support staff, an internal report seen by The Times shows. Scholarly staff are understood to have insisted their criticisms of the proposal were included in the document. They wrote that academics can "innovate at any age", adding: "Top talent won't join Cambridge knowing they'll be forced out at 67 or 69."

"The EJRA does not lead to Cambridge promoting its own junior aca-

demics. Forced retirement disproportionately also harms women."

Since 2011, employers have been able to operate a compulsory retirement age if they can show it is justifiable as a means to achieve a legitimate aim. The EJRA at Cambridge was adopted in June 2012 and reviewed in 2015-16. The proposals to push the EJRA to 69 will be debated this month and voted on by Regent House, the university's democratic body, in July.

Jon Crowcroft, 66, a professor of communications systems, said the EJRA constituted "age discrimination". Professor Raghu Rau, another member of the group, said: "To get rid of some dead wood, the university burns down the forest."

Other concerned academics include Professor Dame Clare Grey, a world-leading chemist. Grey told The Times:

"The EJRA for someone at my stage of my career means I can no longer view Cambridge as my home."

A university source close to the process described the EJRA as "a complex issue" that had split opinions. "The proposed change [to 69] strikes a reasonable compromise between the legitimate benefits of the EJRA, and the inevitable downsides of using a retirement age," the source said.

The Times understands some younger scholars support the university's aim to nurture their careers.

The row began in November when 120 academics wrote an open letter asking Cambridge's vice-chancellor to abolish the EJRA, saying the policy "contravenes" the 2010 Equality Act.

Professor Didier Queloz, a Nobel prizewinner and one of the leaders behind the letter, said the latest proposals

and revised age "is a sign the university admitted the current situation should be revised". However, he has opposed abolishing the rule for administrative staff but not academics, saying: "I don't support an asymmetric treatment."

Nino Lübbli, a postdoctoral researcher who fed into the university's review of the policy, said: "The EJRA plays an essential role in the creation of new positions, with the retirement age being an important trade-off to the unique independence and academic freedom offered by Cambridge's established posts."

Professor Richard Penty, chairman of the review group, said: "The university's review shows that its retirement age creates job opportunities. There would be significantly fewer permanent jobs available each year to academics in the earlier stages of their careers without it."

OXFORD MAIL/SWINS; GASPARD ROUFFIN

Vet investigation could cut fees for pet owners

Alex Ralph

The veterinary industry is to be investigated by the competition regulator amid concerns that pet owners may be overpaying for medicines.

The Competition and Markets Authority confirmed that it was pushing ahead with a full market investigation after an initial review last September, which prompted an “unprecedented” 56,000 responses from pet owners and those working in the sector.

Pet ownership has risen sharply since the pandemic and has coincided with private equity firms buying up individual veterinary practices.

An investigation could lead to vets being forced to be more open with pet owners about the prices they charge and who owns them. Companies may also be forced to set maximum prices or sell off practices.

The investigation into the £5 billion-a-year industry will look into whether people “are getting the information they need, at the right time, to make informed decisions”. It will explore whether a limited choice of vet businesses in some areas is to pet owners’ disadvantage; whether profits earned are consistent with those expected in a competitive market; and whether businesses have the incentive and ability to

limit consumer choice when providing treatments or recommending related services, particularly when they are part of large, integrated groups.

Almost 60 per cent of vet practices in the UK are owned by large companies, up from about 10 per cent a decade ago.

The regulator can make recommendations to the government. With a snap general election called for July 4 and Labour ahead in the polls, it could fall to Sir Keir Starmer to introduce reforms.

Sarah Cardell, chief executive of the competition authority, said: “We’ve heard from people who are struggling to pay vet bills, potentially overpaying for medicines and [who] don’t always

know the best treatment options available to them. We also remain concerned about the potential impact of sector consolidation and the incentives for large, integrated vet groups to act in ways that reduce consumer choice.”

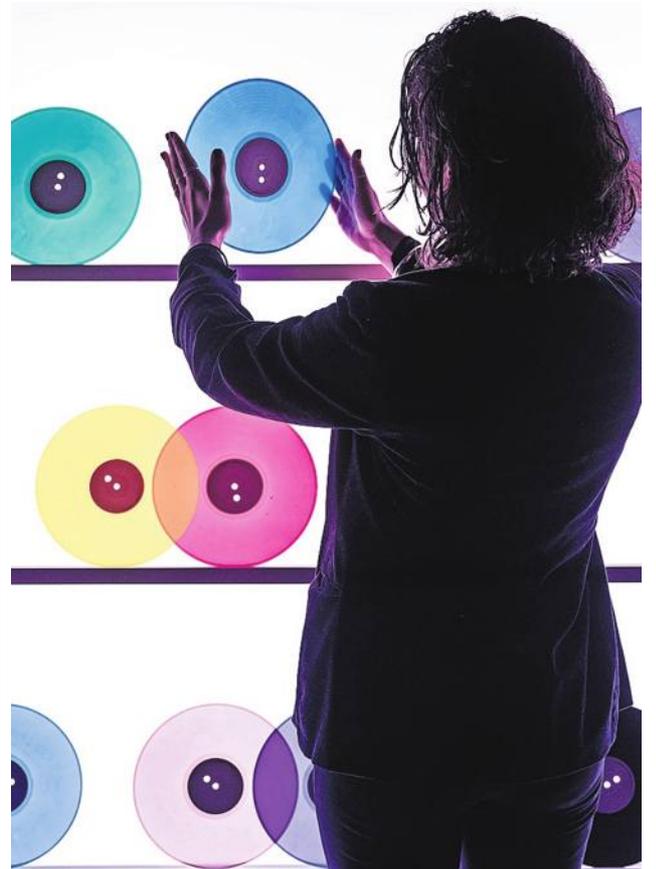
The regulator had proposed a full investigation in March and Cardell said this proposal had been “overwhelmingly endorsed by the consultation.”

“While we’re aware of acute staff shortages and difficult working conditions for vets, we consider a formal market investigation is essential to ensure good outcomes for the millions of pet owners in the UK, as well as professionals working in the sector.”

In the meantime the regulator has given tips to help pet owners to “navigate” vet services, such as looking further afield than the closest vet and asking if there are other treatments.

Concerns about potential remedies have hit the share prices of London-listed companies. Shares in CVS Group, one of the six biggest players who have been buying practices, have halved over the past 12 months, although they were up by 26p, or 2.5 per cent, at £10.62 in afternoon trading. Shares in Pets at Home, a more diversified retailer behind the Vets for Pets practitioners, jointly owned with local practitioners, were down by 7p, or 2.5 per cent, at 275½p.

STEPHEN CHUNG/LNP



Vinyl touches Bausatz Noto, a mix of art and music by Carsten Nicolai, features in Reverb, an exhibition at The Vinyl Factory’s 180 Studios at the Strand, London

Boy shot in head while climbing fence to get ball

Jessica Rawnsley

A schoolboy has suffered a fractured skull after being shot by a metal pellet, thought to have been fired from an air-gun, while he searched for a football.

The 11-year-old was hit when he climbed over a garden fence to retrieve the ball while playing with friends in Leyland, Lancashire, on Monday.

He was recovering from surgery at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital in Liverpool, Lancashire police said.

The force said the boy had suffered “significant injuries” and was “fortunate he was not more seriously hurt or even killed”.

The incident took place in Roadtrain Avenue at about 7.20pm on Monday. Police have appealed for information.

Detective Constable Paul Brown, of Lancashire police, said: “This incident

has left a young boy with some really significant injuries and it is fortunate he was not more seriously hurt or even killed.

“We are carrying out a number of inquiries to try and identify the person or persons responsible and I would appeal to anyone who saw what happened, has any dashcam or Ring doorbell footage, or who has any information which could assist our investigation to get in touch.

“I’m sure someone in the local community knows who is responsible for what’s happened to this young boy and I would urge them to come and speak to us.”

Anyone with information should call 101 quoting log 1410 of May 20, or the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously and in confidence on 0800 555 111.

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Iron Lady had a steel bladder

At a memorial service for Dame Ann Leslie, the pioneering foreign correspondent, much was made of her glamour in war. "There's no point in crying, it just makes the mascara run," she once declared. A colleague said "no one could type as fast with nails as long". Her daughter, Katharine, recalled that thanks to her mother's influence she was "the only 10-year-old who knew what an intifada was or how to spell Mangosuthu Buthelezi". Yet she lost one battle. During the 1979 election, Leslie asked if the Tory campaign bus could make more frequent toilet stops as her bladder had been weakened by labour (giving birth, I mean, not Jim Callaghan). Margaret Thatcher gave a withering look. "No one needs to go more than twice a day," she said. "I go first thing in the morning and then at night and it's quite enough." Leslie, above, who had faced down tyrants around the world, was for once left frustrated.

On a packed Commons terrace after the election was called, two Labour MPs were eager to find and thank Jonathan Gullis, the Tory deputy chairman and a former teacher.



Asked why, they crowed: "We've promised 6,500 extra teachers, but he's going to make it 6,499."

ENGLISH STIFF KIT REQUIRED
On her way to Westminster, where she attended yesterday's Reform press conference, Ann Widdecombe gave a talk in Somerset, where she mentioned some of her favourite malapropisms. One chairman, wanting to shorten his introduction, said he wouldn't "dwell on her biological details". This was not as bad, she said, as the time someone introduced her by saying that "she always impresses the Commons with her debatable qualities".

CELEBRITY SURVIVOR
Our Rome correspondent reported yesterday that the actor Gérard Depardieu had allegedly beaten up a 79-year-old Italian paparazzo. Rino Barillari went bleeding to hospital, but he is used to his

targets being unappreciative of his attention. In 2018, a retrospective of his work in Rome listed some of the remarkable statistics from his career snapping celebrities: 163 trips to A&E, 11 broken ribs, one stabbing and 76 smashed cameras.

There are worse fates that can befall a party leader in an election than heavy rain. The historian Robert Saunders says that in the 1892 campaign, Gladstone was "trampled by a bull, run over by a taxi and struck in the eye with a sharp piece of gingerbread". The Liberal leader wrote in his diary that he was "no longer fit for public life", but he ended up prime minister after polling day.

FRISKY COURSE OF ACTION
I wrote on Wednesday about a rare Beatles album that featured the word "copulation" rather than "compilation" on the sleeve notes. David Lamming emailed to say that a similar error appears in written evidence to the Post Office Horizon IT inquiry. A PO lawyer had advised in an email that if they didn't prosecute a sub-postmaster it would encourage others to "get hold of their MP and result in copulation". The inquiry counsel generously suggested that the intended word was "capitulation".

PATRICK KIDD

What number? Clever crows can just tell you

Rhys Blakely Science Correspondent

The crow's lofty place on the pecking order of animal intelligence has been confirmed by a study that suggests they can let us know what number they are thinking of.

Scientists found that carrion crows could be taught to recognise printed numerals from one to four — and to then crow that many times. They believe it is the first time that this "sophisticated combination of numerical abilities and vocal control" has been demonstrated in a species other than our own.

The findings bolster a reputation for corvid cleverness that took flight in 2002 when a New Caledonian crow named Betty became famous as the first non-human animal ever seen to create a hooked tool by bending a wire.

Since then, crows have been shown to recognise human faces, work in teams and plan for the future. The study, published in the journal *Science*, was the latest effort to explore how their abilities may overlap with ours.

"We were inspired by studies of toddlers learning to count," Dr Diana Liao of the University of Tübingen, who led the research, said.

She explained that young children often used number words, not to count as an adult would, but as a vocal tally. For instance, when asked to count three blocks, a three-year-old human might respond by saying "one, one, one",

where the number of sounds corresponds to the number of objects.

Liao and her colleagues wanted to know whether this ability to control and count "vocalisations" was shared by other species. They described how they trained three crows to crow a set number of times when they saw a cue. The crows then had to peck an "enter key" to signal that they were finished. If they got it right, they got a food reward.

The birds were not perfect: they recognised the number "one" and made the correct number of noises 98 per cent of the time. For two it was 63 per cent, for three it was 52 per cent and for four calls it was 40 per cent. But when they were incorrect, they usually erred by producing just one more or fewer vocalisations than they should have.

The researchers also found that the acoustic properties of the crow's first call could be analysed to predict the total number of noises it was going to make. They believed that this indicated the sequence of calls was planned.

They argue this is fresh evidence that avian cognitive ability should not be underestimated. The density of neurones in birds' brains may help to explain their abilities on a par with those of great apes and elephants.

"The crows' cognitive vocal control opens the possibility that some bird species may deliberately use the number of vocalisations to convey ecologically relevant information," the researchers wrote.

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Moments in time A family of royal photographers attend the launch of the Princess Diana: Accredited Access Exhibition in London, which displays their images of Catherine, Diana and other royals, and tells the stories behind them. The photographs by Anwar Hussein and his sons Samir, left, and Zak, span some seven decades

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Stables sued over 'mischievous' horse

Jonathan Ames Legal Editor

A groom is suing a stables for £1.5 million, claiming that it failed to warn her a horse was "dangerous and mischievous" before it threw her off, breaking her back.

Amy Mahon, 45, told a judge at the High Court in London that the gelding she was riding "exploded", causing her to somersault backwards from the saddle and land on a fence. As a result she claims she is unable to work or ride and needs crutches to walk.

She alleges that the stables boss, Helena O'Regan, concealed from her that the horse, Cisco, was "an abnormally difficult and dangerous" animal with a history of throwing off riders.

O'Regan has denied liability and in

court highlighted text messages she received from Mahon after the accident in which the groom assured her: "It's not your fault; horses are horses and stuff happens."

The court was told that at the time of the accident in 2019, Mahon had only recently started working for O'Regan at Stonehouse Equestrian Farm in Leicestershire. O'Regan was caring for Cisco under the terms of a livery contract, which obliged her to exercise the horse for its owner.

On her boss's instructions, Mahon was riding Cisco for the first time when the horse suddenly "exploded".

Emily Read, representing Mahon, told the court that the horse "turned himself inside out... with enough force to pull the reins from Mahon's hands".

She said the groom was thrown from the saddle and "somersaulted backwards", landing with such force that she fractured her spine.

Read said that after the accident, other riders told Mahon that Cisco was "dangerous" and had caused injuries before — including to O'Regan.

Mahon has accused the stables boss of failing to warn her of Cisco's "mischievous propensities" or that the arena was known for having cats and wildlife nearby that could spook horses.

The court was also told that shortly after the accident, a horse dealer had declared Cisco "unsaleable" after a "spooky" test ride and a vet's examination that revealed he was "unsound and lame". The horse was subsequently put down. Read told the court that the vet



Amy Mahon, right and top, worked for the stables owner Helena O'Regan

involved had noted that the decision was taken partly because of its "spooky" behaviour.

Roger Harris, O'Regan's barrister, highlighted texts the groom sent after her fall. She wrote to O'Regan: "This was nothing more than a freak accident of the type which can happen when you are on horses. It's not your fault; horses are horses and stuff happens."

Mahon said that had been her "initial impression" but she had subsequently received a message from a friend who knew O'Regan that said: "That bitch knew the pony was naughty and had bucked off people before."

O'Regan denied that Cisco was put down because he was "spooky" and that she knew he was especially dangerous. The trial continues.

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News

Spider-Man makes a good fist of tech Romeo

Theatre Clive Davis

Romeo and Juliet

Duke of York's Theatre, WC2

★★★☆☆

Did Tom Holland's army of fans feel short-changed? The USP of this latest Jamie Lloyd production is, after all, the chance to see one of the biggest stars of multiplex cinema in the flesh. All credit to the Brit who plays Spider-Man for taking on the challenge of performing modern-dress Shakespeare in the West End. But given how much Lloyd enjoys using digital technology, Holland's admirers may wonder why they spend a fair amount of the evening watching their idol on a screen.

He doesn't disgrace himself. This Romeo is quiet, fresh-faced and sensitive. In the opening scenes he really does convince you that he is an adolescent adrift, waiting to abandon himself to a doomed romance. In the end, though, the dominant figure turns out to be Lloyd himself, a



Tom Holland and Francesca Amewudah-Rivers play the screen-crossed lovers

director who has done so much to reinvent the classics and draw a new, younger audience into the stalls.

In the programme notes Lloyd is quoted as saying, "My role [is] increasingly to get out of the way of the connection between an actor and an audience member". That's what happened in his extraordinary 2019 hip-hop reworking of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, James McAvoy supplying no end of charisma. Yet here, what once seemed innovative threatens to become a string of mannerisms.

In this gangland-style Verona, all is muted. Holland's hoodie-wearing Romeo, wandering a bare stage in

which the designer Soutra Gilmour has scattered shades of grey and black, remains locked in an inert state. You can understand why Lloyd decided to do without the traditional setting for the balcony scene — Holland and Francesca Amewudah-Rivers's subdued Juliet swap thoughts like two teens in a corner at a party. But by the time they approach the final moments of desolation, we may be eavesdropping on a conscientious but colourless radio drama.

Throughout, the verse is given a harder, streetwise edge; its internal music doesn't always survive. When Romeo is banished, the screen shows Holland on the theatre's rooftop, the Coliseum looming behind him (Nathan Amzi and Joe Ransom deserve praise for the video presentation). Earlier, the Capulet ball becomes a desultory onscreen gathering relayed from the foyer.

Michael Balogun's Friar, who declaims the prologue, adds much-needed warmth. Freema Agyeman's Nurse is a spitfire. Holland — whose father, the stand-up comedian Dominic Holland, was at the preview I attended — signals Romeo's demise by removing his head mic.

Amewudah-Rivers does the same. It's an oddly anti-climactic gesture.

Apart from the odd whoop when Holland made an entrance, the audience was on its best behaviour. Perhaps, like me, they were more perplexed than gripped.

To August 3, romeoandjulietLDN.com

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Stamp expert was unfairly sacked for sex-pest claim

Jonathan Ames Legal Editor

A stamp expert will receive a payout for being unfairly sacked after he accused a member of the world's oldest philately society of sexual harassment.

Ben Palmer was targeted for sacking by the owners of an auction house in a row over his request not to work with the director of the Royal Philatelic Society London, of which the King is a patron.

An employment tribunal was told that in an "acrimonious" bid to force him out, Greg Spring and wife, Susan, "contrived" complaints that the world-renowned expert was on a "go-slow".

A judge has now ruled that he was sacked after a "sham" process.

Palmer, who has won awards for his collections and published works, started working as a "describer" for Cavendish Philatelic Auctions in Derby in 2016. Cavendish describes itself as "international auctioneers of fine stamps, postal history, related books and ephemera".

The Royal Philatelic Society London, which was founded in 1869, describes itself as the "worldwide home of stamp collecting and postal history".

The tribunal, in central London, was told that Palmer raised his complaint at the society's annual general meeting in 2021, but that the Springs refused his request.

It heard that Palmer, who worked from the auction house's London office, became a director at the business and still owns half the shares of the company. But he was sacked for gross misconduct last year after his relationship with the Springs — which had been previously "largely positive and productive" — deteriorated.

Palmer claimed that he had been sexually harassed by an unidentified

member of the Royal Philatelic Society London and asked that the company discontinue dealings with that person.

Palmer decided he wanted to leave the business and attempted to cash in his shares, which he estimated to be worth about £220,000. Spring offered just £80,000, however, which Palmer described as "derisory".

In early 2023, Palmer was accused of working slowly, which he denied, arguing that had just dealt with the "largest collection he had ever seen in his career" and was not suffering from a "lack of output".

Backing Palmer, the tribunal ruled that Spring was "determined" to depict



Ben Palmer was the victim of a "sham" process, a tribunal said

the expert as "obstinate, unproductive and deceptive come what may, even in the face of plausible explanations".

The judge, Ashley Fredericks-Bowyer, found that the true reason for the sacking was so that the Springs could gain full control of the business.

He went on to find that Greg Spring had been "dishonest in the letter of dismissal where he denied that there had been any prior conflict or disagreement" between him and Palmer.

The judge added that the auction house owner was "clearly bent" on casting Palmer's position as employee misconduct and conducted a "contrived investigation" as part of a "sham designed to engineer dismissal".

A hearing to determine compensation will take place at a later date.

American antipathy towards UN is hardening

Gerard Baker

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Comment

There will be a wobble — can Starmer cope?

The intensity, scrutiny and pace of an election campaign will present new challenges for the untested Labour leader

Patrick Maguire



@PATRICKKMAGUIRE

It has been a while since we had a general election in July. For those not on the electoral roll in 1945, there now follows a brief summary of what happened last time. The leader of the Conservative Party, his reputation forged in the oppressive heat of national crisis, told voters that they could not trust Labour to defend British interests in a dangerous world. But Winston Churchill lurched too far into petty partisanship, and too few of them believed it. The leader of the Labour Party was derided as a dullard by nonplussed colleagues and clever-clever commentators. (The Economist warned it was impossible to “beat somebody with nobody”.) He lost sleep over left-wing indiscipline (“a silly speech by Aneurin Bevan,” he fretted, “might easily be used to stampede the electors away from Labour”) and soothed Middle England with temperate language on the economy.

In the end Clement Attlee was swept into Downing Street with a majority that only one of his successors has ever managed to match. Is Sir Keir Starmer about to make that two? There are plenty of parallels between the July of 1945 and the July of 2024 if the Labour Party wishes to draw them. Not that its leader will: if anything baffles him about his idiosyncratic flock it is its unkickable addiction to reliving and relitigating its own history. Save for the unlikely event the opinion polls

are very, very wrong, or he is as hopeless a campaigner as Theresa May, we know he is instead set to break free of it. That is the “huge prize” Starmer dangled before Labour staff on Wednesday evening. Their victory, he said, would mark only the fourth time in 100 years that the Tories had been thrown out of government.

Sorry, would? Even Rishi Sunak’s cabinet dispenses with the conditional tense there. The contest ahead is no longer about the outcome — everything we know about public opinion suggests that is settled — but its scale. This election is not so much Labour’s to lose but to win less impressively. They were as surprised by the prime minister’s soggy stand outside No 10 as everybody else. As Lord Mandelson helpfully revealed on Times Radio some 24 hours earlier, even the campaign director Morgan McSweeney had booked a summer holiday for July. So the

Time needed to tackle flash fires will become scarce in the campaign

opposition are inconvenienced, maybe. But unready? Look at that which they can control.

Labour, unlike the Tories, has selected candidates for all of its battleground seats. Its manifesto is written. And, as its fundraiser-in-chief Lord Alli told the shadow cabinet on Tuesday, it has amassed enough donations to meet the new election spending limit of £35 million, quietly doubled by the government last year. Labour’s ancien régime complained that electoral law was rigged against them. This one has chosen to level the playing field itself.

But an election campaign will not,

by its very nature, be an exercise in effortless authoritarianism. Starmer’s aides are good at that: what’s left of the Corbynite left can tell you so. Events, however, cannot be fixed like parliamentary selections. Six weeks is a long time to wait for the inevitable. Something will wobble: a leak, a policy, a candidate, a shadow cabinet minister going the full Prescott. Let’s be honest: the media will want something to wobble. The pals’ battalion who went over the top with Ed Miliband in 2015 still curse the BBC’s coverage of that election. It was, they argue, framed just as David Cameron wanted. Like the damaged children in Larkin’s *This Be The Verse*, some in Labour HQ have inherited that grievance. They expect harsher scrutiny than their opponents and an outsized focus on minor fluctuations in the polls.

That may be true. But whatever — or whoever’s — the wobble, it is Starmer’s job to ensure it does not escalate to something more serious. Gaza, Angela Rayner’s living arrangements, its calamitous candidate selection in Rochdale, the year its climate investment policy spent lying in a persistent vegetative state as the family squabbled over its assets and funeral arrangements: this Labour leadership does not always extinguish flash fires as quickly as it needs to. None of the above changed the fundamentals of this election but they did waste time, which is now a scarce and finite resource. It helps that the several months of destructive ambiguity over the order of precedence among Starmer’s aides are now over. Judgment calls over policy and party management that have at times been torturously disputed by Sue Gray and the shadow cabinet are now for McSweeney to make for the benefit of Labour’s target voters alone.



Clement Attlee won for Labour in 1945 despite being regarded as a dullard

Starmer’s job is not to excite them. Any one of the focus groups to which the Labour leadership pay such assiduous attention would tell his staff that he is unlikely to do that. His sole objective is to reassure those voters that the change promised by his one-word slogan is not a threat. “Any crack in the campaign,” says one senior party insider, “will be exploited not by the Tories but by the voters and their own doubts about the Labour Party.”

No matter how well-oiled the machine beneath him, it will fall to Starmer alone to keep things moving. He is not a man given to impulsive judgments. He trusts his advisers — occasionally to a fault — and prefers a deliberative style of decision-making that can confuse and frustrate those more accustomed to settling existential debates or

starting wars within a single news cycle. Those who know him best suggest he occasionally struggles to trust his own political instincts, even if — as they often do — they lead him to the same conclusion later reached by committee.

There will be no hiding place on the stump or debate stage, hence the many hours of training Starmer has undergone for months in anonymous London meeting rooms, steeling

Starmer has steeled himself for the verbal fusillades that await

himself for the verbal fusillades that await him in the studio or on the street. In the oppressive heat of those moments he will be forced to choose between ego and id: between his cold-hearted will to win and his allergy to low politics.

If anything gives the Conservatives hopes that Labour may yet fail to win well, it is that their opponent remains untested in a campaign of this intensity and unloved by the electorate (just don’t mention the prime minister’s own personal ratings). It’s not impossible that Starmer lives down to those expectations over the next six weeks. But if he does, just recall — as one of Starmer’s inner court did this week — the famous line from Joseph Biden Sr to his son: “Joey, don’t compare me to the Almighty. Compare me to the alternative.”

RED BOX

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How to call an election!

It’s happened. Rishi Sunak has announced the General Election for July 4. The political masterminds Peter Mandelson, Polly Mackenzie and Daniel Finkelstein join Matt for an emergency episode to discuss the announcement.

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THE TIMES
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Comment

Sunak's right, we should judge him on economy

Since 2010, Britain has done a lot worse than the rest of the G7 on most important indicators

Emma
Duncan



It was a bit sad that Rishi Sunak started his speech announcing the election with a reference to the furlough scheme, which he established while chancellor. He sounded like one of those one-hit wonder pop stars who hark back constantly to the track that made their name when they were 17. But it was also useful, in that it was a clear indication of the ground on which he intends to fight the election: the idea that he can manage the economy better than the other guy.

Looking at the other measures by which Sunak asked to be judged shortly after he took office, he didn't have much choice. The small boats are surging on to our beaches and NHS waiting lists remain at previously uncharted heights. Recent economic data has, by contrast, been relatively good, and it appeals to his preference for the future over the past (an unpleasant place in which previous occupants of Sunak's current address did things of which he prefers not to speak).

The sales pitch is that the economy has turned the corner. So on the radio yesterday morning, Sunak told us Britain was growing faster than America; the previous morning Jeremy Hunt told us inflation was under control and the IMF had upgraded its forecast for Britain; and last month Kemi

Badenoch cheered Britain's rise to fourth place in the global-export league in the latest UN data.

There are two problems with this approach. One is that this selectivity is embarrassing. Inflation probably is under control but healthy growth remains a distant hope. Yes, Britain did grow faster than America in the first quarter of the year but quarterly figures are meaningless. Over the whole year, America is expected to do far better than Britain. Yes, the IMF did upgrade our growth forecast for the year, but it was from a dismal 0.5 per cent to a slightly less miserable 0.7 per cent. Among the G7 group of rich countries (America, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Italy and the UK), only Germany is expected to do worse than Britain. And yes, Britain is fourth in the UN export league, but that's because of gold movements, which have no bearing on the real economy. If you ignore precious metals, Britain is sixth, where it usually is.

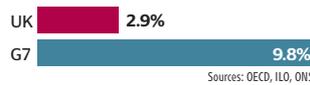
The second problem is that the news that things are going a bit better hasn't reached voters. Most people feel the economy is a car crash and will judge the government on the basis of their gloomy recent experience, not the sunny uplands ahead.

The government's defence of its record is that a series of unprecedented shocks — the financial crisis, Covid and the Ukraine war — have hit the world economy, so things have been hard for everybody. Compared with our peers, they argue, we have done well.

So let's judge their performance by comparison with others, looking at

Change in real earnings 2010-2022

UK v G7 countries



what I reckon are the four most important measures of economic performance since they came to power. GDP growth is the most commonly used measure, but population increases automatically boost national output. GDP per person is a better indicator of individual prosperity. On that basis, Britain has done poorly compared with the G7. Real GDP per person has grown by 11.5 per cent in 2010-24 compared with 18.6 per cent for the G7.

The government argues that the underperformance is due to the size of Britain's financial sector, which meant the global financial crisis hit us particularly hard. But if the main problem was the financial crisis, you would have expected the gap to have closed over time, not widened; and Britain did worse, relative to its peers, in the second half of the period than in the first. Brexit may help to explain that.

Real earnings — the purchasing power of people's pay packets — are the most important determinant of how working people feel about the economy. They have risen a mere 2.9 per cent in Britain over the period, less than a third of the G7 average.

Inflation has been the big shock of this decade. Britons have had it slightly worse than others: since inflation took off four years ago, it has been running at an annual

average rate of 4.8 per cent, compared with the G7's 4.1 per cent. The government might reasonably argue that the Bank of England is largely responsible, and it's true that the interest rate is the main means of controlling inflation. But the government's decisions also contribute. The more demand it pumps into the economy, through spending more or cutting taxes, the higher inflation is likely to be.

The government's labour-market record looks rather better. Our employment rate (the proportion of working-age people in work) has increased by 3 percentage points since the Tories came to power, compared with 1.6 in the G7. But it has fallen since Covid while the G7's has risen, and Sunak's one big hit, the furlough scheme, may have contributed to that decline. Furlough was particularly generous in Britain; and a paper by the Bank for International Settlements last year argued that people got used to being paid for doing nothing during Covid, which made them unwilling to go back to work when the pandemic was over.

Still, Sunak and Hunt aren't much to blame for these numbers. Under the circumstances, they've done a relatively good job on the economy. The guilty gang are Cameron, Osborne, Johnson and Truss. But the notion that we can turn the corner from one quarter to the next is for the birds. Our decline has been long and slow; recovery will be a longer and slower business still, and will happen only if the economy is better managed than it has been for the past 14 years.



Mission impossible for our film sector without investment

Josh Berger

Half a century ago George Lucas wrote the first draft of *Star Wars*, which would redefine blockbuster storytelling. Cannes 2024 is marking the occasion with a Palme d'Or. Not many people know that *Star Wars* came to be made in the UK because Hollywood had run out of working space and other destinations lacked the crew expertise.

Star Wars channelled unmistakably British craftsmanship and ingenuity in front of and behind the camera, building on the legacy of UK-produced masterpieces such as *Lawrence of Arabia*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey* and the Bond films. British cinematic excellence, from Harry Potter to *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Barbie* to *The King's Speech*, means UK-made films account for an average 21 per cent of the global box office.

As the media and entertainment sectors pass \$1 trillion in annual revenues, the rest of the world is waking up. Countries as far away as Australia and as near as France are pouring resources into studio capacity, skills, training and tax incentives. How long before they outpace us?

During 20 years of running Warner Bros in the UK, I saw what the film industry needs to flourish. I know the UK has unique potential — but we have to be bold. The truth is the UK faces a real shortage of quality studio capacity close to where our crews live — and we are losing big movies and the tax-take and jobs they bring to other territories.

Britain can lead the world in new immersive 3D technologies, virtual production, performance capture and post-production. But only investment in the spaces these technologies need can make that possible. And that requires new media campuses where cutting-edge tech exists alongside traditional film craft.

We need to give our creative ecosystem top-quality, purpose-built studio space, training academies and pipelines for fresh talent to enter the industry, regardless of who they know. That's why I've joined James Cameron, Sir Sam Mendes, Paul Greengrass, Andy Serkis and Richard Curtis to champion Marlow Film Studios, a media campus that looks to the future while honouring the past.

Tom Cruise, a passionate anglophile who has shot ten blockbuster movies in the UK, loves Britain so much he made the last five *Mission: Impossible* films here. Braving the lack of studio space, he shot the last two on a muddy test track off the M3 in conditions closer to those of a battlefield than a top-tier movie studio. Not every international film-maker has Cruise's irrepressible will — and many will choose to go elsewhere unless we take future investment in this critical sector seriously.

Josh Berger is chair of the Brit School and former chairman of the BFI

Martin Samuel Notebook

Soho night was ruined by clipboard misery guts

It's not just please and thank you that are disappearing from the lexicon. It's the idea that our default position should be politeness and courtesy.

Sorry to sound like an old man. But I'm an old, polite man, at least. I'll get the door. I'll let you go first out of the lift. If you stop for me at a zebra crossing, I'll always — and I do mean always — say thank you. And wave, if I can. Mouth it, if I'm on the phone.

We were out in Soho on Saturday night. Our evening started at a place called SOMA. "A modern minimalist take on the basement speakeasy cocktail bar, influenced by the Indian subcontinent and beyond." I know, but I always think the increasing eye-rolls are just old age, too.

Anyway, despite our best efforts to be punctual it took a little while to find because it was one of those businesses that regards apparent signage as uncool. I think it was our

third spin along the street when we spotted the entrance. The door was firmly shut. I got a friendlier greeting in Moscow once from an official who worked for the KGB. There was a bloke on a stool with a clipboard. Have we got a reservation? Yes, we smiled. It did nothing. Name? We gave it, still smiling. No thank. Time? We told him. Not even a hello. No indication he was a worker in hospitality. Forget Moscow, you'd get a more hospitable reception wearing a Millwall scarf in the Shed End at Chelsea.

We were late, he told us, grimly. Tables are kept for 15 minutes then given away. This seemed to be the bit he enjoyed, spoiling the night. We were a couple of minutes outside that deadline, tops. Maybe if the establishment was less dedicated to anonymity we would have found it sooner. But one of our number might already be inside, we explained. He booked the table although he's just had major hip surgery and is on crutches so he might also be — at which point, up he limped.



Very much apologetic. Very much on crutches. Very much at a disadvantage getting through teeming central London streets. Yet still no mercy. A manager would be summoned to see if we could be accommodated. And once she saw our situation, of course we got in. Who turns a blue badge away for being slightly outside the allotted hour? Certainly not a place that was half empty anyway. As Clipboard Enforcer must have known because everybody inside would pass him, unless customers were tunnelling in from the massage parlour down the street. Downstairs, what staff could be located in the gloom were friendly enough but the gin and tonic was unexceptional. Couldn't do a bowl glass, couldn't do slim, no aromatics save a segment of lime. Speakeasys always sounded fun. Unpretentious, too. SOMA wasn't either.

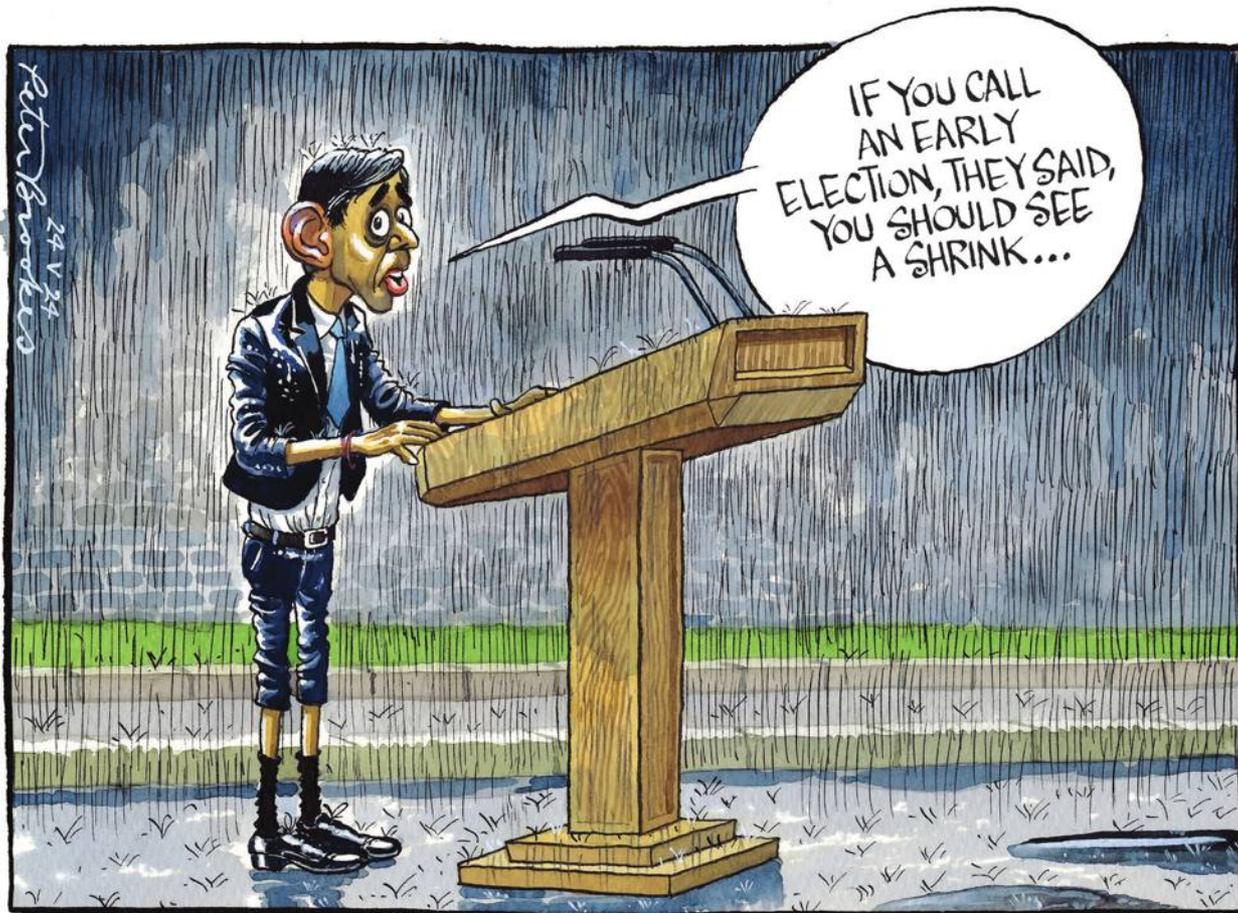
On the way out, I reminded Clipboard of his employment in hospitality. He didn't thank me.

Lybra louts

I do notice good manners, though. We both do. That's why on our way back from the market last week my wife remarked on the two teenagers crossing the road ahead. "Nice, polite boys," she said. They thanked the motorist in front, who had stopped, thanked the slowing driver in the oncoming lane of traffic, too. And then they both jumped for their lives as they neared the pavement because a cyclist on the inside lane had continued at full speed through the crossing because, well, he could. And cyclists will continue menacing pedestrians until police take their behaviour seriously.

Tunnel vision

But don't hold your breath. This week I read Edward Lucas's column about the spot-check crackdown on cyclists jumping red lights and flouting the rules of the road, and my eyes rolled again. In October I wrote about the L-plate motorcycle delivery drivers that speed along the pavement in the Rotherhithe tunnel during rush hour. It's now an epidemic. Every time traffic is slow I am passed by at least five. God knows what would happen if they met a pedestrian coming the other way. It's an old tunnel, full of blind corners. And one copper, for one week, would stop it. But they don't.



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American antipathy towards UN is hardening

It's not just Trump but Democrats too are growing sceptical of international organisations that take aim at US allies

Gerard Baker



@GERARDBAKER

In the space of two days the world was given a revealing glimpse of the moral compass that guides the multilateral institutions of the so-called global community, the various bodies in which governments and peoples invest their trust for the cause of creating a safer and more just planet.

At the United Nations headquarters in New York on Tuesday, flags flew at half-mast and security council members stood and observed a minute's silence for Ebrahim Raisi, the president of Iran, who died last weekend. His contribution to domestic and global peace has been the blood of thousands of Iranian dissidents and victims of Iranian-sponsored terror around the world. RIP.

The day before, at the International Criminal Court in the Hague, a body separate from but endorsed by the UN, created by more than 100 nations for the administration of so-called international criminal justice, the court's chief prosecutor announced he was recommending arrest warrants

for Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, and Yoav Gallant, the country's defence minister, for alleged war crimes. In the interests of balance, perhaps, he called for the arrest of the Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and other figures in the Islamist organisation.

Consider the juxtaposition of the "international community's" priorities. For the murderous head of a theocratic authoritarian state: solemn remembrance and solidarity. For the democratically elected leader of a nation fighting a war against a terrorist organisation that massacred its civilians and still holds many of them (and those of other countries) hostage: a request for an arrest warrant. Even for Joe Biden, whose daily vacillations on Israel's war in Gaza have become a menace to the security of America's principal ally in the Middle East, the ICC's action was too much, and he issued a terse and sulphurous statement condemning it (though his administration did, thoughtfully, express its condolences to Iran on the death of its president).

The stark contrast between the official multilateral institutions' treatment of civilised nations and their enemies has again brought into sharp focus the purpose and value of global co-operation through these bodies, especially for the United States.

In the US, the virtue and utility of multilateralism, particularly through the UN and similar bodies, have long

been a source of tension. But recent events have been pushing the country further away from the multilateral system. American foreign policymakers have had mixed feelings about the UN for some time. Its elevation of the interests of hostile states, its consistent anti-Israel stance, the sheer lunacy of the priorities of some of its bodies and councils, and the soaring ambitions of its bureaucracy to be less a global forum for co-operation and more a world government, have made it a constant pain in Washington's backside.

Against that, its status, particularly

The contempt the UN showed for Trump has been fully reciprocated

through the security council, as the most serious, credible and easily accessed forum for the conduct of high-level diplomacy has been highly prized. Now, however, the cost-benefit equation of this trade-off is getting decidedly more disadvantageous for the US.

This week's ICC action will reinforce American popular and institutional hostility to the multilateral system (the US, wisely expecting something exactly like this to happen, never signed up for membership of the court). But it

comes on top of other developments that further undermine US trust. The accusation that 19 United Nations Relief and Works Agency employees took part in Hamas's October 7 attacks led the US to briefly suspend funding for the agency and Congress passed legislation in March to extend that suspension.

The performance of the UN's World Health Organisation in its handling of the Covid pandemic, particularly its craven approach to the Chinese Communist Party, further exposed the malignant influence of these institutions.

If Donald Trump is elected, you can be fairly certain that US estrangement from the international system will grow dramatically. Trump's Nato scepticism is well known and, while an exit from the military alliance is unlikely, we can expect many more strains that are likely to weaken it. The contempt the UN and its agencies showed for Trump in his first term has been reciprocated. Trump likes to recall the time he spoke at the general assembly and warned the German government it had become dangerously dependent on Russian oil and gas, for which he was literally laughed at by the German delegation. The laughter stopped in February 2022.

But even Democrats, who have typically taken a more favourable view of multilateralism and the

institutions that facilitate it, are becoming sceptical of some of the international ties associated with it. The left has already rejected many of the tenets of global economic integration that it championed under Bill Clinton and that were seen as part of a commitment to advancing through international co-operation.

President Biden this month imposed new tariffs on imports of steel, electric vehicles and other products from China, stepping up a trade war that is a feature of the wider strategic rivalry between the two countries. The administration is also mulling co-operation with Congress to impose sanctions on the ICC for its actions against the Israeli leaders.

For a diminishing number of policymakers on the left the UN and other bodies continue to have their utility. But the mood is changing rapidly. The moral and political neutrality the UN was obliged to practise in the Cold War has given way to something much worse — an apparent tilt in its stance away from the US and its democratic allies and towards the rogues' gallery of autocrats, revisionists and antisemites.

As all the signs point to a steadily escalating Cold War 2.0, this time with China, America needs friends and allies. It doesn't need to find itself and its allies condemned, undermined and tethered by international organisations it helps to sustain.

Letters to the Editor



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Reform of justice

Sir, Your leading article "Prison Break" (May 22) suggests two ways of solving the prisons crisis: creating more prison places and sending fewer people to jail, in particular giving support to a plan by the justice secretary to scrap short prison sentences. I suggest two additional strategies: first, the abandonment of oral (on the day) pre-sentence reports by probation officers, which precede a custodial sentence. In 2022, 1,158 individuals were so sentenced. Justice requires full background information to be sought on adjournment, and should not be sacrificed to the desire for speed in the processing of offenders. Second, recommendations in pre-sentence reports are related to the use of an algorithm, which helps the probation officer to come to a conclusion to be put before a court. In 94 per cent of reports the recommendation, contained in the algorithm, is followed by the writers of the report. In 2020 a total of 3,187 recommendations for custody were made in probation reports. Against this background steps need to be taken, by an independent body, to ensure the algorithm does not overemphasise the use of custody.

Howard Thomas
Chief probation officer north Wales 1985-93; Nannerch, Flintshire

Sir, Arresting fewer people (May 22) is a delayed consequence of ignoring Penrose's Law (1939): there is an inverse relationship between the availability of psychiatric beds and the prison population. Surely positive investment in mental health is better than ignoring offending behaviour.

Dr Huw Davies
Ref'd consultant psychiatrist, Bridgend

Fur exchange

Sir, Further to Janice Turner's Notebook (May 23), when we finally cleared out our family home I took the three fox furs belonging to my grandmother. They rest very happily on the back of the sofa, and are very popular with small girls, who love to wear them and pretend to be grand ladies. One child puts one on as soon as she comes into the house and describes it as being able to wear a cat, with which she is obsessed.

Amara Procter
London N7

Corrections and clarifications

● We said Ben Delo of the crypto-asset exchange BitMEX was being indicted in a US court and certain findings of fact were made against him (News, Apr 12). In fact the ruling solely concerned a decision on jurisdiction in a civil claim. Mr Delo was not indicted and no findings of fact were made against him. We apologise for the errors.

 Regulated We are committed to abiding by the

Independent Press Standards Organisation rules and regulations and the Editors' Code of Practice that IPSO enforces. Requests for corrections should be sent to feedback@thetimes.co.uk

Sunak's decision to go to the country in July

Sir, Amid all the speculation around the reasons for Rishi Sunak's announcement of an early election, none has mentioned the possibility that secretly he might actually want to lose. The scale of the problems facing the country and the paucity of talent available to him make his task virtually impossible. Perhaps the same thought has come to other party leaders, for they show little enthusiasm for putting forward detailed plans of their own.

The underlying weakness of our two-party system needs to be addressed and our adversarial politics revised to make it possible for the long-term issues that face this country to be resolved. To do this we need greater consensus in all areas of our public life, which can only remain a dream under our existing electoral system.

Chris van Hoorn
Croydon

Sir, Daniel Finkelstein suggests that the timing of the election is because "this may be as good as it gets", the Rwanda policy is likely to not stop the boats but holding the election "after the policy has been introduced but before the hottest part of summer

when more boats might come" would help to suppress Reform, and an autumn fiscal event "might have involved bad news rather than good news" ("Four reasons why Sunak has gambled on July", comment, May 23). Your leading article "Battle Commenced" similarly states that there is a chance of a rise in inflation later in the year, that the IMF warned this week that taxes should be raised to limit government borrowing, that the pledge to cut NHS waiting lists will not be met to any tangible degree in the near future, and (again) that the first Rwanda flight should have left but "the deportation scheme's real-world deterrent effect would not be known on election day". In other words, the election has been timed to facilitate a con.

Christopher Clayton
Waverton, Cheshire

Sir, A six-week election campaign is surely too long now that we have instant communication and 24-hour news. In 1974 a general election was called on February 7 with voters going to the polls 21 days later.

Leigh Hatts
London SE1

Sir, Daniel Finkelstein tells us that "we really do need to talk about Brexit" (May 22) but omits to mention the one UK-wide party that has been willing to do so. The election campaign will provide an ideal opportunity to hear the Liberal Democrats' cautious, but realistic, views about a gradual rapprochement with Europe.

Richard Willmott
Hereford

Sir, I suspect that Peter Willetts (letter, May 23) will find no shortage of candidates standing on a platform of "filling in the potholes" or "obtaining a routine surgery appointment within five weeks of requesting one". The problem arises in finding a candidate who will fulfil the commitment.

Ian McKirdy
Bishops Stortford, Herts

Sir, Scottish schools need to get better, so the SNP should welcome the fact that pupils are not going to lose a day's teaching on July 4 ("Holding election in school holidays 'disrespects Scots'", May 23).

Gareth Howlett
Edinburgh

Post Office scandal

Sir, I have no sympathy with the tearful Paula Vennells nor with any of the Post Office executives whose reprehensible behaviour created the scandal that destroyed the lives of so many sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses (reports, May 23). However, it was not Ms Vennells or any of her colleagues who sent all those innocent people to prison: the courts were responsible for that. Lawyers, magistrates and judges failed to see the truth — and they failed time and time again. The Ministry of Justice should conduct its own inquiry into what went wrong in the courts, and do so without being side-tracked by the election, and before society's confidence in the embattled legal system is further undermined.

Robin Laurance
Oxford

Sir, Either Paula Vennells did lie to parliament in 2015 or she was egregiously incompetent as chief executive of the Post Office. Whichever is the case, if she has any moral conscience whatsoever her apologies should be followed by her voluntary return of the huge salary

she earned in those years: she should give it to the victims and their relatives in the case of those who decided to end their lives as a direct result of her behaviour.

Andrew Dobbie
Berkhamsted, Herts

Sir, If the Rev Paula Vennells is truly sorry, should she not follow the example of Zacchaeus, who said: "If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount?"

The Rev Richard Hill
Son of a former sub-postmaster; Ludlow, Shropshire

Proportionate force

Sir, The letter from Lord Grabiner et al (May 22) argues that the war crime warrant issued by the International Criminal Court is wrong in principle for five reasons. The first is that Israel is entitled to seek to remove the ability of Hamas to murder, rape and abduct Israeli citizens. Certainly. But as a young national serviceman about to go on riot duty, I was handed an explicit and printed order that if I used more force than was necessary to maintain law and order I would face a charge "which may be anything

from common assault to murder". It was a sobering reminder that just wars do not justify every kind of action and that participants are still accountable for what they do.

Professor John Bowker
Cambridge

Operation Biting

Sir, I take issue with Max Hastings's comments about my grandfather, General "Boy" Browning, and my grandmother, Daphne du Maurier (Magazine, May 18). My grandfather was not a "notable prima donna" as Hastings asserts. He won the DSO, aged 20, for his leadership and courage at the Battle of Gauche Wood in December 1917, the only officer to survive from his company that day. He was a Grenadier Guards officer and knew that immaculate turnout and discipline went hand in hand with fighting spirit. It was also not the case that my grandfather was "unable to form lasting relationships" with women. He had just one relationship before he was engaged to my grandmother, to whom he was married for 31 years until his death in 1965.

Paul de Zulueta
London W8

A CENTENARY OF GAS LIGHTING

FROM THE TIMES MAY 24, 1924

The centenary of the lighting of Paris by gas will be celebrated tomorrow, when a tablet will be unveiled in the St Louis Hospital, where the first gasworks were established in February, 1818, for the exploitation of the invention of Philippe Lebon. The unhappy inventor was not present to witness the achievement of his labours. Neglect and penury had been his lot. On the night of December 2, 1804, the day of Napoleon's coronation, he was stabbed to death in the Avenue des Champs Elysees, then a dark and deserted lane. Gas

lighting had not then come within the range of practical application, but Lebon had already demonstrated its possibilities. Noticing that a handful of sawdust put in a glass bottle and placed over a fire gave out a thick smoke which could be transformed into a brilliant flame, the idea occurred to him of making a gas lamp. He constructed an apparatus for the distillation of the wood, with a water container for condensation, and a tube at the end of which the gas burned. He obtained a patent, dated September 28, 1799, for what he called a "thermolampe". He was careful to explain in the specification that coal could be used instead of wood. A similar idea occurred about the same time to Minckelers, in Belgium, and to Murdoch, in London, and the claim to priority of invention was disputed. Lebon conducted his first public experiments at the Hotel Seignelay. All the apartments, the courtyard, and the gardens were illuminated

with gas-jets, grouped like bouquets of flowers. The First Consul took a great interest in the invention, not so much as a new process of lighting as for the by-product of tar, which was greatly needed for the fleet. Lebon's widow carried on the experiments and was given a pension until 1814, when the patent expired. A new patent was taken out by a German named Winzer, or Winsor, who became naturalised in England and associated himself with Murdoch. After lighting several streets in London and Westminster Bridge, he came to Paris. The Opera was lighted with gas for the first time on February 6, 1822. Of the 12,672 lanterns with which Paris was lighted 100 years ago, only 69 were gas jets. It was not until December 31, 1828, that the Rue de la Paix was entirely lighted by gas.

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Opera and culture of anti-elitism

Sir, What James Marriott calls snobbery I (with Pierre Bourdieu) call cultural capital ("Vandalism of opera may be only first shock", May 23). Of course it has a sociological function. But to make the arts simply a function of sociology, as theorists have done since Adorno (himself a lover of high culture), debases their aesthetic value. Every human culture has independently found meaning in harmonised complexity. Neither the mode of production nor class formation can explain why we consistently think Virgil is better than Lucan, Shakespeare better than Dekker or Verdi than Rossini — nor the way in which even non-Muslim Arabs respond to the beauty of the Quran. They don't even explain Taylor Swift. And the test of opera is not the Royal Opera House, it is listening to Wagner alone at home or on the hard benches of Bayreuth.

Sir John Jenkins
Matfield, Kent

Sir, James Marriott perpetuates the lamentable misuse of the term "elite", giving it a negative connotation. Why is it all right for Roger Federer or Marcus Rashford to be elite but not for a classical musician? Surely they share the same commitment to outstanding performance — although the musician does not receive the same financial reward for the years spent pursuing excellence.

Lady Smith
Tetbury, Glos

Offside change

Sir, Arsène Wenger's proposal to amend the offside law (May 23) so that an attacker is inside if partially level with the defender is to be welcomed but should apply to all attacking players. The concept of "not interfering with play" should be dropped; even if a player is not challenging for the ball, he or she could be gaining the advantage of not having to run so far for the next phase of play. As Brian Clough is reputed to have said: "If a player isn't interfering with play he shouldn't be on the pitch."

Sebastian Marr
Chippenham, Wilts

Sir, Arsène Wenger's proposal will not get rid of the need to draw lines on the screen to decide whether a player is offside. Why not get rid of the offside law completely (as in hockey)? This would benefit attackers and lead to more goals and at the same time make the midfield less congested, making for a more entertaining spectator experience. There would, of course, be little to talk about in the pub afterwards.

Dr Andrew Cairns
Liss, Hants

Name of shame?

Sir, I read with interest about the plight of people named "Kevin", and am full of sympathy ("Can Costner save the Keven-ens of France?", news, May 23). However, imagine how much worse it is to be a "Karen". It is now used as a derogatory term on both sides of the Atlantic — I almost wish I was called "Sharon". Incidentally, in my teens I had a boyfriend called Kevin.

Karen Butler
North Luffenham, Rutland

Letters to The Times must be exclusive and may be edited. Please include a full address and daytime telephone number.

Daily Universal Register

UK: Final day of Paula Vennells's evidence to the Post Office inquiry; Ofgem announces the energy tariff cap to come into effect from July 1.

Nature notes



As the spring bird migration reaches a climax, keen birdwatchers look out for the fleeting visit of the Temminck's stint.

After a winter in Africa, this small wader is returning to breed in the taiga of the far north. Stopping off in Britain, the traveller can be occasionally glimpsed at pools, lakes or marshes. The bird is named after Coenraad Jacob Temminck, a highly influential Dutch zoologist, who died in 1858. This influential figure gave his name to a wide range of bird species, including the Temminck's cormorant, Temminck's fruit dove and Temminck's hornbill. He also provided the name for a broadfin shark, many fish, reptiles and mammals including a pangolin, and a flying fox. Temminck's golden cat is a beautiful Asian wild cat.

JONATHAN TULLOCH

Birthdays today



Bob Dylan, pictured, singer-songwriter, Nobel prize in literature (2016), 83; Ali Bacher, former South African Test cricket captain, 82; Stanley Baxter, comedian, 98; Jim

Broadbent, actor, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* (2023), 75; Eric Cantona, footballer, Manchester United (1992-97) and actor, *The Salvation* (2014), 58; Michael Chabon, novelist, *Moonglow* (2017), 61; John Christodoulou, businessman, owner of Yianis Group (property), 59; Tansu Ciller, economist, the first female prime minister of Turkey (1993-96), 78; Sir Roger Deakins, two-time Oscar-winning cinematographer, *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), *1917* (2019), 75; Orla Kiely, fashion designer, 61; Patti LaBelle, singer, *Lady Marmalade* (1975), 80; Liz McColgan, athlete, Olympic silver medalist (1988), 60; Paul McCreesh, founder (1982) and artistic director, Gabrieli (Consort & Players), 64; Alfred Molina, actor, *Chocolat* (2000), 71; Adrian Moorhouse, swimmer, Olympic gold medalist (1988), 60; Dermot O'Leary, radio and TV presenter, 51; Dave Peacock, singer, Chas 'n' Dave, 79; Prof Nick Pearce, director, Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath, head, prime minister's policy unit (2008-10), 56; Annamarie Phelps, vice-chairwoman, British Olympic Association (Team GB), 58; Priscilla Presley, actress, *Dallas* (1983-98), 79; Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg, Conservative MP for North East Somerset, business, energy and industrial strategy secretary (2022), 55; John C Reilly, actor, *Holmes & Watson* (2018), 59; Sir Luke Rittner, chief executive, Royal Academy of Dance (1999-22), London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (1994-2017), 77; Archie Shepp, jazz musician, 87; Dame Kristin Scott Thomas, actress, *The English Patient* (1996), 64; Prof Jeremy Treglown, editor, *The Times Literary Supplement* (1982-90), 78; Richard Wilson, sculptor, *20.50* (1987), 71.

On this day

In 1877 the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) arranged for the socialite Lillie Langtry to be seated next to him at a dinner party (and her husband at the far end of the table).

The last word

"If grass can grow through cement, love can find you at every time in your life." Cher, singer and actress, in *The Times* (1998)



Stage Right

As Nigel Farage rules out entering the electoral race with Reform, prospective voters should take a questioning look at what his party is really offering

In what is already a key image of the general election, Rishi Sunak was soaked in bucketing rain on Wednesday as he told a surprised nation that it was going to the polls. The deluge did not stop there, however: yesterday, Nigel Farage poured cold water on his right-wing Reform Party's ambitions by announcing that he will not stand for a parliamentary seat.

Mr Farage, the honorary president and former leader of the party, had long permitted speculation to mount over whether he would make a return to the political fray. Yet hours before Richard Tice, the party leader, launched Reform's election campaign, Mr Farage made it known on Twitter/X that while he was "fully supportive", his energies were focused elsewhere: on helping Donald Trump in the US presidential election. "Important though the general election is," he said, "the contest in the United States of America on November 5 has huge global significance."

It might come as little surprise that a consummate showman such as Mr Farage should choose even a bit-part on the dazzling stage of an American presidential campaign over a well-worn role in the British political equivalent of local rep. Still, despite putting on a brave face, Mr Tice has a case for feeling abandoned by his box-office draw.

Reform had already been wrong-footed by Mr Sunak's snap announcement of an election. The party was struggling to find enough candidates to fight every seat, as it promised to do. This problem has now become much more urgent. The difficulty is less finding people, than finding people who have been vetted or can pass vetting. Only 500 prospective candidates are thus far "approved and allocated", with 100 more "in the vetting process". Right-wing fringe parties tend to attract unsavoury characters from time to time, and there must now be a reasonable chance that Reform will select candidates it will have to disown during the campaign.

Just how rigorous that vetting will be remains open to question. Reform has already ditched or suspended at least 12 election candidates over offensive social media posts, a high tally which Mr Tice defended by observing that every party has its share of "muppets and morons". Yet the party has also backed candidates who have, variously, referred to a "make-believe climate crisis", promoted anti-vaccine content, and called the RNLI "a taxi service for illegal immigrants".

Reform is thought to have little chance of winning a Westminster seat, particularly with Mr Farage out of the running. Its sole MP, Lee

Anderson, defected from the Conservatives in March after refusing to apologise for baseless claims that Islamists had "control" of the London mayor, Sadiq Khan: it is uncertain whether Anderson can hang on to his Ashfield seat. The party's "common-sense" policies are heavy on bombastic promises, and thin on practical detail. Nonetheless, it would be foolish to dismiss its significance in the election.

Reform can do two things. The first is to act, as populist parties so often do, as a magnet for those who are politically alienated. The second is significantly to disrupt voting patterns, with the party's support currently running at about 11 per cent in the polls. The Conservative Party has the most to lose from this. As Sir John Curtice observed, recent polls indicate that one in five 2019 Conservative voters would now vote for Reform, compared with one in six who would switch to Labour.

Even a Farageless Reform could leave Mr Sunak in the unenviable position of attempting to outflank it on the right, while remaining sufficiently moderate not to drive one-nation Tories towards the Liberal Democrats or Labour. These are contortions which would test the skills of even a latter-day political Houdini. For their part, however, voters should take a closer look at what Reform is really offering. The reality is not enticing.

Divine Retribution

Paula Vennells is at last having to face up to the suffering of the Horizon victims

Paula Vennells — Paula Vennells CBE before a petition signed by more than a million people forced her to renounce the honour — should never have been chief executive of the Post Office. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from her evidence to the statutory inquiry into the Horizon computer scandal that claimed the lives, liberty, happiness and reputations of hundreds of postmasters wrongly accused of theft and other offences. If Ms Vennells is to be believed — and an ordained priest of the Church of England who swears on the Bible should be — she was clearly incapable of running a large and complex concern.

Ms Vennells's two days of testimony before the inquiry, with a third today, conveyed the impression of a leader at the mercy of unscrupulous subordinates, ignorant of the bodged technology that was sending her employees to prison, and incapable of detecting a stupendous miscarriage of justice taking place before her very eyes. There is another darker interpretation: that Ms Vennells, for all her pretensions to godliness, was the opposite of the Good Samaritan, abandoning those in distress, and is now bent on saving her own skin.

Ms Vennells's appearance was a culminating moment in the inquiry. For years she escaped public interrogation over her leading role in a scandal that, among other horrors, caused a wrongly accused postmaster to walk in front of a bus. Referring to the victim, Martin Griffiths, she broke down in tears. The emotion appeared genuine. What was odd was that this capacity for sympathy was not exercised for year after year as terrified postmasters were overwhelmed by a tide of prosecutions instigated against them and based on the lie that Horizon could not produce false entries.

Anyone with an ounce of common sense should have smelt a rat about Horizon. But Ms Vennells, who raked in £5 million as Post Office CEO between 2012 and 2019, was invincibly incurious about its failings. While bombarding the inquiry with apologies, interspersed with tears, she offered a series of answers minimising her culpability. She was "too trusting" of her lieutenants. All around was a convenient fog of uncertainty caused by the failure of those in the know to enlighten her. For the first three years of her tenure she did not realise that the Post Office could prosecute cases.

The email exchanges between Ms Vennells and her senior staff presented to the inquiry told another story, of a more knowing person. There was one in August 2013 in which she expressed the hope that a mediation scheme might "avoid or minimise" compensation to victims facing ruin. A month before, Mark Davies, her communications director, counselled against a sweeping review of prosecutions because it would make "front-page news". Ms Vennells took the steer. And then there was an email in 2019 when she advocated a "toolbox" of measures, including injunctions, to dampen reporting of the unfolding scandal. None of that suggests a gentle and God-fearing innocent adrift in a sea of corporate cynicism.

There was a moment when Ms Vennells almost stumbled into a straight answer. When asked if the abortive 2013 review of prosecutions for false accounting would have avoided a "lost decade" of miscarriages of justice, she replied: "It may well have done. It may well have done." It was the nearest she came to acknowledging the terrible cost of her failure to translate her professed values as a Christian into her professional life.

Funny Business

Comics and commissioners need to take more risks if the British sitcom is to survive

The traditional television situation comedy has struggled over recent decades to reinvent itself to suit modern tastes. At the height of the genre's popularity, programmes like *Only Fools and Horses*, *Dad's Army* and *Steptoe and Son* boasted viewing figures rivalled only by major sporting events and funerals of members of the royal family. To a younger generation of viewers, the canned laughter, formulaic plots and stock catch-phrases of classic situation comedy make the format seem a quaint relic of a bygone era.

The death of the traditional sitcom would, however, be no laughing matter. As with most

formats of truly broad appeal, they are deceptively hard to do well. In the case of the greatest sitcoms, their lack of outward sophistication belied an ability to artfully channel themes in the national subconscious in a way that amused rather than alienated the viewer.

However tempting it may be to attribute the decline of sitcoms to a rise in political sensitivity on the part of audiences, or the dwindling market for mass family entertainment, the problem is partly one of supply rather than demand. Speaking at the BBC Comedy Festival in Glasgow yesterday, Jon Petrie, the broadcaster's director of comedy,

chastised production companies for failing to pitch the kind of "big laugh" sitcoms the BBC is seeking to commission. One underlying problem seems to be that the present vogue among aspiring writers is to create thematically challenging, eccentric comedy-dramas in the style of Phoebe Waller-Bridge's hit show *Fleabag*, which are easier to sell to global streaming services. That self-aware style certainly has its place; but alternative comedy needs a mainstream to pose as an alternative to.

Writers should be unafraid of courting the broad appeal of sitcom. If they take the risk of doing so, they may have the last laugh.

World

China 'punishes' Taiwan with show of strength

Taiwan

Richard Lloyd Parry Asia Editor

China mobilised land and rocket forces and sent warships and military jets into the waters off Taiwan in what it called "punishment" for President Lai after he described the island as a "sovereign and independent country" in his inaugural speech.

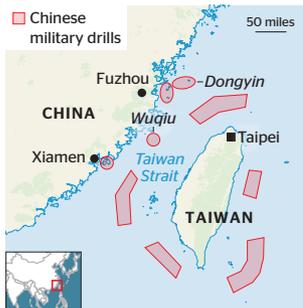
Taiwan responded by sending naval vessels, scrambling jets and placing land forces on alert in the worst military tension this year in the strait, which divides the island from the mainland. The Chinese response is an indicator of President Xi's hatred and suspicion of Lai, who has gone further than previous leaders towards asserting Taiwan's independence from Beijing.

"The exercises focus on joint sea-air combat-readiness patrol, joint seizure of comprehensive battlefield control and joint precision strikes on key targets," the Eastern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) said in a statement.

"They involve vessels and planes closing in on areas around the island of Taiwan and integrated operations



President Lai, centre, spoke at a military camp in Taoyuan, Taiwan, yesterday



inside and outside the island chain to test combat capabilities."

It added: "They also serve as a strong punishment for the separatist acts of 'Taiwan independence' forces and a stern warning against the interference and provocation by external forces."

Taiwan, a self-ruling democracy of 23.9 million people, is claimed by China as an intrinsic part of its territory and Xi insists he will "reunify" the island — by force if necessary. Lai, 64, who served as vice-president to the outgoing president, Tsai Ing-wen, is regarded by Beijing as a separatist and has been described by government mouthpieces as a "troublemaker and through".

China's exercise is



Analysis

Land and rocket forces on standby, warships churning the seas and jet fighters screaming overhead: if China did decide on a full-scale invasion of Taiwan it would probably begin with the kind of air and sea exercises mounted by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Taiwan Strait yesterday (Richard Lloyd Parry writes).

But such a step, potentially the most dangerous and consequential world event in 80 years, is still a long way off — these exercises are a political gesture, intended to warn and intimidate, rather than a preparation for war.

We have seen such displays before, always after China has taken offence at acts of the Taiwanese leadership. In 2022, there were four days of exercises, including

missiles fired over the island, after a brief visit to Taipei by Nancy Pelosi, left, then the Speaker of the US Congress.

Last year her successor, Kevin McCarthy, met Tsai Ing-wen, then the Taiwanese president, in Washington, exciting further menacing exercises.

According to Taiwan, which must be getting the information from the US and its intelligence satellites, there are no signs of large-scale movement of land or rocket forces — which would be part of any preparations for invasion. Rather than a desperately risky military gamble, these exercises indicate the kind of relationship that Taiwan can expect to have with Beijing under the leadership of its new president, Lai Ching-te, also known as William Lai.

Past Taiwanese leaders had a grace period before the PLA began to flex its muscles — Lai faces them on his fourth day in office. The

pressure is unlikely to relent. As the senior US general Stephen Sklenka said yesterday, this is "the normalisation of abnormal actions".

Beijing is hoping that by putting the heat on Taiwan it will open up cracks and fissures in the island's democratic politics. Opposition parties argue that in refusing to compromise and negotiate with Beijing, Lai is risking a devastating and unwinnable war. They are not without supporters — his Democratic Progressive Party has lost control of parliament, making it harder for him to pass legislation.

However, polls show a growing number of Taiwanese for whom the idea of reunification with China is unthinkable and who are unrattled by the PLA's menaces. Yesterday, as the rest of the world worried about events in the strait, people in Taipei went about their business. The stock exchange even registered a small rise.

codenamed Joint Sword-2024A, a term used to describe previous manoeuvres held annually. The letter A in the name is new, however — it contains the implicit threat that further such exercises may be held, if Lai continues to displease Beijing.

Chinese state media published a map showing the five zones in which the exercises were to take place yesterday and today. They include areas north, south and east of the main island as well as smaller islands, very close to the mainland, that are controlled by Taiwan.

Among them are the islands of Kinmen, Matsu, Wuzhu and Dongyin, all of which would be in effect indefensible if the PLA were to launch a full-scale attack. According to state media, dozens of ships and fighter jets armed with live missiles conducted simulated strikes, along with warships, of "high-value military targets".

Lai's speech, after his swearing in on Monday, contained appeals for dialogue with China and proposals for tourist and educational exchanges with the mainland. But the language he used in describing the relationship between Beijing and Taipei, as equals in international status, is deeply offensive to China, which regards the island as no more than a mutinous province.

Crucially, he made no reference to the so-called 1992 Consensus, an understanding between previous governments that although they may not agree how it is to be brought about, both sides agree that there is only one China.

China Daily, an organ of the ruling Communist Party, complained: "Lai failed to clearly refer to the 1992 Consensus and the one-China principle, indirectly indicating his rejection of both crucial notions." Instead, Lai unabashedly referred to the notions of "two Chinas" and "one China, one Taiwan", calling the island a "sovereign and independent country".

Xi's foreign minister, Wang Yi, said after the speech: "The ugly acts of Lai Ching-te and others who betray the nation and their ancestors is disgraceful. All Taiwan independence separatists will be nailed to the pillar of shame in history."

Taiwan's defence ministry criticised the exercises, but insisted that it was confident of repelling any threat to its territory. "The launch of military exercises on this occasion not only does not contribute to the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait, it also highlights [China's] militaristic mentality," it said. Speaking in Australia, the deputy commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Lieutenant General Stephen Sklenka, called the aggressive exercises "the normalisation of abnormal actions".

He said: "We need to condemn it publicly and it needs to come from us, but it also needs to come from nations in the region... it is far more powerful when it comes from nations in this region. It is concerning, but I also believe in my heart of hearts that conflict between our two nations is not inevitable and not a foregone conclusion."



Restaurant collapse kills at least four in Mallorca

A two-storey building collapsed on the beach in Palma de Mallorca last night, killing at least four people and injuring dozens in the tourism hotspot in Spain's Balearic Islands (David Rose writes).

Firefighters and police forces were at the scene, emergency services said on Twitter/X, adding that psychologists had been called in. Seven people were critically injured, reports said.

One of those killed was named locally as Abdoulaye Diop, a Senegalese migrant living in Mallorca. He was working as a nightclub doorman and in 2017 had saved a man from drowning in the sea off Palma.

The building that collapsed was a restaurant, Spanish media reported.

Human printer plucked at Trump's heartstrings
Page 28

Rome tunnels under its treasures for Metro line
Page 29



Macron delays voting reforms that led to riots on visit to island territory

New Caledonia
David Chazan Paris

President Macron gave into pressure to delay voting reforms that triggered deadly riots in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia after crisis talks with separatist leaders yesterday aimed at calming what he called an “unprecedented insurrection movement”.

His lightning visit, also intended to counter growing Chinese influence in the archipelago, came after six people, including two gendarmes, were killed in more than a week of rioting over his plan to extend voting rights to recently arrived, mostly white French settlers.

Barricades of charred vehicles and debris litter parts of the capital, Nouméa, and the airport is closed to commercial flights. Indigenous Kanak protesters fear the voting reform would make it harder for a referendum on independence to pass. As Macron met local leaders, rioters erected new barricades and set fire to piles of rubbish.

The unrest is one of the worst crises of his presidency and he agreed to postpone the constitutional change after his own MPs in Paris backed a delay.

After initially ruling out any “backtracking”, by the end of his visit the French president conceded that more talks were needed. “This reform will not be forced through in the current context,” he said. “We will allow some

President Macron speaking in New Caledonia yesterday



It was named as the Medusa Beach Club in Carthage Street, an area particularly popular with German tourists.

“I am closely following the consequences of the terrible collapse that occurred on the beach of Palma,” Pedro Sánchez, the Spanish prime minister, said.

He said he had spoken to the local and regional authorities, adding that the government was ready to help “with all the means and troops that are necessary”.

He added: “I want to send my condolences to the families of the deceased and my wish for a speedy recovery to the injured.”

The Spanish state-owned broadcaster TVE showed firefighters working to clear areas around the Medusa Beach Club at about 11.30pm local time.

Ambulance crews were treating and removing casualties from the scene. Public television for the Balearic Islands, IB3, reported there were people dancing on a terrace when it collapsed on top of the floor below.

Marga Prohens, president of the Balearic Islands, said on Twitter/X that she was “shocked” to hear of the collapse. “All my affection and warmth to the families of the four people who lost their lives in this



About 27 people were injured and more are feared trapped under the rubble

tragic incident and wishing the recovery of all the injured,” Prohens said.

Raul, an employee from the shop next door, told CadenaSER, a radio station: “Everything fell, completely. It was very loud and there were a lot of people inside. A very loud sound was heard. There were people eating, people upstairs ... the top floor fell in.”

The incident took place at 8.30pm, one of the busiest times in

the area. Alarm spread quickly after the collapse, while the screams of the injured could be heard.

Police involved in the rescue work last night said they feared the death toll could rise. Shortly before 10pm they rescued a young man with a broken arm who had been trapped.

Mallorca’s pristine waters and beaches attract more tourists than any Spanish regions apart from Catalonia. More than 14 million

tourists visited the islands last year, according to official figures. The island’s government recently for the first time announced a reduction in tourist accommodation.

The crackdown came as the Balearic Islands increased curbs on street drinking and further restricted party boats in an effort to deter alcohol-fuelled holidays.

Mallorca, which is run by the conservative Popular Party and the hard-right Vox party, announced a reduction of 18,000 tourist beds on the island, a cut of 4.2 per cent of its total 430,000 beds.

The initiative was prompted by a growing social debate about the island’s tourist “saturation”. In recent weeks concerns have mounted over traffic jams in villages that until now were limited to the months of July and August.

Last week the Balearic Islands government toughened a law passed in 2020 to curb excessive drinking, and introduced tougher rules against party boats.

A commission on “the Promotion of Civility in Tourist Zones” will be expanded to include representatives of the countries whose tourists are most associated with problems — the UK and Germany.

weeks to allow a calming of tensions and resumption of dialogue to find a broad accord [among all parties].”

Macron said he would review the situation again in a month. Three senior French civil servants will stay on to try to negotiate an agreement with leaders, which would then be put to a vote.

The French government believes the unrest has been exacerbated by Chinese and Russian propaganda. France is competing with China, the United States and other countries for influence in the Pacific.

A French government source said: “China is trying to deepen its security ties in the region, and our intelligence services have detected activity by Russia and Azerbaijan in New Caledonia, pushing the narrative of France being a colonial power.”

Azerbaijan, whose ties with France have become strained over its conflict with Armenia, has denied meddling in the territory nearly 9,000 miles away.

France has declared a state of emergency in New Caledonia, imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew and sent in more than a thousand police and soldiers to reinforce security forces.

As things stand, it is uncertain the reform would be ratified by the required two thirds majority of both houses, given that left-wing parties oppose it and the right, including Marine Le Pen’s populist National Rally, favour a delay.

World

New scramble for Africa as Biden courts Kenyan leader

United States

David Charter Washington
Jane Flanagan Cape Town

President Biden welcomed Kenya's President Ruto for a state visit aimed at deepening relations between the United States and African nations, with Washington eager to counter growing Chinese and Russian influence on the continent.

Both men emphasised the role Kenya plays in regional security, as well as the policing mission it is about to lead in the Caribbean in troubled Haiti, 7,000 miles away from the east African nation.

Biden and Ruto called on countries around the globe to reduce the enormous debt burden on developing nations. Kenya is one of the five most indebted to China after a series of loans for infrastructure projects including a railway line between the capital, Nairobi, and the port city of Mombasa.

America is trying to recover ground lost to Chinese funding in Africa and the spread of Russian paramilitary groups. Niger and Chad recently asked US troops stationed there to leave.

The invitation to Washington was a boost to Ruto's ambitions to be Africa's most influential leader on issues such as climate change, renewable energy and debt relief. His three-day state visit marks a significant comeback: less than a decade ago he was facing prosecution at the International Criminal Court over post-election violence in 2007.

"The United States and Kenya are working to deliver on the challenges that matter most to our people's lives: health security, economic security, cybersecurity and climate security," Biden said at a White House ceremony. "Mr President, your bold leadership has been important and significantly impactful: 90 per cent of Kenya's electricity comes from clean energy."

Kenya's debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds 70 per cent, much of it owed to China.

Fitch, the credit ratings agency, estimated that Kenya will spend almost a third of government revenues on interest payments this year.

Ruto, who badly needs to raise inward investment after Kenya almost defaulted on a \$2 billion loan to China, welcomed the opportunity to "build partnerships that will not only solve our current problems but also to build a future that is much more promising, much more prosperous, a fairer Africa".

Ruto tweeted: "Kenya means business" after meeting business leaders in Atlanta on Wednesday. The city is home to Delta Air Lines, which is considering acquiring a stake in Kenya Airways, the national carrier.

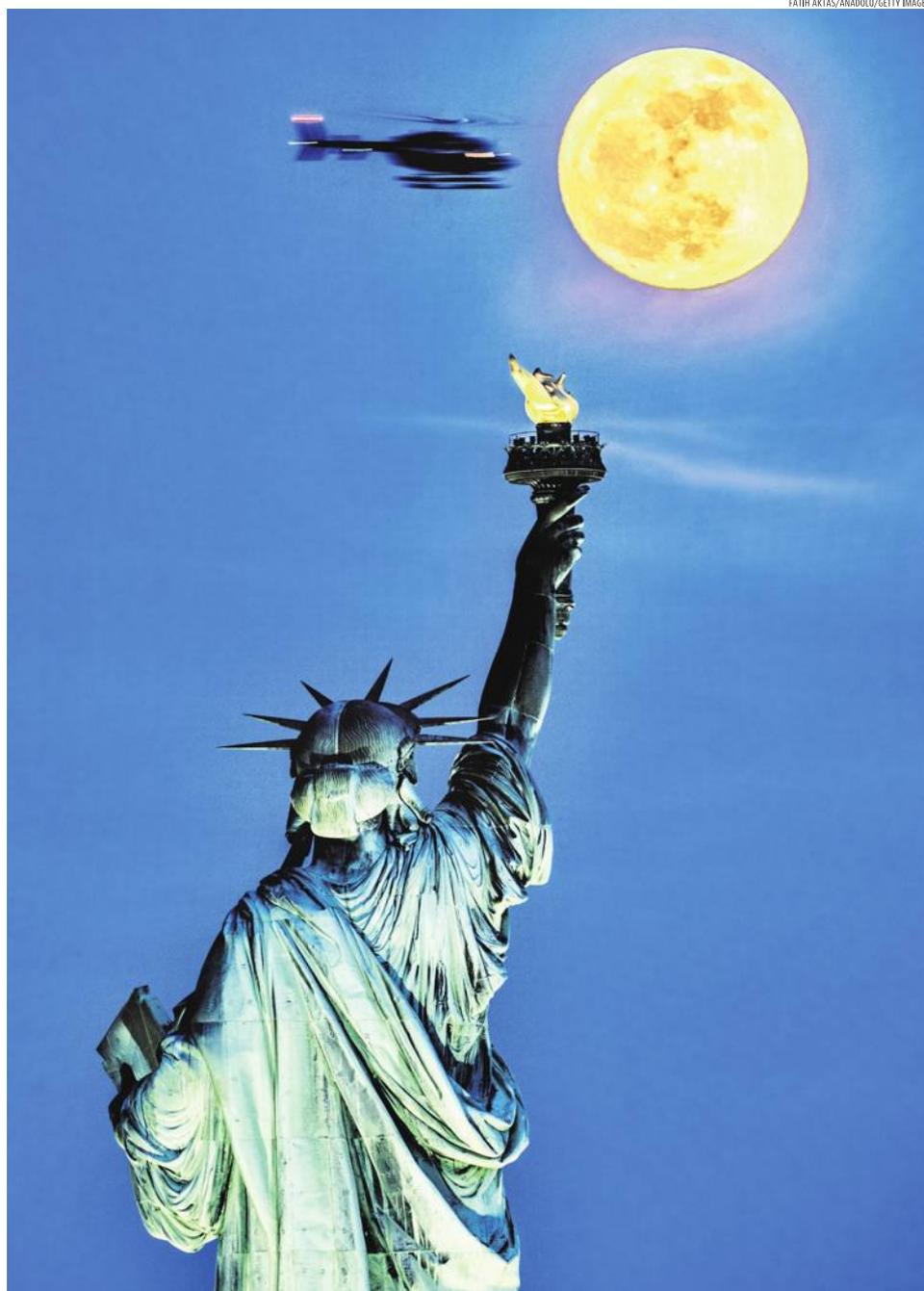
He called on the US to recognise "the heavy lifting Kenya was doing in supporting peace and security efforts".

His talks with Biden in the Oval Office were expected to focus on Haiti, where months of gang violence and political chaos have caused a humanitarian crisis. America has already signed a five-year, \$300 million military co-operation deal with Kenya after it stepped forward to lead the Haiti mission with 1,000 police, a deployment resisted by the Kenyan opposition.

The announcement of new US-backed investments in Kenya, including \$180 million for affordable housing, and plans to cut Kenya's \$77 billion debt is good news for Ruto to take home. Reports that \$1.5 million was spent hiring a private jet for the visit to Washington will further fuel accusations the tax will fund government extravagance.

Biden will ask Congress to grant Kenya "major non-Nato ally" status, prioritising military and diplomatic links without a formal security pact. The White House also announced \$250 million in grants for the International Development Association, part of the World Bank, to assist poor countries.

American antipathy to the UN is hardening, Gerard Baker, page 23



Torch light The flower moon, as the full moon in May is sometimes known, illuminates the Statue of Liberty in New York

How the human printer plucked at Trump's heartstrings

At the ex-president's trial in New York, Natalie Harp hovers with papers. It's a key role, Will Pavia writes

One afternoon at the criminal trial of Donald Trump, a tall young woman on the stand fondly recalled her days working in the White House as his secretary, printing out articles and drafts of tweets for his perusal.

"He liked hard-copy documents," Madeleine Westerhout said.

Westerhout, 33, lost her position at his side in August 2019 after she went to what she thought was an off-the-record dinner with journalists and "said some things that I should not have said".

Her former boss still yearns for the printed word, though. Seated behind Trump for much of his trial at the Man-

hattan criminal court has been another young woman who has become known as "the human printer". Natalie Harp, 32, carries a portable printer, rechargeable batteries and a stock of paper.

Since she joined Trump's presidential campaign last year, she has been said to spend more time than anyone else with the presidential candidate, supplying a steady flow of printouts of articles and nice things people have said about him. Emerging from the courtroom one recent evening, "he spent most of the time reading from printed paper about comments made on social media and cable news about him and the case", according to a pool reporter stationed in the corridor.

Harp, from California, has said that in 2015, the year she graduated from an evangelical college in Vir-

ginia, she was the victim of a crippling medical error in which a nurse accidentally put her on an intravenous drip of sterile water instead of saline.

"I survived but only to be diagnosed with a rare and terminal bone cancer," she said in a speech years later. "When I failed the chemotherapies that were on the market, no one wanted me on their clinical trials."

In a 2019 Fox News interview, Harp said that her life had been saved thanks to a "Right to Try" law enacted under Trump, which allows patients with serious illnesses access to experimental treatments not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

"I'm not dying from cancer any more, thanks to President Trump. I'm living with cancer," she

Natalie Harp keeps Donald Trump informed

said. After watching the interview, Trump called the news channel and praised the "young, beautiful woman" he had seen on screen, inviting her to speak at a conservative conference.

Harp joined his 2020 campaign and made a speech at the Republican National Convention in which she cast her story as an escape from Democrat-governed healthcare. She compared Trump to James Stewart's character in *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey, who is shown all the good he has done and how much worse the world would have been without him. "Without you, I'd have died waiting for [experimental drugs] to be approved," she told him.

The claims did not go unquestioned. Jeremy Snyder, a professor of health sciences at Simon Fraser University, wrote that Harp had been given "an FDA-approved immunotherapy drug" in a new form or dosage — something that had been allowed long before Right to Try, which covered drugs that had not received FDA approval.

Stewart's daughter took issue with the idea that Trump was like Bailey. "Given that this beloved American classic is about decency, compassion, sacrifice and a fight against corruption, our family considers Ms Harp's analogy to be the height of hypocrisy and dishonesty," Kelly Stewart-Harcourt said in a letter to *The New York Times*.

Part of Harp's job is to assist Trump with his social media posts, according to *The Bulwark*. The politics website, citing anonymous sources, reported that it was Harp who reposted a video this week predicting what would happen if Trump won, featuring the phrase "unified reich", igniting a controversy. Trump's campaign took the post down.

Being the human printer is said to have given Harp a particular affinity with Trump, like that of a royal confidant. For Henry VIII, his closest confidant was the man who managed his toilet. In the court of Trump, by all accounts, it is the woman who hands him the paper.



Rome tunnels under its treasures

Planners unearth €3bn to extend a Metro line and link the Colosseum with the Vatican, writes **Tom Kington**

It will take a decade and nearly €3 billion, but engineers in Rome are to send driverless underground trains deep beneath the city's chaotic traffic, mobs of tourists and Roman remains from the Colosseum to the Vatican.

Long promised but held up by corruption scandals, a lack of cash and the discovery of ancient artefacts that shut down digging, funding is now available to extend Rome's Metro C line, linking the two sites in the eternal city by 2034, Andrea Sciotti, the project manager, announced yesterday.

"London has its clay, New York has its rock, but Rome is one of the most difficult places in the world to build an underground line," he said. Sciotti announced the ten-year timetable at the dusty, noisy building site of the new station planned for Piazza Venezia, where a 185-tonne digging machine stands close to the spot where white-helmeted police officers once conducted traffic from a podium. Over two years, the machine will dig an 85-metre deep (280 feet), narrow ring around the site that will be filled with reinforced concrete to protect the six underground floors of the station being dug out.

"It's the first time this kind of digging has been done down to that depth in Italy," said Sciotti as earth chugged to the surface on a conveyor belt.

The Metro C line has already entered Rome from the suburbs, arriving at the Colosseum 25 metres below ground, where a station will open next year. The rail tunnel continues from there under the Roman Forum to reach Piazza Venezia, ready for the €750 million station to open in a decade.

From the piazza the line will sink to 35 metres underground as it continues through the heart of Rome's historical centre, passing beneath baroque churches and stopping once before arriving at Castel Sant'Angelo, the papal castle on the other side of the Tiber next to the Vatican. The €2 billion stretch will then continue to Piazzale Clodio, in the Prati neighbourhood.

The new line was long in doubt as archaeologists regularly stopped work after finding buried villas and artefacts, but Sciotti said the engineers had now



Rome's new Metro line was never going to be built in a day, needing delicate work under the Forum and Piazza Venezia, left



made peace with the historians. "The archaeological superintendent has said we can move what we find," he said, adding, "Twenty, 30 years ago, it would have been very difficult to do this."

Before arriving at the Colosseum, planners won over archaeologists by turning a Roman barracks into a



museum at one station and placing recovered artefacts in display cases inside another. Despite tunnelling 13 metres from the base of the Colosseum, there has been no subsidence at the 1st-century AD arena, Sciotti said. If tiny movements were registered, empty tubes laid between the station and the

site could be pumped full of material to shore up the ground, he added.

In the ticket hall at Piazza Venezia station, parts of the original Flaminian Way will be on display, as will poetry-reading rooms built by the emperor Hadrian in the 2nd century AD. "There is a third, un-dug hall we will excavate

during the construction of the station," Sciotti said.

An early dig at the station site went down eight metres, discovering a medieval tavern and the start of Roman ruins, which continue down to 15 metres, but Sciotti said the city's archaeology chiefs did not expect big discoveries.

Not all has gone according to plan. One planned station at Largo di Torre Argentina, home to a Roman temple and the spot where Julius Caesar was said to have been murdered, was scrapped when it proved impossible to burrow down to the tunnel without damaging Roman heritage. That means only one station, Chiesa Nuova, will be built in the heart of Rome's historic centre, between Piazza Venezia and the Tiber. "The archaeologists have said we can build there," Sciotti said.

The engineer said that the risk of vibrations from the line shaking Trajan's column, the 2nd century AD monument near Piazza Venezia, had been tackled with buffering material. If anything went wrong, he joked, "I have my passport ready."

Triptych helps to cement cult of Kim

North Korea

Richard Lloyd Parry Asia Editor

The portrait of Kim Jong-un is being displayed for the first time alongside that of his father and grandfather, indicating the increasing intensity of the personality cult around the North Korean leader.

Photographs in state media of a new school for North Korean officials shows a giant portrait of Kim alongside his late father and predecessor, Kim Jong-il, and his grandfather, the country's founding president, Kim Il-sung.

Photographs of the two former leaders are displayed in every school, workplace and state institution, but this is the first time they have been seen with the young Kim. It indicates that, 12 years after succeeding his father, he is establishing himself on an equal basis.



Kim Jong-un's portrait featured alongside his father and grandfather for the first time, emphasising the growing cult of personality surrounding him

"The participants were overflowing with great excitement and joy ... of having a picture taken with the respected Comrade Kim Jong-un" said the report on the state run Korean Central News Agency of the visit to the Central Cadres Training School of the Workers' Party of Korea in Pyongyang.

"Side-by-side portraits of all three

Kims is unprecedented," South Korea's ministry of unification said. Last month North Korea broadcast a new song in praise of Kim Jong-un, accompanied by a video of citizens singing his name. The song, *Friendly Father*, has gone viral on TikTok and has been banned in South Korea, where North Korean propaganda is technically illegal.

Another Bacon saved nine years after €30m art heist

Spain

Isambard Wilkinson Madrid

Had he been alive Francis Bacon might have had some sympathy for the thieves responsible for stealing five of his paintings from a Madrid flat in 2015. His long-term lover, George Dyer, was an East End petty crook.

The theft of the paintings, together worth an estimated €30 million, took place at the home of José Capelo, another lover of Bacon's, who had inherited the works after the artist's death in 1992.

Spanish police have recovered the fourth stolen painting. They seized the 1989 *Study for Portrait of Jose Capelo*, valued at €5 million, after the arrest in

February of two people suspected of having received two of the five works.

Since the launch of the investigation into what is thought to be the largest theft of contemporary art in Spain, 16 people believed to have planned and carried out the robbery have been arrested, police said.

Three paintings were recovered in 2017 after a tip-off from a London team specialising in tracking down missing art. Police offered no further details. The burglars also made off with a safe containing jewels from the house.

Police said they were continuing the search for the fifth painting and were focusing investigations on Spaniards with connections with criminal gangs from Eastern Europe.

World

Israel tightens its net around Rafah

Israel

Amal Helles Cairo
Gabrielle Weiniger Tel Aviv

Israel's military has pushed deep into the heart of Rafah, entering new neighbourhoods and intensifying its fight against Hamas.

Visiting the Gazan coast on Thursday, Yoav Gallant, Israel's defence minister, warned: "This action will go on and on, more forces from the ground, more forces from the air, and we will reach our goals."

After conducting heavy airstrikes, troops entered the Brazil and Shaboura neighbourhoods of the city, home to the majority of Gaza's displaced population. It marks entry into new territory after Israel vowed to conduct a pinpoint, limited operation in the city when it entered and held eastern Rafah earlier this month.

"We're not smashing into Rafah, we're operating carefully and precisely," Israel's military spokesman, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, said. "We're protecting Gazan civilians in Rafah from being a layer of protection for Hamas by encouraging them to evacuate to humanitarian areas as we've done with around 1 million



As Israeli forces pushed further into Rafah, the port to the west of the city was hit by airstrikes, destroying many fishing boats

MOHAMMED TALATENE/DPA/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

of a Palestinian state by three European countries and the request by the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for the prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, and Gallant.

Netanyahu also found himself under the spotlight at home yesterday after a claim that he received an early warning from IDF intelligence over a potential attack from Gaza before the October 7 attack. Citing intelligence documents to the contrary, the prime minister's office denied the allegations, saying Hamas was not thought to be interested in escalation. "The claim that prime minister Netanyahu received early warning about a possible attack from Gaza is the opposite of the truth," the handout read.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is to decide today whether to order Israel to halt its assault on Rafah as part of South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza. "Nobody, including international organisations, will stop us on this just cause to destroy Hamas," said the government spokesman, Avi Hyman.

Satellite images taken from April to May show the damage done to Rafah from aerial and ground attacks, razing numerous buildings around the two border crossings and into the surrounding fields. The damage, consistent with mass destruction seen in other Gazan cities since October, was significant around the Rafah border crossing, which has been closed since the incursion.

"Almost no aid is getting in. Hundreds of trucks sit in Egypt, including food rotting because it's been sitting for so long, as Israel keeps Rafah closed," said Alexandra Saieh, Save the Children International's head of policy.

Israel took control of the Gazan side of the crossing on May 6, with Egypt and Israel blaming each other for the closure that has severed a vital entry and exit point for medical emergency and aid workers. The UN agency in charge of distributing aid (UNRWA) has since suspended its operations, with its warehouse in eastern Rafah made inaccessible by the continuing combat.

Israel has been waging a months-long war against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack on October 7 killed 1,139 people and saw more than 200 taken hostage. In Gaza at least 35,800 people have been killed according to the Hamas-run health ministry. **Proportionate force, letters, page 24**

civilians in Rafah who have moved out of harm's way."

Witnesses said the strikes hit the fisherman's port on the coastal plain west of Rafah and that fishermen and displaced people had not been told to evacuate. Some were relaxing on the shore when the bombs fell.

Ashraf Al-Turk, who used his boat to feed up to ten families, said: "They did not warn us and did not tell us to leave the area. They did not warn us that they would burn our boats and now they burnt and destroyed them, and burnt our hearts with them.

"Where will we go now?" he added, standing by the burnt remains of his boat.

Before the war, fishermen were allowed to fish six miles off the coast. With Israel's navy patrolling the waters, much less of the area is now accessible and fishermen face the risk of shelling. Many say they only dare venture a hundred yards from the Mediterranean shoreline — missing the deeper water and larger catches.

"While informal, shallow fishing on the shoreline does take place on local initiative but the amounts fished are mostly used for home consumption," Ofir Feuerstein, of the UN



Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said. "Fish markets are not functional and sailing is banned," he said.

The military push comes during a difficult week of diplomatic and legal fallout, with the unilateral recognition

laundry, migrant smuggling and gun sales.

On Wednesday, Boyun, 39, was the chief suspect among 19 people rounded up in Italy, Bosnia, Turkey and the Netherlands, accused of building what magistrates called an "armed and extremely dangerous" criminal empire. "There is no doubt Boyun was the head of this organisation," investigators said.

Boyun was first arrested in Italy in 2022 on a Turkish extradition warrant accusing him of ordering 19 murders in Turkey. He was allowed to stay in Italy after a court ruled he faced inhumane treatment in his home country.

He was caught with a gun this year and held under house arrest in a small

town near Viterbo, central Italy. Police hid listening devices in his home and in his ankle tag. They soon realised Boyun was as serious a criminal as Turkey had claimed.

"I have someone making arms for me," he told one caller, claiming to supply Serbian criminals and "the whole German market."

After a rival gang fired shots at his front door in Italy, Boyun planned a revenge attack using a suicide bomber on a factory near Istanbul run by the gang, only to be stopped by police.

Boyun was arrested at the house and taken into custody by masked police officers, startling locals. "We thought he was a mafia turncoat and we didn't expect this," one said.

Arrested gangster planned bazooka attacks

Italy

Tom Kington Rome

When Baris Boyun was placed under house arrest and fitted with an electronic ankle bracelet with a secret microphone, Italian police had no idea they would stumble on a deadly criminal network.

Despite being restricted to his house, he still managed, prosecutors say, to plan murders and bazooka attacks while running an international drugs and human-trafficking gang.

He used his new home as the headquarters for his alleged crime empire, organised drug shipments through the port of Istanbul using Serbian manpower and managed money-

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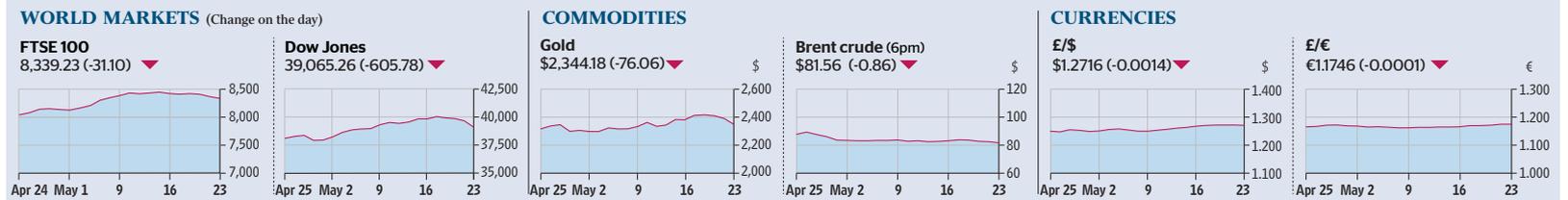
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Business



Nationwide defends giving members no say in Virgin takeover

Ben Martin Banking Editor

The boss of Nationwide Building Society has defended the customer-owned mutual's decision not to give its members a say on its £2.9 billion takeover of Virgin Money.

A group of Nationwide's members have mounted a campaign to force the mutual to allow them a vote on the deal, which would significantly expand Britain's biggest building society but is

also likely to be fraught with potential execution risks. Virgin Money's shareholders approved the deal on Wednesday, but Nationwide is not required either under the Building Societies Act or the mutual's own regulations to hold a similar poll of its 16 million members.

"Actually, we've seen really limited demand in our customer member base for a vote," Debbie Crosbie, Nationwide's chief executive, said. She pointed to a survey of the building society's

customers, which it conducted since agreeing the takeover in March and which showed that only 8 per cent of the 21,929 respondents were against the deal; 48 per cent were said to be neutral and 43 per cent were positive.

"The large majority of people seem to be very content with the direction we've taken," Crosbie said, adding that no listed bank would have agreed to a deal if a takeover was subject to a member vote. A petition organised by

members urging the mutual to give them a vote on the deal has attracted about 5,200 signatures.

Nationwide's offer for the FTSE 250 bank surprised the financial industry because takeovers of banks by building societies are unusual. Crosbie said it was getting a good deal and that the price it was paying represented a big discount to Virgin Money's book value and equated to a £1.5 billion gain for the mutual. Based on market forecasts for

the bank's annual profits this year, the takeover represented a 17 per cent return on the purchase price, she said.

Combining two financial institutions after a merger is a complicated process that often results in unexpected problems and costs that erode the benefits of the deal. Nationwide is planning a gradual integration of Virgin Money, which will be run as a standalone business for the first few years after the deal.

Cash bonus for customers, page 37

Grid's £7bn fundraising hits shares

Rights issue will finance network upgrade

Emma Powell

More than £6 billion was wiped off the London stock market's energy and water sectors after National Grid unveiled plans for one of the largest fundraisings in more than a decade and fears grew that an election will delay energy policy decisions.

The near-£7 billion rights issue would be the largest from a company in Europe outside the banking sector in 15 years, the FTSE 100 company said.

Proceeds from the fully underwritten £6.8 billion rights issue will be used to finance a £60 billion investment programme over the next five years, almost double the previous five-year period. Just over half the planned investment will be directed towards the British electricity distribution and transmission businesses and most of the remaining £29 billion will go towards the company's networks business in New York and New England.

The new shares will be issued at 645p each, a discount of almost 35 per cent to last night's closing share price. National Grid expects the investment to help it to expand its asset base at an average compound rate of 10 per cent over the five years to 2029 and to increase earnings at a rate of between 6 per cent and 8 per cent from 2025.

National Grid shares sank 122½p, or 10.9 per cent, to £10.05 and were joined by falls in other companies in the energy sector, including Centrica, the owner of British Gas, and SSE.

"I think the reason for [the sell-off] is a combination of the National Grid fundraising and the potential for policy

delays due to the general election," Deepa Venkateswaran, an analyst at Bernstein, said.

The rights issue came a day after Rishi Sunak had called an election, which could mean that a Labour government replaces the Conservative administration in July.

Water companies including Pennon, the owner of South West Water, and Severn Trent suffered even heavier declines, with their shares down by 71 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively. Analysts at Citi said the sell-off in water companies was more likely attributable to political risk, which could include a clampdown on dividends under a Labour government.

John Pettigrew, 55, the chief executive of National Grid, said the two political parties were "very aligned when it comes to the need for this infrastructure to enable the energy transition, so I don't see a change of government, if that was to happen, impacting on the plans we've laid out today".

The scale of the rights issue was greater than analysts had forecast. However, Pettigrew said there had been unanimous support from shareholders that he had spoken to in the days before it was announced.

It was unlikely that the investment plans would result in an overall increase in customers' bills, according to Pettigrew. "With this increased investment, the network cost will go up slightly, but actually what it enables is the connection of the lower-cost renewable generation and it avoids you having exposure to world gas prices," he said.

Grid aims to secure supply, pages 32-33



Calling the tune The US Department of Justice is seeking to split up Live Nation-Ticketmaster, which promotes events such as Camp festival 2024, due to feature Sophie Ellis-Bextor, in an antitrust lawsuit that accuses it of "abusing monopolistic power in the live entertainment industry". The company was created by the 2010 merger of Live Nation and Ticketmaster

Royal Mail fails to deliver annual results

Robert Lea Industrial Editor

The owner of Royal Mail group switched from takeover controversy to farce yesterday when it took nearly seven hours to tell the stock market that it would not be able to publish its annual results as scheduled.

When International Distributions Services, Royal Mail's holding company, finally got round to making an announcement, it appeared to blame its auditors at KPMG.

With no preliminary results announced at 7am and repeated indications that publication would be "in an hour or so", speculation grew that some form of intervention had taken place after the prime minister called a general election on Wednesday even-

ing. The proposed £3.5 billion takeover of International Distributions Services by Daniel Kretinsky, a Czech energy tycoon, is politically contentious. Even while the group's board has been minded to accept an offer at 370p a share, such a deal would be mired in issues, not least because it is only a little over ten years since the company was state-owned and because it is the near-monopoly nationwide postal network, regarded as a strategic national asset.

In a statement that finally hit London Stock Exchange screens shortly after 1.45pm, the company said there had been a delay in publishing its results. "The group's auditor, KPMG, has requested additional time to complete the usual standard procedures after their internal reviews were late in the

audit timetable, thereby delaying their final audit process," it said. "The board confirms that it expects adjusted operating profit (excluding voluntary redundancy costs) for the 53 weeks to March 31, 2024, to be broadly in line with previously published guidance."

International Distributions Services gave no additional guidance on what had happened at KPMG to cause the delay or when the results may be published. Previously it had told the market that it expected to break even for the year, with its loss-making Royal Mail division offset by profits in GLS, its European and American courier services.

Shares in International Distributions Services closed down by 13¼p, or 4 per cent, at 314½p.

Business

Need to know

1 More than £6 billion was wiped off the London stock market's energy and water sectors after National Grid unveiled plans for one of the largest fundraisings in more than a decade and as fears grew that an election will delay energy policy decisions. The £6.8 billion rights issue would be the largest from a company in Europe outside the banking sector in 15 years, the FTSE 100 company said. **Page 31**

2 Debbie Crosbie, the boss of Nationwide Building Society, has defended the customer-owned mutual's decision not to give its members a say on its £2.9 billion takeover of Virgin Money. **Pages 31, 37**

3 International Distributions Services, the owner of Royal Mail, took nearly seven hours to tell the stock market that it would not be able to publish its annual results as had been scheduled. **Page 31**

4 News Corporation, the owner of The Times, The Sunday Times and The Sun as well as The Wall Street Journal, the New York Post and The Australian, has announced a multi-year agreement to bring news content from its publications to OpenAI, one of the leading players in artificial intelligence.

5 Confidence among consumers has risen to its highest level in nearly three years, according to a closely watched survey. GfK's consumer confidence index rose to -17 in May, up from -19 the previous month. **Page 34**

6 HSBC has been fined almost £6.3 million for failures over the bank's treatment of customers who were in arrears or experiencing financial difficulty, putting 1.5 million people at risk of greater financial harm. **Page 35**

7 The billionaire who is the biggest shareholder in Hargreaves Lansdown is "watching with interest" after the wealth manager he co-founded rejected a £4.7 billion bid from a private equity consortium. Peter Hargreaves, 77, owns a fifth of the FTSE 250 company. **Page 36-37**

8 Boohoo, the online retailer that owns brands including PrettyLittleThing and Debenhams, has handed out £1 million in bonuses to its top executives despite missing performance targets. **Page 38**

9 Great Portland Estates is asking shareholders to back it with £350 million to buy and build more offices in London. The value of the developer's portfolio of offices has tumbled by 12 per cent over the past year to £2.3 billion, but it is convinced that those valuations are unlikely to slide any further. **Page 39**

10 For a profession that prides itself on selling, estate agency often has failed to sell itself. Agents rank fifth from bottom on the Ipsos Veracity Index. A lack of trust means few young people consider estate agency as a prime career choice, but this could be set to change with the launch this week of the Netflix series *Buying London*. **Recruitment, page 46**

National Grid embarks on power trip to secure supply

Emma Powell

If anyone was in any doubt about the mountainous task facing National Grid, it was made all too clear yesterday. According to John Pettigrew, the chief executive of National Grid, Britain is "at the foothills of the energy transition" and the company is facing the challenge of future-proofing the nation's power network. Hence its vast spending plan and intended fundraising programme.

The design and capacity of the nation's electricity grid has failed to keep pace with the rapid expansion of renewable energy, notably wind power generation that is heavily concentrated in Scotland and off the east coast of England.

The government has said it wants to increase offshore wind capacity to 50 gigawatts by 2030, from about 14GW at present, in an attempt to decarbonise the electricity system by 2035. One gigawatt equates roughly to the power required to power a million homes.

Renewable energy accounted for 41 per cent of Britain's electricity generation last year, according to figures from the National Grid's Electricity System Operator, up from about 16 per cent a decade ago. On the other side of the ledger, however, electricity demand is expected to increase by 50 per cent by 2035 as people replace their ageing, polluting petrol and diesel cars with electric vehicles and switch their household gas boilers for more modern electric heat pumps.

"All of those things have contributed towards making the system much more complicated and also mean that, after a decade of underinvestment, we're going to see an increase in electric

demand and an increase in demand for less consistent generation, renewables primarily," Charles Wood, the deputy director for policy at Energy UK, said.

The sharp rise in renewables and energy storage projects has led to lengthy delays in connecting projects to the grid, which operates on a first-come, first-served basis. Ofgem and the government want to speed up the approvals process. That includes project developers being at risk of being kicked out of the queue if they don't meet new delivery milestones to show that their project is progressing.

And it's a long queue. The list of energy projects awaiting connection has reached more than 700GW, according to National Grid statistics, of which 97GW are battery storage projects. To put this into context, Britain's entire operational wind capacity, both onshore and offshore, stands at nearly 30GW.

"There are obvious issues there in terms of investment and certainty for the sector," Wood said, including the risk that generation or storage developers take their projects outside the UK, where they may be able to get a faster grid connection.

Without the capacity of the electricity grid to cope with the level of renewables on the system, there is the chance that the system operator, which manages supply and demand on the network, could have to increase the amount it pays renewable generators to switch off to prevent the system being overloaded.

Constraints on grid capacity cost bill-payers £970 million last year, paying gas plants to switch on when renewable generation was insufficient and asking wind farms to turn off to prevent the

Energy boost



network becoming overloaded. About £670 million of this was attributed to the boundary line transmission between Scotland and England, according to research by Field, a British start-up that is focused on battery storage for renewable technologies. That could rise more than threefold to £2.2 billion by 2030, its analysis suggests.

ScottishPower and National Grid, which own the transmission lines along the boundary between Scotland and England, plan to spend billions of pounds on upgrading the transmission and local distribution lines that are

needed to carry power from Scotland, where generation is highest, to the south of England, the area of greatest demand.

The challenge is not simply a capacity issue. The evolution of the energy mix from coal to gas to an increasing level of renewables energy has created a design problem.

"The UK is a system where generation was close to the coalmines in the north and with power flowing north to south," Pettigrew said. "With more offshore wind coming on board, more infrastructure's going to have to run from east to west." That is a struc-

Manganese mines offer an escape route for Anglo

Helen Cahill, Emma Powell

Anglo American's efforts to remain independent have been boosted after an Australian miner expressed interest in acquiring its stake in two manganese operations.

The FTSE 100 company is seeking to simplify its business to fend off a takeover tilt from BHP. Anglo American recently rejected a third and improved £29.34-a-share, £38 billion offer from BHP, an increase from an earlier proposal of £27.53.

South32, a diversified Australian miner, has said it is open to buying out Anglo American's share of the manganese operations that the two companies own jointly. Graham Kerr, the chief executive of South32, said: "At the right price, absolutely. We know them better than anyone else."

Anglo American has set out plans for a break-up of the company as it strives to retain its independence and has proposed selling or spinning-off its steelmaking coal, platinum and diamonds businesses. The group then

could focus on its copper mining operations in Peru and Chile, which are capable of digging out about 760,000 tonnes of the metal each year.

Copper has become the metal of choice for investors as it is used in a wide range of "green" technologies, including electric vehicles, wind turbines and energy networks. Mining groups are racing to secure the copper assets.

BHP's all-paper deal would give Anglo's shareholders a 17.8 per cent stake in the enlarged company and represents a 47 per cent premium to the group's share price. The offer is conditional on a spin-off of Anglo American's South African iron ore and platinum mining businesses and Mike Henry, 57, the boss of BHP, said the higher price would be the "final" approach for Anglo American.

Dawid Heyl, a portfolio manager at Ninety One, a top ten Anglo investor, said: "For us as Anglo shareholders, it was definitely a welcome development and my base case is still that there's an agreed deal and they just have to thrash out the structure. On the price side, I

Listing under pressure

An activist investor who pressured BHP to abandon its Anglo-Australian dual-listing is repeating the strategy with Rio Tinto. Palliser Capital, founded by James Smith, formerly with the Elliott Investment hedge fund, said ditching a "clumsy" dual structure for a primary listing to Sydney could lift Rio's share price "by nearly 40 per cent". Palliser, which is based in London, argued that quitting the FTSE 100 would give Rio access to Australian tax credits worth billions of dollars. BHP switched its primary listing to Sydney two years ago in the wake of a combative campaign led by Elliott.

think we're getting close to the right ball park. I think the structure is more of a sticking point."

Stuart Chambers, 67, Anglo American's chairman, said the revised deal did "not meet expectations of value

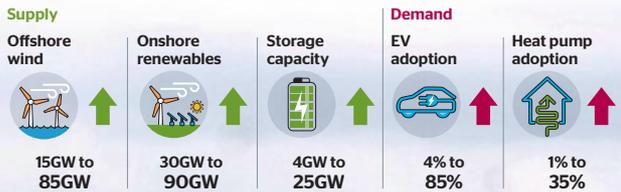
delivered to Anglo American's shareholders". The group is considering a stock market flotation of De Beers, one of the world's largest diamond businesses, as it seeks to focus instead on copper mining.

Duncan Wanblad, 57, Anglo American's chief executive, said the group was "considering all the options" for exiting De Beers. The government of Botswana, which retains a 15 per cent stake in the business, is expected to be involved in the talks.

Anglo American is also set to slow down the development of its \$9 billion polyhalite mine in North Yorkshire and wants to look to demerge its Amplats platinum mining operations and its steelmaking coal business. The slowdown in development of the polyhalite fertiliser mine will help to reduce the company's debt, with capital spending on the project being cut to \$200 million in 2025 and to no expenditure in 2026. The group previously had planned to spend \$1 billion.

Shares in Anglo American fell by 53p, or 2 per cent, to £26.45½ yesterday.

Britain's ambitious targets for 2035



tural update that is going to take both time and money.

How easily National Grid is able to put its cash to work will depend, at least in part, on policy reforms. In making a radical package of recommendations aimed at speeding up the expansion of the hundreds of miles of high-voltage cables needed to connect new wind farms, Nick Winsor, the government's independent adviser, found that developing and building new power lines could take up to 14 years. That timescale needed to be halved to achieve the government's decarbonisation goals, he said in his report. The government

has said that it wants to reduce the construction time to five years.

"We have said to the government that planning reform is going to be needed if you want to build infrastructure more quickly," Pettigrew said, adding that securing the supply chain for parts and workforce was another potential challenge.

It also would be important to make clear the community benefit, he said, since a lot of infrastructure was going to be hosted in areas where it has not been built in the past, a challenge in its own right to the nimbyism that has long afflicted planning in the UK.

A move that does not come cheap

Helen Cahill

Britain's biggest rights issues have largely come during times of crisis, but FTSE 100 companies also have offered a discount on shares to fund acquisitions and restructurings.

Such moves do not come cheap. National Grid said in the prospectus for its rights issue that the cost of fees for advisers and other expenses would be £165 million. Barclays and JP Morgan are underwriting the fundraising, with Robey Warshaw, the boutique investment bank where George Osborne, the former chancellor, is a partner, also advising on the deal.

Some of the most significant rights issues came in the financial crisis, when Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS, Lloyds Banking Group and HSBC sought emergency funding from investors. Not all were successful, as HBOS achieved a take-up of less than 10 per cent for its £4 billion cash-call in 2008. Lloyds called on investors for £13.5 billion of new capital at a discount of 60 per cent in 2009 after its merger with HBOS.

RBS's crisis-era fundraising spawned a legal case from thousands of shareholders who claimed that they had been misled into backing the £12 billion deal shortly before the bank's collapse. They claimed the prospectus had contained untrue or misleading statements about the state of the bank's finances and they wanted Fred Goodwin, its former chief executive, to give evidence in court. RBS denied the allegations and Goodwin avoided a public appearance as the lender agreed a settlement with the investors.

Imperial Tobacco and Rio Tinto raised billions through rights issues in 2008-09. Imperial Tobacco launched a £4.9 billion discounted share sale to fund its acquisition of Altadis, the Spanish cigarette maker, in 2008, and Rio Tinto sought to reduce its debt with a \$15.2 billion issuance in 2009.

Standard Chartered joined its peers in the finance industry issuing rights issues years after the financial crisis when Bill Winters, its chief executive, sought £3.3 billion from investors to fund a plan to cut 15,000 jobs in 2015.

More recently, British companies raised billions through discounted share sales during the pandemic.

High-voltage play isn't so shocking

BUSINESS COMMENTARY Alistair Osborne



Some companies can choose whether to invest in the energy transition. Not National Grid. Imagine if it failed to get itself reeved up for the exciting world of electric cars, gigafactories, data centres and AI mania from robot land. Or, for that matter, the task of shifting a fossil fuel economy to green stuff. Pretty soon the lights would be going out on the business.

So it's no big shock that the Grid's boss John Pettigrew has just popped up to deliver investors an electrifying experience. The surprise is the scale of the bet he's taking: a £60 billion spend over the next five years to ensure the operator of UK and US transmission and distribution networks can live with the demand coming down the wires. And all backed, too, by a £7 billion, 7-for-24 rights issue at 645p — the biggest such cash-call, he said, "in Europe over the past 15 years, outside the banking sector".

Analysts were expecting spending of £45 billion to £50 billion, with a comparatively smaller rights issue — not a level of investment that will nearly double the Grid's present rate of capex. Neither had they pencilled in Pettigrew "rebasings" the full-year dividend from last year's 58.52p to about 45.3p on account of the new shares in issue. Or putting the Grid's LNG business on the Isle of Grain and US onshore renewables wing up for sale: assets worth £3.6 billion on UBS maths. So no surprise the shares fell 11 per cent to £10.05, even if they still closed a bit above the 988p theoretical ex-rights price.

Pettigrew is confident that, on the back of his spend, the Grid can deliver compound asset growth of 10 per cent a year and underlying increases in earnings per share of 6 per cent to 8 per cent. As he points out, "we are in the foothills of the energy transition", with governments and regulators on both sides of the Atlantic "moving with increased urgency to attract the levels of investment required" to meet their net-zero plans.

Yet getting a return on such a spend is no slam dunk. He points to three risks: planning logjams; supply chain shortages, including for skilled workers; and around the benefits for local communities.

Last year, a report from Nick Winsor, the government's electricity networks commissioner, found the time between identifying the need for a new transmission line and building the thing averaged "12 to 14 years". Pettigrew may get a nimby backlash, too, from communities required to "host", as he put it, new high-voltage cables, pylons and substations. Cash payments should help, but, as he noted, many of these communities will be new hosts, with electricity now moving westwards from wind farms on the east coast, as well as the traditional north-south route of coalmining days.

As he puts it: "We have said to the government that planning reforms will be needed." His big spend also spans regulatory periods in Britain, where the final determination from Ofgem is unknown, even if Pettigrew says his discussions with the regulator show it understands pricing regimes must be "investible".

There are also elections in the Grid's two markets, though he says all political parties are "aligned" on the need for green spending.

Get it right and by 2029 the Grid will have more than £50 billion of assets in the UK and £45 billion in America, with the group 80 per cent focused on electricity. And, despite the stonking £165 million rights issue costs, isn't this how capital markets are supposed to work — helping to fund the big investment that society needs? People should benefit from Pettigrew's power play.

Keep digging

Three goes with the blasting dynamite and still between a rock and a hard place. Mike Henry, the BHP boss, has got himself to the negotiating table with Anglo American. But he's still insisting on an unworkable bid structure: the demand that Anglo take the open-ended risk of first demerging its 78.6 per cent stake in Anglo American Platinum and 70 per cent in Kumba Iron Ore, both listed in Johannesburg.

BHP investors won't take the risk of spinning off those assets themselves. So what other options does Henry have to make the structural problem go away? A cash sweetener might do the trick, but it would have to be enough to convince the Anglo board to run the demerger risks — a sum likely to be too much for BHP shareholders. Raising the offer ratio, which is nowhere near as "final" as BHP claimed, would get a similar response from its own investors. And Anglo probably needs more than a mere contingent payment or some sort of guarantee.

After BHP shares fell 3 per cent in Australia, the proposed bid price is down to £30.50 a share, even on maths flattering BHP's offer. Anglo shares, down 2 per cent at £26.45, are at a big discount, highlighting the risk of no deal. And analysts are split. Jefferies' "base case" is that "discussions between BHP and Anglo will lead to a recommended deal". Berenberg reckons "on balance ... the chance is that the BHP bid fails, but it is on a knife-edge". Henry will need all his ingenuity to dig out a deal here.

Delivery still due

Lost in the post. This time it's Royal Mail's results, or at least those of its long-winded parent International Distributions Services. Has the dog eaten them, perhaps? Or could they have been wrongly delivered to the neighbours?

Whatever, it took chairman Keith Williams and chief executive Martin Seidenberg almost seven hours to 'fess up to the stock market that the figures hadn't yet arrived — and to blame auditor KPMG, as you do. They didn't even specify a new delivery date. As for the shares, they fell 4 per cent to 314p. Presumably this isn't an elaborate ploy to make Daniel Kretinsky's 370p-a-share takeover tilt look better than it is.

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News Corp agrees 'historic' OpenAI deal

Robert Miller

News Corporation has announced a groundbreaking, multi-year agreement to bring news content from its publications to OpenAI, one of the leading players in artificial intelligence.

The multimedia group, which owns The Times, The Sunday Times and The Sun as well as The Wall Street Journal, the New York Post and The Australian, said that OpenAI had permission to display content from News Corp titles in response to user questions and to enhance its products.

OpenAI also will have access to the media group's extensive archive, which includes The Times, which was founded in 1785. The partnership does not include access to content from any of News Corp's other businesses.

It is the latest deal the ChatGPT maker has done with a media organisation as it endeavours to power its technology with reliable information and news sources, without breaching copyright.

It already has partnerships with Axel

Springer, Associated Press and the Financial Times. Generative AI produces human-like content from prompts. It is underpinned by so-called large-language models, which are created with vast tracts of data including articles. The better the information in the models, the more sophisticated the output.

The creative industries fear that to date their content has been used without permission. Some, such as The New York Times, are suing OpenAI for using their intellectual property without appropriate payment. Sony Music is the latest business to accuse AI labs of using artists' content without authority.

Robert Thomson, the chief executive of News Corp, told Fox Business the deal

Sam Altman hailed "a proud moment for journalism and technology"

would have profound consequences for journalism now and in the future. "Apart from artificial intelligence, which will affect everyone, you need actual intelligence and that's why these partnerships are so important," he said.

In a statement, Thomson said: "We believe an historic agreement will set new standards for veracity, for virtue and for value in the digital age."

"We are delighted to have found principled partners in Sam Altman and his trusty, talented team who understand the commercial and social significance of journalism and journalism. This landmark accord is not an end, but the beginning of a beautiful friendship in which we are jointly committed to creating and delivering insight and integrity instantaneously."



Business

Household confidence at three-year high

Jack Barnett Economics Correspondent

Confidence among consumers has risen to its highest level in nearly three years, according to a closely watched survey, suggesting that families recognise an improvement in economic conditions heading into the six-week general election campaign.

GfK's consumer confidence index rose by two points to -17 in May, up from -19 in the previous month. It is the highest reading since October 2021. The survey was carried out between May 1 and May 5.

The increase in optimism is likely to be seized upon by Rishi Sunak as he makes economic recovery a linchpin of the Conservatives' election campaign. Since Sunak became prime minister in

October 2022, GfK's consumer confidence index has risen by 30 points from -47. Consumer confidence is watched closely by economists to gauge whether household spending and larger asset purchases will rise or fall in future months. It tends to be influenced by perceptions of job security, developments in real incomes and economic growth.

According to GfK, households' confidence in their personal financial situation in the coming year has improved markedly, possibly reflecting a strengthening in economic conditions. Consumers also grew increasingly confident in the economy's growth prospects in the coming year.

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics revealed that gross

domestic product had risen by 0.6 per cent in the first three months of this year, lifting Britain out of a short-lived recession. The International Monetary Fund also revised up its growth forecasts for this year to 0.7 per cent from 0.5 per cent and signalled that the UK economy was on course for a "soft landing".

Joe Staton, client strategy director at GfK, said: "With the latest drop in headline inflation and the prospect of interest rate cuts in due course, the trend [in consumer confidence] is certainly positive after a long period of stasis, which has seen the overall index score stuck in the doldrums. All in all, consumers are clearly sensing that conditions are improving. This good result anticipates further growth in confi-

dence in the months to come." On Wednesday Sunak called a general election for July 4 amid signs that the economy's normalisation from a short-lived recession and the cost of living crisis would take longer than anticipated. Although inflation dropped to 2.3 per cent in April, a near-three-year low, it declined more slowly than the Bank of England had expected. Services inflation, closely watched by the Bank, edged down to 5.9 per cent from 6 per cent, but this was well above its forecast of 5.5 per cent.

The numbers ignited warnings that interest rates would not be cut until as late as November. Elevated inflation and more cautious investor expectations for rate cuts cast doubt on whether Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor,

could cut taxes before a widely expected autumn general election, prompting the prime minister to schedule the vote for July instead.

Hunt has lowered the rate of national insurance contributions by four percentage points over the past two fiscal events, but the tax burden is still on course for a postwar high.

GfK's consumer confidence index plummeted to a record low of -49 in September 2022 after the disastrous mini-budget of Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng, which included £45 billion of unfunded tax cuts. The package, alongside concerns about inflation and higher interest rates, triggered chaos in the bond markets that forced the Bank to launch a round of emergency bond-buying.

China a sparkling target for Gusbourne

A maker of sparkling wine controlled by Lord Ashcroft has added the Chinese mainland to its list of export markets as it seeks to cash in on a growing taste for English fizz around the world (Dominic Walsh writes).

Gusbourne, which is 66.2 per cent controlled by the former deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, increased its international sales by 7 per cent last year. They now account for 21.2 per cent of total net revenue.

Jonathan White, 42, the chief executive of Gusbourne, said: "Growth in exports has been really positive in recent years. They got off to a slower start last year due to a stock overhang, but put in a really strong finish."

Its biggest markets are Scandinavia, in particular Norway, Japan and the United States. It has added China and the Caribbean this year,



Gusbourne's UK wine sales grew by 16.5 per cent to £4.9 million, while international sales increased from £1.4 million to £1.5 million

lifting its total number of markets to 35, and is targeting India and the Middle East.

"Opportunities in China continue to be interesting, but we proceed with a degree of caution, given the complexity of the market and the

importance of getting things right," White said. In the year to the end of December, Gusbourne lifted its net revenue by 13 per cent to £7.05 million, with gross profit up 30 per cent at £4.81 million. Adjusted losses narrowed from

£1.13 million to £669,000.

UK wine sales rose by 16.5 per cent to £4.9 million, while international sales improved from £1.4 million to £1.5 million.

Gusbourne, which was established in 2004, produces

vintage sparkling wines. It is also one of the only British makers of red wine, producing a pinot noir that retails at £40. Its sparkling wines range from £45 to £195 for its exclusive Fifty One Degrees North label. The company has 93

hectares of mature vineyards in Kent and West Sussex, plus a visitor centre at its Appledore winery in Ashford. It acquired a further 55 hectares in Kent for planting in the next few years.

Its shares rose by 2p, or 3.3 per cent, to 62p.

Cost of living takes its toll on services

Jack Barnett

Britain's recovery from a short-lived recession has lost speed over the past month, denting Rishi Sunak's hopes of pinning a general election campaign on accelerating growth in the economy.

However, the fact that inflation in the services industry was at its slowest pace in more than three years has rekindled hopes that the Bank of England will cut interest rates over the summer.

The flash composite purchasing managers' index for May, compiled by S&P Global and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply, declined to a measure of 52.8, from 54.1 in the previous month. City analysts had expected a reading of 54.

The figure indicates that the pace of growth throughout the private sector has eased, but has continued to expand, nonetheless. The reading has been above the 50-point threshold that separates growth from contraction for several months. The economy is thought to have expanded by 0.3 per cent in the second quarter of this year, down from the 0.6 per cent growth registered in the three months to March.

On Wednesday Sunak called a general election for July 4 after new figures showed inflation had declined to 2.3 per cent, the lowest level since July 2021.

The disappointing PMI figures have been driven by sluggish activity in the services sector, which generates about two thirds of the nation's gross domestic product. The services PMI has slid to 52.9, a six-month low and down from 55 in April. Cost of living pressures, compounded by uncertainty over the economic outlook and high interest rates, have curbed demand for services.

In contrast, manufacturers have experienced their best month in nearly two years. The PMI reading for the sector has risen to 51.3 in May, from 49.1 in April. Demand from overseas buyers for manufactured goods has increased and orders from European buyers have lifted overall export volumes.

Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, said: "The flash PMI survey data for May signalled a further expansion of UK business activity, suggesting the economy continues to recover from the mild recession of late last year."

The survey revealed that businesses have raised their prices at the slowest pace since February 2021 amid competition between services companies. Input costs have climbed at the slowest pace in seven months.

Wizz Air in profit for first time since pandemic

Robert Lea Industrial Editor

Wizz Air has returned to profit for the first time since the pandemic, with passenger numbers up by a fifth last year.

The budget airline carried 62 million people in the year to the end of March, enabling it to wipe out its previous €535 million of losses and to book profits of €365 million.

It has received nearly €198 million in compensation from Pratt & Whitney because of defective engine issues that grounded dozens of its aircraft. The

Hungary-based, London-listed airline is expecting similarly significant levels of compensation from the engine manufacturer this year as the groundings continue.

Wizz's revenue per passenger in the year rose by 7 per cent to €81.80, lifting its turnover by 30 per cent to €5.07 billion. However, the airline has told investors that 45 of its 210 aircraft are expected to be grounded this summer, its most lucrative flying season, meaning the number in the air will be unchanged from 12 months previously. It

does not expect to significantly increase passenger numbers this year.

Wizz remains affected by lost markets from the war in Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East, which means that aircraft have had to be moved to less mature, less profitable routes.

Jozsef Varadi, 58, its founder and chief executive, said that material growth should resume in the financial year after this and that outside of any more unforeseen circumstances the airline could be carrying between

75 million and 80 million passengers in 2025-26. "Sustained healthy demand for air travel across our markets was a defining feature of last year, signalling that the surge witnessed post pandemic has evolved into a longer-term trend in consumer behaviour," he said.

RBC analysts said that Wizz "has strong medium-term growth credentials backed by its A321neo order book and exposure to faster-growing eastern European and Middle Eastern markets". Wizz Air's shares rose by 206p, or 10.5 per cent, to £21.68.

Harry Wallop

Even as cash disappears, cards shouldn't be the only alternative

“A few months ago a contact emailed me a long critique of an article I had written, which ended thus: “As far as I am concerned, you have let me down badly, but more than that you have let the British public down.” Ouch.

The article was for The Sunday Times Magazine and tried to get to the bottom of why there was £82.4 billion of cash still in circulation in the British economy. That's actual notes, fivers, tenners, twenties and fifties, the equivalent of £2,921 for every household in the UK. In an age when many leave the house without a wallet and rely on a phone, this seems a bafflingly large amount.

I'm not sure I did a very good job at explaining the location of all that cash, but that wasn't why my correspondent was so irritated. It was because I stated that some campaigners, fighting most vociferously to keep cash as a payment choice, were conspiracy theorist cranks.

I was correct. In Facebook groups championing cash, there is talk about Tesco Express tills being part of “a totalitarian cashless society” and the government wanting to control us. The reader's email did make me wonder, however, whether I had failed to adequately explain why so many businesses run by sane, sensible people resent taking debit cards.

I spoke to a handful of pubs and cafés that have gone as far as banning card payments. Most refused to appear in a newspaper, in some cases because they distrusted what they called “the mainstream media” (slightly proving my point about cash equating to crankiness) and some because they did not want the publicity. Fair enough.

One cash-only publican put it very simply: if he installed a card machine, he would have to pay £29 a month in fees to a payments company such as Barclaycard and as much as 2 per cent on all transactions to the likes of Visa and Mastercard. “If your profit margin is only 5 per cent and you're paying 2 per cent to the card payments, then it's wiping out a lot of your profits.”

This week his view was backed up by the Payment Systems Regulator, which found that although Visa and Mastercard had increased their fees



by more than 30 per cent in real terms over the past five years, there was “little evidence that the quality of service has improved at the same rate”. The two companies account for 95 per cent of UK card transactions, according to the watchdog.

Visa and Mastercard, of course, deny that they offer bad value to businesses and insist that they need higher fees to invest in security and anti-fraud measures.

The owner of my local corner shop has shown me an invoice, detailing all his charges. There is a dizzying array of levies, from 0.2 per cent to 2.2 per cent depending on the type of card used and whether someone taps and goes or types in their four-digit Pin (he is charged less for these because they are deemed to be more

secure). On top of this is “chargeback”, a scheme whereby a customer requests a refund through their debit card provider if they claim they have been incorrectly charged. In these cases, the retailer has to pay not only the refund but also an administration fee of £15 to £25 to the card provider.

Cash supporters argue that we have to hold on to notes and coins not merely for the millions who do not use a smartphone or the 1.1 million who are unbanked, but as a bulwark against overpriced card providers and banks.

Yet if you rely on cash you still have to pay a bank to handle your transactions. A bank can charge £150 to give £100 in change. My publican argued, though, that all his customers



HSBC fined for failing customers in arrears

Times Business Reporter

HSBC has been fined more than £6.2 million for failures over the treatment of customers who were in arrears or were experiencing financial difficulty, putting about 1.5 million people at risk of greater financial harm.

Between June 2017 and October 2018, the bank had failed to properly consider some people's circumstances when they had missed payments, the Financial Conduct Authority said. It fined HSBC UK Bank plc, HSBC Bank plc and Marks & Spencer Financial Services plc (HSBC) £6,280,100.

HSBC had not always undertaken the right affordability assessments when entering arrangements with people to reduce or clear their arrears, the regulator said. Sometimes it took disproportionate action when people fell behind with payments, which risked people getting into greater financial difficulty.

The failings were caused by deficiencies in HSBC's policies and procedures and in the training of its staff, as well as by inadequate measures to identify and address instances of unfair customer treatment, according to the FCA.

In 2018, HSBC identified that there were issues with its handling of customers in financial difficulty and it notified the FCA. The high street bank has invested £94 million in identifying the issues and putting them right. It also has issued redress payments totalling £185 million to more than 1.5 million customers.

Therese Chambers, joint executive director of enforcement and market oversight at the FCA, said: “People must be able to trust their lenders to treat them fairly when in financial difficulty. By failing to do so, HSBC put 1.5 million people at risk of greater financial harm.”

The watchdog took HSBC's remediation and redress programme into account when setting its fine. The bank also agreed to settle the case and qualified for a 30 per cent discount to the financial penalty imposed, which otherwise would have been £8,971,600.

HSBC UK said: “We're sorry that between 2017 and 2018 some customers who fell into arrears did not receive the service they expected from us. We reported these issues to the FCA at the time and have fully remediated affected customers. We have invested in our processes since these matters came to light and are pleased to have resolved these historic issues with the regulator.”

knew he was cash-only so brought in their old coins, while the fruit machine worked as an alternative supplier of change. So he was, in effect, operating as an alternative bank. Many communities, especially where the banks have closed branches, operate their own ecosystem of cash.

This, realistically, cannot be the future, even for those who really resent the charges of Visa and Mastercard. Having to wait until midday for the pub to open to get change to pay for the hairdresser is not a sustainable payment system.

Recently, in a shop and also at a car-boot sale, I've had business owners ask me to make a direct bank transfer, a way for them to avoid having to pay for a card machine and fees. But it is fiddly to tap out their sort code on your banking app while you're out and about.

There is an alternative: account-to-account payments using open banking. Open banking, giving third-party players read-only access to your account, is a technology that has been available for six years and it is used by endless budgeting apps. It has taken its time to make its way on to the high street. A provider called Moneyhub has tied up with Samsung (which provides the screens), allowing customers of a dentist in Edinburgh, a health spa in Wimbledon and a few other places to pay by scanning a QR code. The business is charged a mere 10p or 25p or so per transaction, rather than a percentage, a huge saving on any big purchase and, crucially, the money arrives in the business's account within seconds rather than 48 hours later. No card issuer is involved. Moneyhub is even trying out the same technology using tap and go, rather than QR codes, which would make payments even easier.

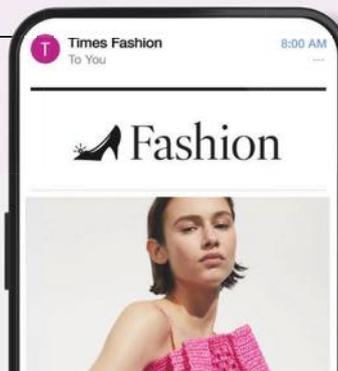
In years to come we will see debit cards as a blip in technology, like music cassette tapes. There will always be cash, as there will be vinyl, a format for nostalgic purists, but most of us want payments to be as convenient, easy and (moderately) cheap as streaming.

Harry Wallop is a consumer journalist and broadcaster. Follow him on Twitter @hwallop

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Business

Hargreaves founder 'watching

Ben Martin Banking Editor

The billionaire who is the biggest shareholder in Hargreaves Lansdown has said he is "watching with interest" after the wealth manager he co-founded rejected a £4.7 billion bid from a private equity consortium.

Peter Hargreaves, 77, owns about a fifth of the FTSE 250 company, making him a key player in any takeover who could make or break a deal for Britain's biggest DIY investment platform.

He refused to comment on whether

he supported the decision made by the board to reject a 985p-a-share approach from a group of joint bidders including CVC, the private equity firm, and a buyout-focused subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.

"I really feel at this point in the proceedings that anything I say could be completely misconstrued," Hargreaves told The Times. "I've noted it's happening and I'm sitting watching with interest."

Stephen Lansdown, 71, the other co-founder, who owns 5.7 per cent of the

company, also said the takeover proposal was "interesting and I await developments". Lindsell Train, the fund management group that owns 12 per cent, did not return a request for comment.

The bid approach was disclosed by the consortium of suitors on Wednesday evening when they revealed that the board of Hargreaves Lansdown had rejected their most recent takeover proposal on April 26.

The Bristol-based company later confirmed that the bidders had made

two approaches and that its board had turned down the second 985p-a-share offer "on the basis it substantially undervalues Hargreaves Lansdown and its future prospects". It urged its investors to "take no action".

Shares in the company climbed by 14.4 per cent, or 14p, to close at £11.20 amid hopes of a higher offer from the consortium and speculation a counter-bidder might emerge.

There have long been rumours that Hargreaves Lansdown's weak share price had left it vulnerable to a takeover. The move by the consortium, which also includes Nordic Capital, another private equity firm, may force other interested parties to emerge.

Some industry-watchers believe it could attract bids from banks seeking to bolster their wealth management divisions. In the past Morgan Stanley, the Wall Street investment bank that is one of the world's biggest wealth managers, has been tipped as a potential suit-

● **AJ Bell has reported a 47 per cent rise in interim pre-tax profit to £61.4 million, up from £41.9 million a year ago. Revenue at the investment platform in the six-month period to the end of March was up by 27 per cent at £131.3 million as assets under management rose by 13 per cent to a record £80.3 billion. The company added 27,000 customers in the first half to reach 503,000. The interim dividend was lifted by 21 per cent from a year ago to 4.25p a share. Shares in AJ Bell jumped by 40½p, or 11.2 per cent, to 403p.**

or. Barclays also has been seen as a possible bidder, as has Goldman Sachs. However, bankers from the latter are advising the private equity consortium on its approach to Hargreaves Lansdown, seemingly ruling out Goldman as a rival suitor.

Analysts at UBS said: "Ownership of a UK investment platform could be attractive to a trade buyer such as a UK bank, insurance or other financial company seeking to diversify their revenue and boost their return on in-

Private equity target



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Investec sets aside £30m over car finance review

Ben Martin Banking Editor

Investec, the Anglo-South African bank, has become the latest lender to take a financial hit from a regulatory review into the motor finance market as it set aside £30 million to cover costs and potential compensation payouts.

The Financial Conduct Authority sent shock waves through the car loans industry in January when it said it was examining potentially unfair vehicle loan deals struck before January 2021, which was when the regulator banned discretionary commissions on vehicle loans, and as far back as April 2007.

This has led to speculation that lenders could face a scandal akin to the payment protection insurance (PPI) debacle, which left banks footing a bill of £50 billion. While analysts expect the hit from the car loans inquiry will be lower than for PPI, customer compensation and associated costs are expected to run into billions across the industry.

Lloyds Banking Group, a big player in motor finance, set aside £450 million in February to account for the potential impact of the watchdog's review. Close

Brothers, another provider of vehicle finance, has axed its dividend and warned it will take other measures to generate an extra £400 million of capital by July next year.

Investec said at its annual results yesterday that the £30 million was to cover legal and other costs arising from the review as well as potential compensation payments to customers.

Investec entered the motor finance business in 2015 and its loan book in this area had stood at £555 million shortly after the watchdog imposed its discretionary commission ban, Ruth Leas, the chief executive of Investec's main banking subsidiary, said.

The authority said last month that many companies were struggling to quickly provide the information it needed for its review, but Leas said this was not a problem for Investec. "Because it's a short period of time and a relatively new business our data is pretty accurate," she said. Pre-tax profits at Investec fell to £822.5 million in the 12 months to March 31 from £893.9 million a year earlier. Shares fell 28½p, or 5.1 per cent, to 526p.

consortium's bid with interest



Warm words faded as successor's strategy failed to reap rewards

Behind the story

When Peter Hargreaves decided in April 2015 to stand down from the board of the wealth manager he co-founded in 1981, the business was riding high (Ben Martin writes).

With its shares trading at about £12 apiece, Hargreaves Lansdown was firmly ensconced in the FTSE 100 index of the London stock market's biggest companies, and it had recently reported what was then a record annual pre-tax profit of almost £210 million for the previous year. The entrepreneur declared: "The group continues to perform strongly and I have every confidence in the strong management team and the well diversified board to look after my interests."

Nine years later and, while the wealth manager's business is significantly bigger, its stock market fortunes have waned significantly, leaving it vulnerable to a takeover bid. Its share price, which peaked at more than £24 in 2019, slumped to less than 70p in recent months, with the corresponding decline in its market capitalisation resulting in the group's demotion to the mid-cap FTSE 250 index last autumn. This is despite annual profits at the business topping £400 million last year and its assets under administration swelling to almost £150 billion, from around £50 billion when Hargreaves left the board.

Part of its lacklustre stock market performance reflects concerns about its strategy. Hargreaves Lansdown

rattled investors in February 2022 when Chris Hill, its former chief executive, set out plans to build a service offering clients advice on their investments. Not only does this take the business away from its core proposition as a DIY investment platform, but the five-year plan, which has been taken on and refreshed by Hill's successor Dan Olley, requires £225 million of spending by 2026. Funding this has required Hargreaves Lansdown to suspend its once regular special dividend payments.

This has fractured the company's relationship with Hargreaves, who in 2022 publicly vented his frustration with the share price and criticised the strategy, in stark contrast to his warm words in 2015.

Worries about rising competition from rival investment platforms such as AJ Bell and Interactive Investor have also dragged on Hargreaves Lansdown's share price. Separately, investors have fretted about regulatory scrutiny of the sector after the Financial Conduct Authority told investment platforms last year to stop profiteering from the interest they are earning on customer cash balances, following the sharp rise in rates since late 2021. The cost of living crisis also dampened some appetite among consumers to invest.

Even so, the company's prospects brightened recently. A trading update from the group last month was stronger than expected, showing Hargreaves Lansdown had enjoyed net new business flows of £1.6 billion in the three months to the end of March.

assets. The relationship between the company and Hargreaves, who stepped down as its chief executive in 2010 and left its board altogether in 2015, has been strained in recent years.

His frustration with the group's flagging share price prompted him to publicly criticise Deanna Oppenheim-

er, its former chairwoman, and the strategy of Chris Hill, its former chief executive, in 2022.

Hill was succeeded last August by Dan Olley, who previously ran Dunnhumby, the data analysis company. Alison Platt replaced Oppenheimer in February. Adrian Collins is

Hargreaves' representative on the board, but he was not among the directors who rejected the bid, which was considered by the company's independent directors. Under the City's takeover rules, the consortium has until June 19 to make a firm offer or walk away.

Nationwide hands out £100 bonus again

Ben Martin Banking Editor

Britain's biggest building society will hand millions of its customers a £100 cash bonus for a second year running, despite announcing a fall in annual profits.

Next month's payout by Nationwide is expected to total about £385 million and will go to the 3.85 million of its customers who have both a current account with the mutual and a savings account or a mortgage.

It comes after the building society revealed its first so-called fairer share payment a year ago at a cost of £340 million.

Cash distributions by customer-owned mutuals to their members are unusual, but Debbie Crosbie, 54, the Nationwide chief executive, said the society's ambition was to make these payments a regular annual occurrence, as long as they were affordable.

She said the profit boost that the mutual expected to receive once it had finalised its £2.9 billion takeover of Virgin Money, the FTSE 250 bank, which it agreed in March, had given it the confidence to make a second payout.

Nationwide announced its first dis-

tribution last year alongside record annual underlying pre-tax profits of £2.23 billion.

However, underlying profits slid to £2 billion in the 12 months to April 4 after the mutual was weighed down by higher costs and a £99 million provision for litigation it is pursuing against Allen & Overy, the law firm, and Bank of New York Mellon. Nationwide's legal action concerns a tax bill that it claims it incurred because of the pair. The building society said that it "expects to recover significant amounts from the defendants".

On a statutory basis, its pre-tax profits fell by a fifth to £1.78 billion, knocked by the impact of last year's bonus to customers.

Chris Rhodes, the society's finance chief, said that a decision to pass on a greater proportion of Bank of England base in-

Debbie Crosbie wants payments to customers to be an annual occurrence



terest rate rises to customers last year also had weighed on Nationwide's profitability, although this had helped to drive a further £1.85 billion in financial benefits to its members on top of the £100 payouts.

In a further boost to customers, the building society said that it was starting a new bond exclusive to members that pays 5.5 per cent and a £200 incentive for members to switch their current accounts to the mutual.

Last month Nationwide was criticised by the Advertising Standards Agency for misleading the public with a high-profile marketing campaign, starring Dominic West, the actor, as an arrogant bank boss that satirised branch closures by rival lenders. The ruling forced the mutual to update the adverts after the watchdog banned them in their previous form.

Crosbie said that the regulator's criticism had been "disappointing" but that Nationwide was happy with the eventual outcome.

Aviva would prefer a clear election victory, says boss

Tom Saunders

The chief executive of Aviva wants the coming election to be "decisive", which would allow the company to invest with "certainty" after years in which a succession of Conservative prime ministers led to a relatively unstable regulatory landscape. Speaking on Sky News, Dame Amanda Blanc, said: "We want consistency and stability. Whoever wins the election, we really want there to be certainty for us to be able to invest in things like UK infrastructure."

Aviva increased its general insurance premiums by 16 per cent year-on-year to £2.7 billion, the company said in its first-quarter results, with strong growth across all areas of its business.

Retirement sales were up by 13 per cent, driven largely by strong bulk annuity volumes, which were up by 26 per cent to £1.3 billion. The bulk annuity market, where UK defined-benefit pension schemes offload liabilities and assets to specialised life insurance carriers, has

expanded rapidly in recent years. LCP, the actuarial firm, estimated at the start of the year that there would be between £50 billion and £65 billion of buy-in and buyout deals in 2024.

The increase in general insurance premiums was driven largely by growth in Aviva's personal line business, with individuals buying cover for themselves or their families. Growth was particularly strong in Britain, where general insurance premiums grew by 19 per cent to £1.7 billion, with personal lines up by 27 per cent year-on-year and commercial lines up by a smaller 10 per cent.

About half of the growth in personal lines was thanks to higher premiums as high inflation fed into, for example, increased car repair and maintenance costs, while the other half was attributed to higher volumes.

In Canada, premiums grew by 11 per cent to £900 million.

Aviva reiterated the guidance from its full-year 2023 results, expecting an operating profit of £2 billion by 2026.

Shares in Aviva fell by 13¼p, or 2.7 per cent, to 483p last night.

Business

Boohoo bonuses despite missed targets

Helen Cahill

Boohoo, the owner of brands including PrettyLittleThing and Debenhams, has paid £1million in bonuses to its senior executives despite missing performance targets.

The online retailer's remuneration committee made the awards after determining that its performance targets had produced a "formulaic outcome" that did not recognise the "excellent work carried out" by the management team.

Boohoo's executives were entitled to a maximum bonus of 300 per cent of their basic salaries, with performance targets based on financial and non-

financial criteria, including the company's revenues for the year and adjusted earnings before interest, tax and other charges. The executives were in line for bonuses if they achieved revenue of more than £1.65 billion and adjusted earnings of more than £63 million.

Boohoo's full-year results showed revenue of £1.46 billion and adjusted earnings of less than half the target figure at £29.2 million and its annual report stated the executives had been unable to secure a bonus based on these measures, or the other criteria they were assessed against.

However, Boohoo's remuneration committee, chaired by Iain McDonald,

founder of Belerion Capital, the ecommerce investor, said in the annual report that it would reward John Lyttle, the chief executive, with a payout of 49.1 per cent of the maximum payable, and would grant Mahmud Kamani, the executive chairman and co-founder of the company, and Carol Kane, its co-founder and executive director, payouts that were 67.1 per cent of the maximum achievable. The committee handed each individual a bonus of £300,000 in cash and deferred shares worth £700,000.

Boohoo's investors revolted against the group's pay proposals last year, with 32.5 per cent of shareholders voting against its remuneration report.

Tate & Lyle buyback is a sweet deal

Tom Saunders

Selling off its remaining stake in the Primient, the ingredients producer, and handing the proceeds to shareholders proved a popular move with Tate & Lyle's investors.

Shares in the FTSE 250 food company, whose roots date back to 1859, rose by 5.2 per cent to their highest point this year after it said it would use the £215 million netted from the deal for a share buyback.

It is selling its remaining 49.7 per cent interest in Primient to KPS, an American private equity firm that bought a controlling stake in the business, then called Tate & Lyle Primary Products, in 2022.

Nick Hampton, chief executive of Tate & Lyle, said the exit completed its transformation into a "fully focused speciality food and beverage solutions business". Total cash proceeds, including dividends received since the initial sale, have exceeded \$1.5 billion.

The announcement came alongside annual results in which the business reported a 2 per cent fall in revenue to £1.6 billion, attributed to weaker consumer demand and a focus on margins over volume. Profit before tax rose by 48 per cent to £226 million in the year to the end of March.

Tate & Lyle said that as consumer confidence returned it expected "good" volume growth in the next financial year, accelerating as the year progressed. Overall, accounting for lower prices, the company expected sales to be slightly lower than in the previous year on a constant currency basis and earnings before interest, taxes and other charges to grow by between 4 per cent and 7 per cent.

Shares in the company closed up 35p, or 5.1 per cent, at 712p last night.



Rivals eye bid for shopping centres



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'Unlucky' Helical boss quits company after three decades

Tom Howard

The chief executive of Helical, a big developer of office blocks in London, is to stand down after three decades with the business and a tough year during which its losses trebled.

Gerald Kaye joined Helical in 1994 as its development director and the right-hand man of Mike Slade, the founder of what was then known as Helical Bar. When Slade stepped aside a few weeks after the Brexit vote in 2016, Kaye, now 66, was asked to take over as chief executive.

Within the industry, he is widely regarded as having done a good job tidying up the portfolio, moving out of Manchester, retirement living and warehouses to focus exclusively on central London offices.

One rival property boss described him as an "exemplar of what a developer should be", despite some of the troubles that Helical and the wider industry have faced in recent years.

Office values have roughly halved during Kaye's tenure, partly reflecting the fallout from the Brexit vote. Most recently, he has had to navigate the pandemic.

In particular, Helical has been affected by the downfall of some of its tenants, including WeWork, the bankrupt office provider, and Farfetch, the online luxury goods retailer.

One industry insider said that Kaye

had been "a bit unlucky". Helical shares have lost a fifth of their value since he became chief executive. They dropped another 14p, or 5.7 per cent, to 231p yesterday.

That was partly because the company reported a trebling of its pre-tax losses to £189.8 million in the year to the end of March as the value of its portfolio was marked down by a fifth to £660 million.

The dividend has been reset and shareholders will receive 1.78p per share

£660m

Value of Helical portfolio as of the end of March

Source: Helical

on August 2, well shy of the 8.7p they were handed last summer.

Kaye, who is staying on in a consultant role, will be replaced in July by Matthew Bonning-Snook, Helical's property director, who first joined the business in 1995.

"It has been a tremendous privilege to lead a business that has delivered some major and iconic London office developments," Kaye said.

"I have worked alongside Matthew for almost 30 years and believe he is the right person to succeed me as chief executive."



Capital & Regional has emerged as the next takeover target in the property sector, with two rival shopping centre owners having declared their interest (Tom Howard writes). The landlord, which owns

six shopping centres worth nearly £400 million, confirmed that it had received a proposal from Vukile, a South African group that also has a strong presence in Spain.

Capital & Regional is also aware that NewRiver Reit, another London-listed

shopping centre landlord, is considering a move. It has approached Growthpoint Properties, Capital's largest shareholder, which has a 68.1 per cent stake, about whether it would support a tie-up.

NewRiver owns 57 shopping centres and retail

parks, mostly in smaller towns, which were last valued at £544 million. Vukile has a much bigger portfolio, worth about £1.5 billion, more than half of which stems from its Spanish-focused Castellana Properties Socimi subsidiary, which is listed

Capital & Regional owns five shopping centres in and around London and another mall in Edinburgh

on the Madrid stock market.

Neither Vukile nor NewRiver has made a formal bid, but under City takeover rules they are required to do so or to walk away before the "put up or shut up" date at close of play on June 20.

With bidders circling, Capital & Regional shares jumped by 9½p, or 18.5 per cent, to 61p, their highest price this year.

Capital & Regional owns five shopping centres in and around London, plus the Gyle Shopping Centre in Edinburgh, which it bought for £40 million last September.

The buyers' interest comes at an uncertain moment for Capital, which confirmed his month that Lawrence Hutchings, 57, its chief executive, who is well thought of in the industry, is to leave and will run Workspace, the offices landlord. The search for his replacement is under way.

Vukile and NewRiver have said they are mulling cash-and-share offers, although neither has outlined what they might be prepared to pay for Capital.

Any deal would be the latest in a wave of merger and acquisition activity that is sweeping through Britain's fragmented commercial property industry. Landlords are under pressure from investors to get bigger, which makes it easier to buy and sell their shares.

Doomsday deal boosts Rolls-Royce

Robert Lea Industrial Editor

A contract to upgrade America's "doomsday planes" has been handed to Rolls-Royce.

The United States has a fleet of four customised Boeing 747 or Boeing-E4 jets, formally known as the Survivable Airborne Operations Center. They are kept in service to fly the president and senior government officials in safety in the event of serious emergencies and are designed to withstand nuclear blasts. Familiar in Hollywood disaster or climate emergency movies, one of the doomsday planes was known to have been circling Washington during the 9/11 terrorist atrocities.

Sierra Nevada Corporation, an American aerospace contractor, is heading a \$13 billion programme to upgrade and/or replace the fleet and it has named Rolls-Royce, the British engineer, as one of its partners. National security concerns mean that there is a ban on discussion of Rolls-Royce's role, but the Derby-based FTSE 100 company is understood to have been brought in for its expertise in aerospace propulsion systems.

The existing doomsday planes are powered by General Electric or Pratt & Whitney engines. However, Rolls has made engines for Boeing 747 aircraft in the past and in recent times it was selected to re-engine the US air force's Stratofortress B-52 bombers.

The contractors named in the Sierra Nevada Corporation consortium include General Electric and Rolls, but not Pratt & Whitney. Adam Riddle, head of Rolls-Royce's defence and North American divisions, said his company had been brought in for "reliable, cutting-edge technologies".

Shares in Rolls-Royce rose by 12½p, or 2.9 per cent, to close at 440½p.

Office market 'set to bounce back'

Tom Howard

Great Portland Estates has called the bottom of the commercial property market and is asking shareholders to back it with £350 million to buy and build more offices in London.

The value of the developer's portfolio of offices has tumbled by 12 per cent over the past year to £2.3 billion, but it is convinced that those valuations are unlikely to slide any further.

"In the last 12 months inflation, interest rates, political uncertainty, all sorts of impediments to growth got in the way and you've seen what happened to the market," Toby Courtauld, its chief executive, said. "However, rents are growing and [property] yields, by and large, have stopped moving. You can see that from our [office] valuations, with a very small movement in the past six months."

He added that with office values having fallen sharply over the past couple of years, now was "one of those rare moments in time when you can pick up quality assets at a discount".

Great Portland Estates has identified "mainly knackered, time-expired" buildings worth about £1.4 billion that it could buy to refurbish or demolish and rebuild.

It has gone to its shareholders and asked them for £350 million to fund its ambitions by selling them new shares at 230p apiece, almost half what they were worth on Wednesday evening. Despite

Rivals watch with interest as Great Portland leads

Behind the story

Bar the odd exception, such as Segro raising £900 million in February to buy and build more warehouses, few property companies have gone cap-in-hand to investors in recent years (Tom Howard writes).

The commercial property industry malaise, with values tumbling against the backdrop of soaring interest rates, has led to a reluctance among investors to keep their existing money on the table, let alone put in

more. There is a feeling that sentiment is starting to turn, though, with interest rate cuts looming and occupier demand — especially for newer, greener buildings — holding up well. Most of the landlords updating shareholder lists in recent weeks have sounded a cautiously upbeat tone.

Great Portland Estates is testing this enthusiasm by asking investors for £350 million to develop more central London offices. Others are likely to follow if investors' interest is as strong as Toby Courtauld, its chief executive, believes. "No one wants to be

first, but once someone has gone and the starting shot has been fired, you don't want to be last," Tim Leckie, a property industry analyst at Panmure Gordon, the broker, said. "We'd be surprised if we go through summer 2024 without at least British Land or Land Securities coming to market. Both companies at their [recent] annual results laid out a positive picture with rich opportunities, but did not pull the trigger on raising equity capital."

One fund manager suggested that rival bosses would wait to see how Great Portland Estates, a high-profile name with a respected management team, fares: "If it is successful, then

some of them will think about [raising money], because they could all do with some money to help their development pipelines."

Deal-starved bankers are expected to be "falling over themselves" to get their clients to follow Great Portland Estates. Five banks — Bank of America, Deutsche Numis, JP Morgan, Santander and Lazard — are all on the developer's ticket, desperate for a cut of the fees.

"The banks will be pushing for it and it's obviously helpful that a high-quality company is raising money, so certainly others will be looking at this," John Cahill, at Stifel, said. "But floodgates opening? I'm not sure about that."

that discount, GPE shares fell a further 5½p, or 1.3 per cent, to 417p last night.

Great Portland Estates is one of the biggest developers and owners of office space in central London. For the past 11 years it has sold more office buildings than it has bought or built, given its aim

to sell when the market is strong and to buy during downturns. Indeed, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, it went on a buying spree, armed with an extra £300 million that investors had given it.

However, Courtauld, 56, said now

was "very different to 2009". While values have fallen by a similar amount, he said there was a "less clear picture on the rental story" 15 years ago.

By contrast, Great Portland Estates' rents rose by 3.8 per cent in the 12 months to the end of March. Over the

coming year, it expects rents for the best London offices to rise by up to a further 10 per cent.

Courtauld said the "idea that the office is yesterday's place of work is plainly nonsense", with businesses increasingly demanding newer, better office space for which they are happy to pay a premium.

Leasing agents have called this "the flight to quality" and the shortage of such space is why rents are rising. Great Portland Estates wants to plug this gap by buying older, less eco-friendly buildings and turning them into the modern, green offices that occupiers want.

"Just about every building that we'll look to buy will likely have very poor sustainability credentials today, but once we've invested in it will be best in class," Nick Sanderson, chief financial officer at Great Portland Estates, said. "We know that's so vital for customers when they're looking for new space. It's not just what they want, but it's what their employees want as well."

Despite strong rental growth over the past year, the chunky drop in the value of its buildings pushed the business to a pre-tax loss of £307.8 million in the 12 months to the end of March, almost double the £163.9 million loss it recorded in the previous year. Excluding the valuation movements, operating profits were unmoved at £19.7 million. The final dividend, to be paid in July, was held at 7.9p per share.

Business Markets

Lauren Almeida Tempus
Buy, sell or hold: today's best share tips



New helping of chips to feed growth

NVIDIA
Market cap \$4.2trn | Forward p/e multiple 36

It's been a big couple of days for fans of Nvidia, the world's most valuable chip manufacturer. The multitrillion-dollar company announced on Wednesday that its net income had risen by 21 per cent in the first quarter to \$13.2 billion, ahead of expectations of \$13.2 billion. That was enough to send its shares up 7 per cent in after-hours trading in New York to cross the \$1,000 watershed.

But, hold on to your hats, the company also announced a ten-for-one stock split. This means that every holder of common stock will receive nine additional shares after the market closes on Friday, June 7. For those who already own a stake in the business, its total value will remain the same, but the price of each share will be diluted in a move designed to make ownership more accessible to Nvidia employees, as well as to investors.

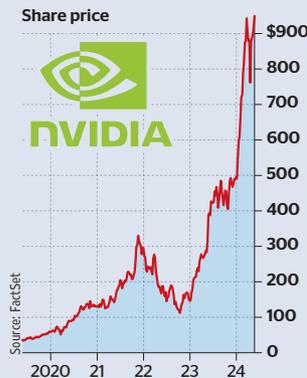
There is huge excitement around the chance to buy Nvidia stock at a lower price, but it will not mean that shares in the company are any cheaper relative to its profits. Wall Street is pricing Nvidia's growth at an extraordinary rate, higher than the likes of Apple, Meta and Google, as investors raise their bets on the chips at the centre of the artificial intelligence boom.

However, while Nvidia remains the market leader in its sector, there are rumblings of an alliance forming against it in Silicon Valley. So does the stock-split really represent a buying opportunity? Or are the powers rallying against Nvidia too great a threat?

Nvidia was founded more than 30 years ago to target the video games market, but the turning point in its trajectory was the launch of its Cuda software in 2006, which enabled it to run other applications on its graphics processing units, including AI. When OpenAI's ChatGPT triggered a wave of investment in AI infrastructure last year, demand for Nvidia's chips went through the roof.

Its growth over the past 12 months has been nothing short of

Runaway rally



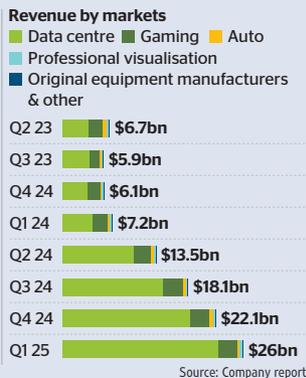
ADVICE Buy
WHY Has first-mover advantage, supported by a strong moat and structural growth in its sector

phenomenal. The shares have risen by more than 200 per cent in the past 12 months and last year its market value surpassed \$1 trillion. Its success has been led by its H100 chip design, which can be used to run the so-called large-language models that power generative AI programmes such as ChatGPT.

CAN IT MAINTAIN THIS PACE?
Quarterly results released on Wednesday showed that the good times are still rolling: in the three months to April 18, revenue rose by 18 per cent compared with the previous quarter to \$26 billion, led by sales of data centre products.

Can Nvidia possibly keep growing at this pace? Investors are pinning their hopes on its next-generation Blackwell chip, which it unveiled for the first time in March, barely a year after it started to ship out Grace Hopper, its predecessor, to customers.

The company says the new products, which are expected to cost more than \$30,000 each, will be twice as powerful for training large-language models. The chips, already



in full production, are also much more energy-efficient. Data centre power capacity is one of the biggest limitations on AI growth, as the servers can consume up to ten times more power. Organisations using Blackwell can build and run real-time generative AI on a large-language model at up to 25 times less cost and energy consumption than Hopper.

The timing of the Blackwell launch has caused some concern that there will be an "air pocket" in demand. In other words, customers will wait for the release of its latest technology rather than use Hopper in the meantime.

There are reports that Amazon's cloud computing division has changed its plans to wait for the more powerful chip. As one of Nvidia's biggest customers, this move should be of some concern to investors, especially if it means that more technology companies also wait for Blackwell's official release, which is not expected until late this year. So far, however, demand has remained robust and Nvidia has forecast that its revenue will hit \$28 billion in its present quarter, give or take 2 per cent.

One of the key reasons investors like Nvidia so much is that it has built an impressive "moat", a competitive advantage that protects it from rivals. In this case, it is the fact that most AI systems and applications already run on its Cuda

software. This makes it expensive and risky for developers to rewrite them for other processors, such as those from AMD or Intel. This has allowed Nvidia to develop strong pricing power and gross margins, which hit 78.9 per cent in the most recent quarter.

However, technology titans such as Meta, Microsoft and Google are said to be contributing to the development of Triton, a tool that can make code run software on a range of AI chips. This may pose a threat to Nvidia's ability to maintain its dominance. Yet even if Triton is successful, analysts believe it will take years to catch up with Cuda's first-mover advantage.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Nvidia's shares trade at a forward price-to-earnings multiple of 36, which is certainly not cheap but is lower than a multiple of 66 only a year ago. The company's remarkable growth spurt may be behind it, especially as it comes up against tougher comparisons from last year, but analysts still expect sales to rise by almost 90 per cent in its 2025 financial year, followed by 28 per cent in the following period.

If Nvidia can achieve the level of growth that Wall Street expects, the valuation looks less steep. It has a price-to-earnings-to-growth ratio over the next two years of 0.9, just below the level that is generally considered decent value for a growth stock.

Nvidia's momentum cannot last indefinitely, but it is worth bearing in mind Bill Gates' saying that people tend to overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten.

There are great expectations tied to Nvidia, which could make the stock vulnerable in the event of even the slightest earnings miss, but there is no denying that it has developed a strong moat and a best-in-class product.

The stock split in June will likely encourage take-up, especially among its following of devoted retail investors in the United States, which should be supportive of the share price. For this level of quality, we think the stock remains a long-term "buy".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Rate-setters in purdah

The Bank of England has dropped all speeches by the members of its rate-setting committee and cancelled public statements during the UK general election campaign. The news, which was first reported by Bloomberg, means that there will be no remarks by central bankers for the next six weeks. The decision comes at a time of high uncertainty over when members of the Bank's monetary policy committee will elect to cut interest rates for the first time since March 2020, from 5.25 per cent.

'A long road' for Boeing

America's chief aviation regulator said Boeing faced a "long road" to address safety issues as it prepared for the company's plan to address concerns, due next week. In late February, Mike Whitaker, head of the Federal Aviation Authority, gave Boeing 90 days to develop a strategy to address "systemic quality-control issues". He told ABC News this "is not the end, it's the beginning and it's going to be a long road to get back to where they need to be making safe [aircraft]."

Ferrexpo rebellion

More than half of the independent shareholders in Ferrexpo, the Ukraine-focused iron ore producer, voted to oust an adviser to the minister of finance of Ukraine from the board. Vitalii Lisovenko, a non-executive director, received 47.14 per cent of the independent shareholder vote. In Ferrexpo's annual meeting notice, it noted that those opposing Lisovenko's re-election were typically smaller shareholders doing so in line with proxy adviser recommendations.

Zantac 'cleared' by jury

A jury in Chicago rejected an Illinois woman's claim that the now discontinued heartburn drug Zantac caused her colon cancer, in the first trial out of thousands of lawsuits making similar allegations. The jury agreed with the drugmakers GSK and Boehringer Ingelheim that Angela Valadez, 89, had not proven her colon cancer was at least in part caused by her Zantac use. First approved in 1983, Zantac became the world's bestselling medicine in 1988.

PRICES

Major indices

New York		
Dow Jones	39065.26 (-605.78)	
Nasdaq Composite	16736.03 (-65.51)	
S&P 500	5267.84 (-39.17)	
Tokyo		
Nikkei 225	39103.22 (+486.12)	
Hong Kong		
Hang Seng	18868.71 (-326.89)	
Amsterdam		
AEX Index	914.27 (+3.75)	
Sydney		
AO	8083.10 (-35.20)	
Frankfurt		
DAX	18691.32 (+11.12)	
Singapore		
Straits	3322.62 (+14.72)	
Brussels		
BEL20	3975.74 (-20.96)	
Paris		
CAC-40	8102.33 (+10.22)	
Zurich		
SMI Index	11966.75 (+8.08)	
DJ Euro Stoxx 50	5037.60 (+12.43)	
London		
FTSE 100	8339.23 (-31.10)	
FTSE 250	20631.30 (-78.77)	
FTSE 350	4589.50 (-17.17)	
FTSE Eurotop 100	4106.78 (+7.11)	
FTSE All-Shares	4543.84 (-16.71)	
FTSE Non Financials	5492.59 n/a	
techMARK 100	7044.22 (+37.80)	
Bargains	n/a	
US\$	1.2717 (-0.0002)	
Euro	1.1749 (+0.0000)	
-DAX	0.98 (+0.00)	
Exchange Index	83.31 (+0.16)	
Bank of England official doc (4pm)		
CPI	133.47 Apr (2015 = 100)	
RPI	385.00 Apr (Jan 1987 = 100)	
RPIX	380.10 Apr (Jan 1987 = 100)	
Morningstar Long Commodity	677.16 (+5.72)	
Morningstar Long/Short Commod	4703.45 (+27.75)	

London Financial Futures

	Period	Open	High	Low	Sett	Vol	Open Int
Long Gilt	Jun 24	97.060	97.310	96.580	96.690	580298	687996
	SEP 24	97.220	97.440	96.740	96.850	209660	36670
	3-Mth Sterling	Jun 24					
3-Mth Euribor	Jun 24						
	Jun 25						
	Jun 26						
3-Mth Euroswiss	Jun 24						
	Jun 25						
	Jun 26						
FTSE100	Jun 24	8394.0	8400.5	8338.5	8357.0	80450	551177
	Sep 24	8428.5	8428.5	8391.0	8400.0	15	221
	FTSEurofirst 80	Jun 24					
Sep 24							

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Commodities

ICIS pricing (London 6,00pm)				
Brent (6,00pm)	Jul	81.36-81.35	Oct	80.34-80.31
	Aug	81.47-81.46	Nov	79.85-79.85
	Sep	80.77-80.75	Volume:	2174007
Crude Oils (\$/barrel FOB)				
Brent Physical	79.05	-1.37		
BFOE (Jul)	81.41	-1.16		
BFOE (Aug)	81.29	-1.09		
WTI (Jul)	76.59	-1.30		
WTI (Aug)	76.59	-1.27		
Products (\$/MT)				
Spot CIF NW Europe (prompt delivery)				
Premium Unld	890.00	894.00	-11.00	
Gasoil FCC	752.50	753.50	+5.00	
3.5 Fuel Oil	447.00	448.25	+3.00	
Naphtha	635.00	647.00	+0.00	
ICE Futures				
Gas Oil				
Jun	747.50-747.25	Sep	749.00-748.75	
Jul	744.75-744.50	Oct	751.00-750.50	
Aug	747.00-746.75	Volume:	674358	
White Sugar (FOB)				
Reuters	Mar	510.50-509.60		
	May	513.90-510.70		
Jun	539.40-539.10	Aug	519.10-510.00	
Oct	517.70-517.40	Oct	527.40-513.20	
Dec	508.30-507.70	Volume:	71794	
RobustaCoffee				
May	4166-3250	Jan	3556-3546	
Jul	3826-3822	Mar	3524-3068	
Sep	3746-3740			
Nov	3651-3643	Volume:	25449	



Story of success at Bloomsbury

A taste for fantasy and escapism has lifted annual revenue and profit at Bloomsbury Publishing to their highest levels on record (Emma Taggart writes). The London-listed publisher reported revenue of £342.7 million for the year to the end of February, up by 30 per cent from the previous year's £264.1 million. Pre-tax profits of £41.5 million were a

63 per cent rise from £25.4 million in the 2023 financial year. There were "exceptional sales" from female authors such as Sarah J Maas, above, the bestselling romantic fantasy author of series such as *Throne of Glass* and *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. "We've had notable success within the fantasy and romantasy space," Penny Scott-Bayfield, chief financial officer, said. Maas had "really defined" the romantic fantasy genre, while authors such as Samantha Shannon and Katherine Rundell had buoyed sales still

further. Maas published *Crescent City: House of Flame and Shadow* with Bloomsbury in January. Sales of her books rose by 161 per cent from the previous year. Revenues in Bloomsbury's consumer division rose by 49 per cent. Maas has published 16 books with Bloomsbury. Her popularity has grown as readers take to TikTok to post reviews and recommendations in a social media trend known as BookTok. The annual dividend of 14.69p is up 25 per cent from last year. The shares fell 40p, or 6.7 per cent, to 560p.

Hill & Smith makes the most of demand in US

Emma Taggart Market report

Forecast-beating revenue and a focus on business across the Atlantic have ensured a successful start to the year at Hill & Smith. The engineer said that strong demand for sustainable infrastructure in the United States during the first four months of the year had offset a challenging market in Britain. Revenue was up by 5 per cent on a constant currency basis during the period. It added that annual profits were set to be slightly ahead of predictions in the City and that it "remains positive" about customer demand. All this was enough to ensure that Hill & Smith rose in a falling market, with its shares climbing by a healthy 137p, or 7 per cent, to end the day at £20.95, a

Wall Street report

Indices were lower despite a rally in technology stocks led by Nvidia — up 9.3 per cent on strong results — with sentiment largely subdued after mixed economic data. The Dow Jones industrial average fell 605.78 points, or 1.5 per cent, to 39,065.26.

record high. Meanwhile, the FTSE 100 fell 31.1 points, or 0.4 per cent, to 8,339.23. A decline in utility companies weighed on the market as the general election is expected to delay decisions from Ofwat, the water regulator, about businesses including Thames Water. Analysts at Citi warned of "a period of heightened risk for the UK water names" and noted that some MPs had called for special measures to be implemented on the sector, including dividend restrictions. Shares in water companies promptly sank. These included **United Utilities**, which closed down 53p, or 4.9 per cent, at £10.24; **Severn Trent**, which declined 136p, or 5.2 per cent, to £25.03; and **Pennon**, the FTSE 250 player, which fell 47p, or 7.1 per cent, to 618p. **National Grid** was the biggest faller on the Footsie after it said it would raise £7 billion via a rights issue to fund a £60 billion investment programme. The shares dropped

ENGINEERING

Energy is growing at QinetiQ

QinetiQ soared to an all-time high after it reported a 21 per cent increase in revenues and upgraded its outlook. The former state-owned defence and technology company was part-privatised in 2002 when a stake was sold to Carlyle, the American private equity firm. It was floated on the stock market in 2006. Its stock has risen by 65 per cent since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 amid concerns about global conflicts. Encouraging annual results and an upgraded outlook



QinetiQ is a leading technology developer for the battlefield

pushed up its stock by 50½p, or 13.4 per cent, to 424½p last night, valuing the FTSE 250 group at more than £2.4 billion. QinetiQ is best known for its bomb disposal robots. More recently it has been

working on DragonFire laser weapons to replace missiles. It employs 8,500 people and is based in Farnborough, Hampshire. For the year to the end of March, its revenue rose 21 per cent to £1.9 billion, generating profits of £169 million, up 11 per cent. It also lifted its dividend to 8.25p and launched a £100 million share buyback programme. It said it was increasing its targets for 2024-25 on the way to hitting £2.4 billion of revenue in 2026-27.

122½p, or 10.9 per cent, to £10.05. **International Distributions Services**, the Royal Mail owner, declined 12½p, or 3.9 per cent, to 314½p after it said the publication of its financial results had been delayed. A number of companies slid after trading ex-dividend. They included **Whitbread**, which fell 95p, or 3.1 per cent, to £29.56, and **DCC**, down 70p, or 1.2 per cent, at £56.70. A positive update from **Rolls-Royce** sent shares in the aerospace and defence company up 12½p, or 2.9 per cent, to 440½p and pushed shares in **BAE Systems**, its industry peer, up 23½p, or 1.7 per cent, to £13.97. **Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust** advanced 30p, or 3.5 per cent, to 900p after the Edinburgh-based company reported an 11.5 per cent increase in the net asset value on its holdings for the year to the end of March. The more UK-focused FTSE 250 ended the day down 78.77 points, or 0.4 per cent, at 20,631.1. **Drax**, the energy company, was the biggest

faller on the mid-cap index as election pressure weighed on the business. Ed Miliband, Labour's energy secretary, criticised Drax last year after it was found to have benefited from a green energy subsidy loophole. Its shares ended the day down 47½p, or 8.6 per cent, at 507½p. **Investec** was in reverse, too, losing 28½p, or 5.1 per cent, to 526p, after the finance group said it had set aside £30 million to cover the potential costs of a regulatory inquiry into unfair car loans. Strong results boosted a number of companies on the mid-cap index. Among them was **Wizz Air**, the budget airline, which flew 206p, or 10.5 per cent, to £21.68 after it reported its first annual profit in three years. The Aim-listed **Alliance Pharma** rose 3½p, or 9.8 per cent, to 38½p after it won an appeal against a Competition and Markets Authority ruling that had fined the company £7.9 million for alleged anti-competitive conduct.

The day's biggest movers

Company	Change
Hargreaves Lansdown Rejects takeover bid	14.4%
Wizz Air Swings to profit	10.5%
Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust Net asset values rise	3.5%
Rolls-Royce Positive trading update	2.9%
AutoTrader Coverage initiated with "buy"	1.1%
Aviva Investors disappointed by trading update	-2.7%
Whitbread Trades ex-dividend	-3.1%
Investec Sets aside £30 million for potential inquiry costs	-5.1%
Severn Trent Uncertainty in water sector	-5.2%
National Grid Announces plan to raise £7 billion	-10.9%

London Grain Futures				
LIFFE Wheat (close £/t)				
May	186.00	Jul	172.00	Nov
Jan	unq	Mar	unq	Volume: 998
London Metal Exchange (Official)				
Cash	3mth	Dec 22		
Copper Gde A (\$/tonne)				
10290.0-10290.5	10410.0-10411.0	10465.0-10475.0		
Lead (\$/tonne)				
2233.0-2235.0	2282.0-2284.0	2342.0-2347.0		
Zinc Spec Hi Gde (\$/tonne)				
3005.0-3007.0	3051.0-3051.5	3013.0-3018.0		
Alum Hi Gde (\$/tonne)				
19775.0-19800.0	2602.0-2602.5	2720.0-2725.0		
Nickel (\$/tonne)				
19775.0-19800.0	20070.0-20075.0	21110.0-21160.0		
Tin (\$/tonne)				
33075.0-33125.0	33110.0-33115.0	32765.0-32815.0		

Gold/Precious metals (US dollars per ounce)				
Owing to a technical issue, the gold fix prices are from Wednesday.				
Bullion: Open \$2382.22				
Close \$2343.98-2344.37 High \$2383.22				
Low \$2340.27				
AM	\$2414.25 PM \$2407.90			
Platinum \$ (£)				
Silver \$30.40 (£23.90)				
Palladium \$ (£)				
European money deposits %				
Currency	1mth	3mth	6mth	12mth
Dollar	0.13	0.20	0.29	0.55
Sterling	4.20	5.30	4.74	0.81
Euro	0.10	0.15	0.20	0.50

Money rates %				
Base Rates Clearing Banks 5.25 ECB Refi 4.50 US Fed Fund 5.25-5.50				
Halifax Mortgage Rate (SVR) 8.74				
Sterling spot and forward rates				
Mkt Rates for	Range	Close	1 month	3 month
Copenhagen	8.7482-8.7780	8.7664-8.7679	141ds	421ds
Euro	1.1764-1.1728	1.1749-1.1749	10pr	32pr
Montreal	1.7380-1.7423	1.7416-1.7417	7ds	23ds
New York	1.2705-1.2746	1.2717-1.2718	2pr	6pr
Oslo	13.498-13.631	13.545-13.559	90ds	255ds
Stockholm	13.589-13.657	13.647-13.650	209ds	632ds
Tokyo	199.15-199.87	199.69-199.70	90ds	266ds
Zurich	1.1612-1.1646	1.1631-1.1632	39ds	116ds
Premium = +r Discount = -ds				

Dollar rates	
Australia	1.5088-1.5089
Canada	1.3696-1.3696
Denmark	6.8936-6.8943
Euro	0.9239-0.9239
Hong Kong	7.8083-7.8088
Japan	157.03-157.03
Malaysia	4.7020-4.7070
Norway	10.654-10.658
Singapore	1.3510-1.3511
Sweden	10.731-10.734
Switzerland	0.9145-0.9149
Other Sterling	
Argentina peso	1132.2-1132.2
Australia dollar	1.9188-1.9189
Bahrain dinar	0.4759-0.4830
Brazil real	6.5468-6.9506
Euro	1.1749-1.1750
Hong Kong dollar	9.2879-9.9303
India rupee	105.91-105.92
Indonesia rupiah	20412-20417
Kuwait dinar KD	0.3893-0.3917
Malaysia ringgit	5.9839-5.9903
New Zealand dollar	2.0789-2.0807
Singapore dollar	1.7180-1.7183
S Africa rand	23.443-23.453
U A E dirham	4.6708-4.6711

Exchange rates			
	Bid	Change	
Australia \$	1.918		
Canada \$	1.741		
Denmark Kr	8.761		
Euro	1.174		
Hong Kong \$	9.926	-0.01	
Hungary	454.439	-0.41	
Indonesia	20328.846	-21.73	
Israel Shk	4.669	-0.01	
Japan Yen	199.589	+0.41	
New Zealand \$	2.079		
Norway Kr	13.541	-0.07	
Poland	5.004		
Russia	114.880	+0.20	
S Africa Rd	23.469	+0.25	
Sweden Kr	13.637	-0.02	
Switzerland Fr	1.161		
Turkey Lira	40.942	-0.01	
USA \$	1.271		
Rates supplied by Morningstar			

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Business Equity prices

Dividend yields Please note dividend yields are supplied by Morningstar. The yield is the sum of a company's trailing 12-month dividend payments divided by the last day's closing share price.

12-month high and low High/Low prices for UK equities are based on closing prices. Investment trust high and low prices are based on intra-day figures.

Automobiles & parts

12 month High	Low	Company	Price (p)	Yld%	Div%	P/E
395%	133%	Aston Martin Lag	135%	-	1%	-3.6

Banking & finance

12 month High	Low	Company	Price (p)	Yld%	Div%	P/E
238%	136%	Abrdn	156	+ 3%	9.6	...
9%	3%	Acuity RM	4%	...	-0.5	...
2837	2029	Admiral	2705	- 1%	2.6	24.4
24%	10%	ADVF	16	- 1	-4.0	...
403	249	AJ Bell	403	+ 40%	2.9	24.3
2728%	2209%	Aon Corp	2209%	- 302%	- 22.5	...
1105	877%	Arbutnot Bldg	937%	+ 25	5.0	4.2
9	4	Argo Group	4%	...	2.0	...
238%	166%	Ashmore	200%	+ 1%	8.4	13.8
1571	1195%	Aus New Z	1479%	- 12%	- 12.6	...
496%	369%	Aviva	482%	- 13%	6.7	12.9
414	260%	Banco Santander	40%	- 2	3.7	7.1
5420	2650	Bank of Georgia	3965	+ 65	6.6	3.5
217%	129%	Barclays	215	+ 3%	3.7	7.9
1%	...	Blue Star Capital	-12.7	...
512%	312	BP Marsh&Ptnrs	463	...	1.4	12.2
15%	4%	Breaveheart Inv	5	...	2.0	...
...	...	Brevin Dolphn	515	+ 1	- 28.1	...
289%	16%	Bridgpoint	234%	- 1%	3.7	26.0
38	24%	Cenkos Sec	29	...	5.9	...
286	246%	Chesnaar	246%	- 1%	9.6	- 2.2
...	...	City of Lon Gp	10	+ 1	-4.6	...
450	301	City Lon Inv Gp	366	+ 5	9.1	12.6
976%	299%	Close Bros	457	+ 1%	9.8	4.8
274	89%	CMC Markets	273%	+ 8%	1.8	7.9
1326	783%	Commerz&B	1326	+ 1%	- 9.3	...
1429%	779%	Deutsche Bk	1324	+ 3%	- 5.5	...
225%	133%	Direct Line Ins	200%	- 1	1.9	12.7

Investment companies

12 month High	Low	Company	Price (p)	Yld%	Div%	P/E
2995	1837%	3i Group	2927	+ 29	2.8	40.6
349	276%	3i Infrastructure	330	+ 9%	3.3	-7.9
1534%	1126	Aberforth Smir	1532	+ 12	3.2	-12.8
1264	977%	Alliance	1236	+ 4	1.9	-3.4
417%	323	Asia Dragon Tr	400	- 2	1.5	-16.1
210	160	Atthey Trust	200	- 5.0	-4.5	...
250%	185	AVI Global Trust	181	- 1	1.4	-10.2
243	175	Baillie Gifford Ch Gr	218	- 2	0.8	-10.8
101%	75%	Baillie Gifford Eu Gr	99%	...	2.3	-14.6
802	633	Baillie Gifford Jntr	724	- 3	1.1	-12.7
150%	108%	Baillie Gifford SN	109	- 1%	-16.3	...
177%	141%	Baillie Gifford UK Gr	174%	- 1%	1.9	-15.1
84%	60	Bal Comm Prop	78%	+ 1%	4.6	-27.7
117%	91%	Bankers Inv Trst	113%	+ 1%	2.0	-10.8
423%	325%	BH Macro	359%	...	-13.5	...
1048	715	Biotech Growth	959	- 19	...	-5.2
127	104	BkRckCk Inv	123%	...	3.4	-10.8
159%	131%	BkRckCk Fto Inv	151%	+ 2%	3.8	-8.1
65%	45%	BkRckCk Eur Euro	617	- 12	1.0	-5.6
206	170	BkRckCk Inc & Gwth	204	- 2	3.5	-12.7
1506	1146	BkRckCk Smir	1490	- 14	2.7	-11.7
207	172%	BkRckCk Sustain Amer	202	- 1	3.5	-10.1
631	503	BkRckCk Thymerton	631	+ 5	2.2	-10.3
644	490	BkRckCk Wild Min	598	- 9	5.9	-4.3
1340	1065	Brown Adv US Sm	1320	- 17%	...	-11.9
1365%	944	Brunner	1345	+ 5	1.6	-4.9
3700	2593%	Caledonia Inv	3400	- 65	1.2	-35.4
429%	371%	City of Lon IT	424%	- 1%	4.9	-2.2
91	60	Crystal Amber Fd	82	+ 2	2.2	-11.2
516	406	CT Priv Eq Ord	468	+ 12	3.9	-5.5
96	72	CT Property	73%	- 1%	6.1	-14.5
340	266%	CT UK CapLck	325	- 1	3.6	-3.5
93	75	CT UK Hf B	87%	...	-8.7	...
95%	71	CT UK HfT	95%	+ 4%	5.9	-4.9
900	448%	Dunedin Ent	493	...	5.7	-12.3
742%	612%	Edinburgh IT	734	...	3.6	-9.5
157%	120%	Edin Wldw	143%	- 1%	-11.7	...
329	27%	EP Global Opp	309	+ 1	1.3	-21.4
95%	73	European Assets	90%	+ 1%	5.6	-11.7
915	740%	Europa Opp Trust	908	- 2	0.3	-10.6
1058	825%	F&C Invest Tr	1024	- 1%	-13.8	...
549%	473%	Fidelity Asian Val	528	- 2	2.6	-9.6
246	161%	Fidelity China Sp	230	+ 4%	2.7	-10.9
740%	58%	FidelityEmergMkt	705%	- 4%	2.0	-11.9
412%	311%	Fidelity European Trust402	315	- 2%	2.0	-4.9
187	151	Fidelity Jap Tru	171%	- 3%	-10.5	...
311%	252	Fidelity Spec Val	307%	- 1	2.8	-9.5
900	785%	Fins Gwth & Inc	856	+ 11	2.0	-7.4
88	59%	GP Infrastructure	72%	- 2%	6.3	-35.8
38%	22%	Gdn Prop Prc Mkt	36	- 1%	-18.7	...
1455	127%	Greenoat UK Wind	136%	- 2%	6.3	-16.9
230%	161%	Hansa Investment	219	...	0.8	-43.2
221	160	Hansa Inv Co 'A'	215	+ 2	0.8	-45.9
2450	2015	Hvst Fnd Gwth & Inc	2265	...	-4.8	...
195%	149	Hvst Euro Foc	192%	+ 1	2.1	-13.7
137	136	High High Inc	165	- 1	6.0	-8.2
87%	626	High Sealr	875	- 2	2.9	-14.4
2225	1590	Herford	2200	...	-12.4	...
340%	348%	HighCapital Trust	420%	- 11%	1.3	-4.6
151%	11%	HKL Infra	120%	- 3%	5.2	-22.6
1%	...	Highbridge Tactical	-61.1	...
126	1046	IGC Ent Tr	1206	- 6	1.6	-8.7
421%	331%	Imax Eur Mkts	398%	- 1%	1.0	-11.0
349	283	Invesco Asia Tr	328	- 2	4.2	-12.3

12 month High Low Company Price (p) +/- Yld% P/E

12 month High	Low	Company	Price (p)	Yld%	Div%	P/E
67	39%	EGF-Hermes Hldg	47%	- 7%	5.4	...
187	145	EPE Special Opps	179	- 1
1179%	948%	FBD	1102%	...	7.7	6.7
70%	46%	Fisix	77%	...	0.3	15.5
87	47	Frankel Topping	51	...	2.0	26.8
1374	804	Georgia Capital	1006	+ 4	2.3	...
1120	690%	Hargreaves Lansdown	1120	+ 141	4.2	19.9
1179%	948%	FBD	1102%	...	7.7	6.7
70%	46%	Fisix	77%	...	0.3	15.5
87	47	Frankel Topping	51	...	2.0	26.8
1374	804	Georgia Capital	1006	+ 4	2.3	...
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87	47	Frankel Topping				

Business Recruitment

Is estate agency about to be sexy?

A Netflix series could do for the capital what an earlier programme did for Los Angeles, writes **Jane Hamilton**

For a profession that prides itself on selling, estate agency all too often has failed to sell itself. Despite agents handling more than a million home sales each year worth over £151 billion, agents rank a lowly fifth from bottom on the Ipsos Veracity Index. A lack of trust and regulation mean that few young people consider estate agency as a prime career choice. But could this be set to change?

This week *Buying London* was launched, a Netflix series that aims to emulate the high-octane glamour of the Los Angeles-based hit *Selling Sunset*. Focused on the capital's most luxurious homes, property experts think the series may make careers in the industry much more alluring. Growing calls for tighter regulation and enhanced training to create more structured career paths could further burnish its appeal.

"The role of an estate agent has evolved drastically over the years and it can be an amazing opportunity to those looking for an adventurous career path," Nathan Emerson, chief executive of Propertymark, the estate agent membership body, said. "The property profession is becoming increasingly popular, including among younger generations. All aspects of estate and letting agency can be highly rewarding for those looking for a challenging and rewarding role."

Propertymark wants agents to hold at least a Level 3 qualification, equivalent to a A-levels. While at present new entrants to estate agency do not need specific qualifications, some larger chains have invested in their own in-house apprenticeships and from September the Royal Agricultural University in Cirencester will become the first such institution to offer a foundation degree in residential estate agency.

According to William Leschallas, the course's leader: "Residential estate agency has become an increasingly complex area of business, with modern and traditional approaches adding to the competitive nature of the work, so the role of an estate agent requires a diverse set of skills and attributes."

While agents may debate the merit of a degree against on-the-job training, there's no doubt that for those at the top end of Britain's 22,000 agents, estate agency can provide both a lucrative and a reasonably secure career. Sales managers working in exclusive areas can be paid an average salary of more than £100,000, while buying agents, working solely to source properties for the buyer and often dealing only with ultra-high-net-worth individuals, may earn several times this figure.

At entry level, Property Personnel, the recruitment specialist, suggests that



RYAN HOWARD

'Charity chugger' to prime candidate

Case study

Richard Douglas, 49, and Alex Bourne, 47 are co-founders of London House, a prime estate agency whose client list includes Oscar-winners, royalty and global music stars. The pair met at drama school before working for Foxtons, another agency. "We don't look for any

specific qualifications," Bourne said. "I was an actor for ten years. I've also been a charity "chugger" and a massage therapist, until eventually I found my career home in prime property. I honed my craft as a real estate expert through these previous roles." Douglas added: "The traditional online portal

search is falling in popularity, so we are laser-focused on how we connect people with their ideal lifestyle across London's prime property neighbourhoods. We're drawn to colleagues who relate to people as human beings, as this is essential to matching people with their perfect home and, ultimately, a lifestyle."

How to be a hot property

Danny Hicks, a sales manager at Chase Buchanan, has been selling prime residential property for almost 30 years. Here he shares his tips on how to clinch the deal to make estate agency your career:

- Estate agency is about character, not education. The key to success is sincerity, accuracy when pricing and pitching, outstanding industry knowledge and an appreciation of your

clients' plans and aspirations.

- Discretion is essential. You will encounter divorcees, clients in debt and deaths. You need to show empathy.

- For sales, most of the role is about listening. You need to be part-psychologist and part-hand-holder, but always with the client's best interests in mind.

- Try work experience or a Saturday job to see if the job is for you.

- Once you secure a junior position, get qualified. It's best to train right away, with qualifications including those run by the National Federation of Property Professionals and the National Association of Estate Agents.
- Long-term success comes from good, old-fashioned hard work. We often work 11 hours a day and it can be unrelenting, certainly if you want to reach the top.

trainee negotiators start on a guaranteed salary of £16,000 to £20,000 for the first three months, with commission on top. However, after this probationary period, income depends on sales performance.

Alex Bourne, of London House, a prime estate agency, stars in the new Netflix series. He believes that life experience and transferable skills underpin sales success. "Our staff come from creative and unrelated backgrounds, bringing hugely transferable skills," he said. "Our team is made up of ex-models, singers, actors and a former dental nurse. Selling multimillion-pound houses is less about bricks and mortar and more about bringing the human element of a home to life for a potential buyer."

Six from the best

Ann Francke is chief executive of the Chartered Management Institute, Britain's professional body for management and leadership. After more than two decades in senior roles at Mars, Boots and Yell, here is what she has learnt to become a better manager.



- 1 Ask for feedback, don't just give it. It's rare to see leaders asking for feedback from their teams. Doing so builds trust and can help you to become aware of your blind spots and how your behaviour affects others.
- 2 Hire people who aren't like you. Human instinct is to hire in our own image. Hire those who are strong in areas that you're not.
- 3 Coach, don't micromanage. Micromanagement is one of the most common bad management behaviours. Allow people the space to make their mistakes, correct them and learn from them.
- 4 Call out bad behaviour. Nothing is worse than leaders tolerating toxic behaviour. It sends the signal that it's OK for others to ignore it and will undermine your people's belief that your organisation's values matter.
- 5 Focus on outcomes, not face-time. Flexible working tops the list of employee asks and makes good business sense.
- 6 Invest in yourself. Management is a skill, so invest in training that helps to boost your confidence and abilities.

Appointment of the week

Enterprising role for the right candidate

Young Enterprise is seeking a new chief executive. Each year the charity delivers nationwide enterprise and financial capability programmes to help thousands of young people to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to succeed.

As the new chief executive, you will lead a highly motivated staff and volunteer group to deliver the 2024-30 strategy, with the opportunity to make the role your own and to continue to build a culture that embraces innovation in responding to the changing needs of young people and educators. Applicants must have strong communication skills to represent and build the profile of the charity, as well as to build effective funding relationships and partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders.

It will be expected that applicants possess an appreciation of the education environment. Candidates also should have a commitment to the powerful role that education, in all forms, and social mobility projects can make to the futures of young people.

Applications should be received by midday on Monday, June 10. For more information, visit www.appointments.thetimes.co.uk

Working week

Wellbeing comes first

Almost two thirds of British workers would turn down a promotion if they felt it could harm their wellbeing, a study claims. According to the *Talent Trends* report from Michael Page, the recruitment agency, UK staff lead the way worldwide in shunning higher-pressure positions. Lucy Spencer, its UK head of people and culture, said: "Historically, salary may have driven job searches, to the detriment of the candidate, but things are changing."

Top of the office pops

Playing music in the workplace divides staff, with 53 per cent backing it and 47 per cent against. While two thirds agree it creates a "more fun" environment, four in five find music at work distracting. Research from Foru, a workspace provider, showed 65 decibels to be the best volume for co-working environments, with the top tunes for productivity including *Seedling*, by Poppy Ackroyd, and *Kite*, by Gigi Masin.

Thinking about a change

Half of the workforce in Britain would like to change their career, with one in five spending time weekly considering their plans. The annual *Global Workforce of the Future Report* from Lee Hecht Harrison Penna, the recruitment provider, also notes that 54 per cent believe that external factors, such as company strategy and the economy, have more control over their career than they do.

London leads the way

London has retained its title as the world's most desirable city for work. In a study on international mobility trends by Boston Consulting Group, the consultancy, and the Stepstone Group, the jobs platform, one in four professionals globally are actively seeking work in another country. While the UK rose to fourth place, overtaking Germany, Australia has jumped to the top spot, overtaking the United States.

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Just fill the SpotWash Home Pet-Design with water and solution and it's ready to go. A trigger on the handle allows you to target the solution on the spill or stain, and SpotWash Home Pet-Design will do the rest; cleaning and extracting the mess into the dirty water tank, which is simply lifted out and poured away - leaving the area looking and smelling clean.

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Complete with an Advanced Home & Pet Tool Kit, the SpotWash Home Pet-Design is equipped to help you clean anywhere in the home and car. For those particularly unsightly messes, there is also a dedicated messy tool, so you'll not need to worry about any cross contamination of cleaning tasks. And when the accidental spills and stains are in hand, it's great for cleaning soft furnishings, and refreshing and reviving upholstery.

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C1S755	220x157x130cm	£119.98	£83.31	£99.97	£20.01
C1S686	1.8x1.2x1.2m	£143.98	£99.98	£119.98	£24.00
C1S788	2.4x2.4x2.1m	£215.98	£149.98	£179.98	£36.00
C1S812	3.7x2.2x2.4m	£262.80	£182.49	£218.99	£43.81
C1S1212	3.0x3.0x2.5m	£286.80	£207.49	£243.99	£42.81
C1S1015	4.2 x 3.2 x 2.4m	£334.80	£222.49	£273.99	£60.81
C1S1216	4.9 x 3.7 x 2.5m	£394.80	£274.16	£326.99	£67.81
C1S1020	6.1 x 3.0 x 2.4m	£418.80	£290.82	£348.98	£69.82
C1S1220	6.7 x 3.7 x 2.5m	£478.80	£322.49	£398.99	£79.81
C1S1224	7.3 x 3.7 x 2.5m	£593.80	£415.82	£498.98	£94.82
C1G1640	12x4.9x3.4m	£3,118.80	£2,165.75	£2,598.90	£519.90

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Page 50



Register

Obituaries

Daniel Kramer

Photojournalist who had unbridled access to Bob Dylan and shot his landmark album covers as he shifted from folk to electric

If a photographer is a historian with a camera, as Daniel Kramer often said, then over a year and a day he would document one of the most significant transitions in the history of popular music: Bob Dylan's metamorphosis from folk hero to electric renegade.

Kramer had never heard of Dylan when in 1964 he watched the 22-year-old perform *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, a slow ballad based on the story of a black woman who was killed by a rich white man in Baltimore. He was impressed. "I couldn't believe what I was hearing," he said. "Here was this young guy with just his guitar, and he was saying these powerful things that you have to be brave to say."

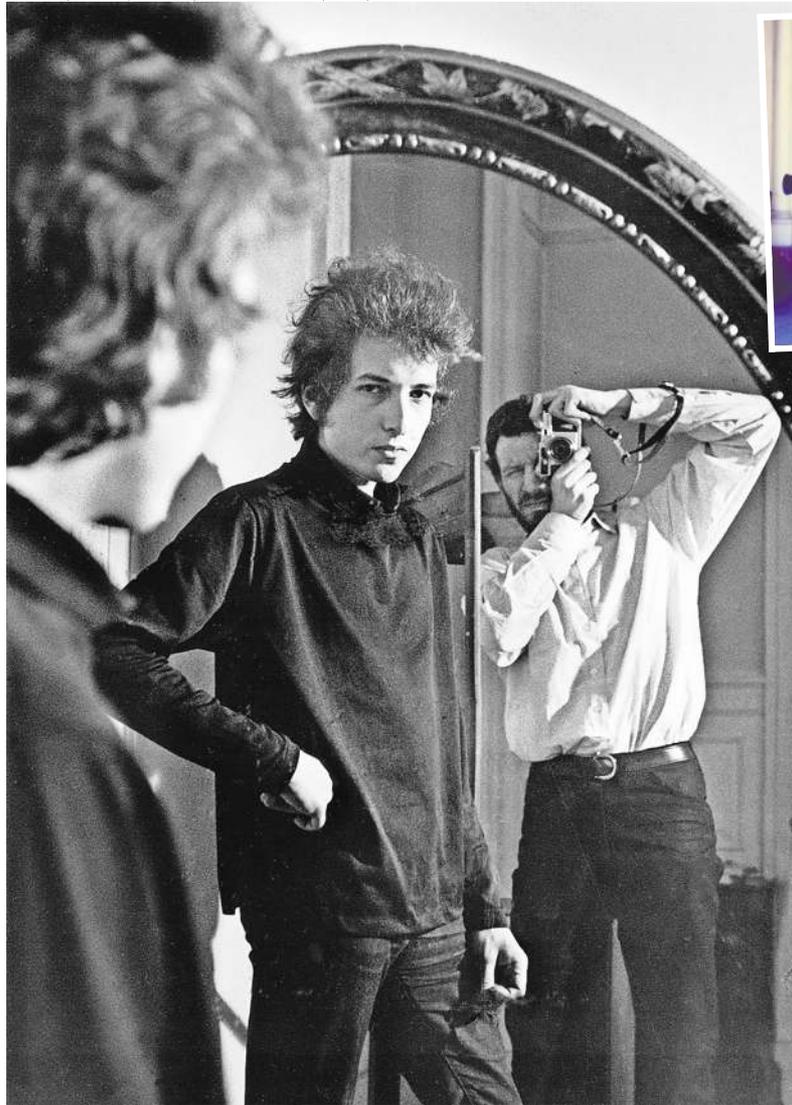
Kramer was a 33-year-old photojournalist from Brooklyn, New York, who specialised in artists' portraits and was on the lookout for new material. He hounded Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman, for six months by letter and phone until one day Grossman, rather than his secretary, picked up the call and invited Kramer to Woodstock for an hour-long shoot. On a hot day in August he drove two hours north to the sleepy town where Dylan went to escape the city. The singer turned up almost two hours late on his motorbike, greeting Kramer with a limp handshake. Kramer asked what photographs Dylan wanted. "Do what you want to do," he purred.

Kramer shot him standing on a swing chair, climbing a tree and playing chess at a café, his brow stitched in concentration. An hour turned into five and by the end of the day Dylan had warmed to the modish photographer with a beard and velvet blazer. In the evening they jammed with Joan Baez and Peter Yarrow (Kramer played the spoons). "Woodstock was like the testing day for him and me," Kramer said. "He gave me a hard time. It was like a courtship. I guess I passed the test."

When Kramer showed Grossman and Dylan the photos, he was invited to Philadelphia to shoot him at a gig. Over the next year he would capture the musician as he shifted from stardom to superstardom. The shots were candid: jotting down lyrics in the front seat of a car; dancing with Joan Baez; reading the newspaper; playing pool in upstate New York; backstage with Allen Ginsberg or Johnny Cash. Through Kramer's lens, Dylan appeared elliptical and playful, sometimes moody. "Bob was in a constant state of creative evolution," he said. "In the one year in which I photographed him, his music and his appearance changed radically."

The singer was known for being private but Kramer was given unbridled access. When he shot Dylan at the Philharmonic Hall in Lincoln Center, New York, on Halloween 1964, he was told by the manager that photographers had to stay in the glass-fronted press booth. "So Bob said to his manager, 'You tell them here that if he can't do whatever he wants to do, I'm not going on,'" Kramer recalled. The following January he was in the Columbia Records studio to photograph Dylan recording his album *Bringing It All Back Home*, his first foray into rock. "People always say that Dylan went electric at Newport in the summer of 1965," Kramer said of the gig in which, much to the horror of his traditional fans, Dylan announced his new musical

DANIEL KRAMER/CAMERA PRESS; DANIEL KRAMER/COURTESY STALEY-WISE GALLERY, NEW YORK; ALAMY



direction with a tangy rendition of *Like a Rolling Stone* and was met with booring. "Well, not to me, he didn't. I saw him go electric that January, when it was still snowing."

Dylan asked him to shoot the album cover, something Kramer had not done before so he sought the advice of Columbia's art director, who blankly refused to help. "Bob's a superstar," he said. "I need a superstar photographer to do it." When Kramer told Dylan and Grossman at lunch later that day, they stormed back into the art director's office. "It was ugly. It was very, very ugly," Kramer recalled.

He wanted the cover to present Dylan at the centre of a changing world. Inspired by an out-of-focus shot that the photographer Richard Avedon had taken of Brigitte Bardot, he blurred the edges by building a rig that allowed him to rotate the camera, creating a circular aurora effect to emulate a spinning record and the age of psychedelia. He

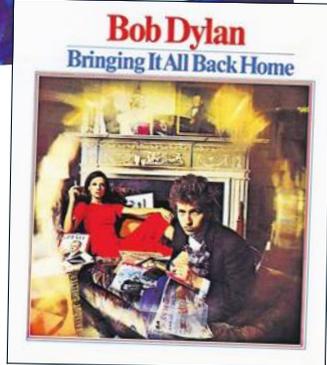
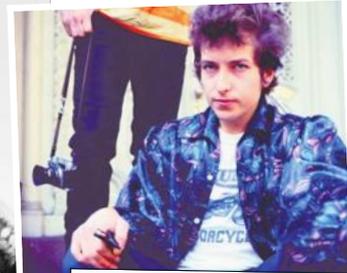
also wanted to show Dylan's shift from sheepskin-clad roadie to suited-and-booted rock star ("Bob didn't really want to be Woody Guthrie," he said, "he wanted to be Elvis Presley"). He had Dylan pose with a grey cat on a velvet chaise longue in front of Grossman's fireplace at his home in Bearsville, New York, wearing a black suit and cufflinks. Behind him sat Grossman's wife, Sally, smoking in a red dress; Columbia's one requirement was that there should be a woman in the photo, like there had been in *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. The shot Kramer chose was the only one in which the cat had looked directly at the camera. The effect was one of decadent languor. Sally looks bored; Dylan scowls. "He's not the guy in the leather jacket any more," Kramer said. "There's no guitar in the shot because I saw him not as any one kind of performer but as a prince of music."

Kramer's design for *Bringing it All Back Home*, later seen as a precursor for

concept album covers such as *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, was nominated for a Grammy and five months later Dylan invited him to shoot for his next album, *Highway 61 Revisited*. This time there was no plan. They wandered from a bistro on 6th Avenue and West 4th Street to Grossman's apartment, where Dylan hurried inside to try on his new Triumph motorcycle T-shirt then perched on the ornate steps. The shot was "too naked" so Kramer had Bob Neuwirth stand behind Dylan and hold his Nikon SP rangefinder. "Now once he did that," said Kramer, "it seems like something's going on."

Once again there was a hint of scorn in Dylan's expression. "He's hostile, or it's a hostile moodiness," said Kramer. "He's almost challenging me or you or whoever's looking at it. 'What are you gonna do about it, buster?'"

By the time Kramer shot his final photo of Dylan, at a soundcheck at Forest Hills tennis stadium in Queens, New



Kramer captured a "hostile moodiness" in Dylan during his year with him, and shot his cover portraits for Highway 61 Revisited and Bringing It All Back Home

York, in August 1965 — Dylan's first gig since Newport — the songwriter had finally embraced his rock era: he was pictured surrounded by cables and lights, wielding a Fender and dark glasses. "That kind of concluded the work," Kramer said. "And just by coincidence, it was one day past a year from the first time I ever worked with him."

Daniel Kramer was born in Brooklyn in 1932 to Irving, a dockworker and amateur film-maker, and Ethel (née Berland), a hospital administrator. Daniel was drawn to the camera from an early age. "I became a professional when someone offered me \$5 to take a photo," he said. "I remember feeling embarrassed to

take so much money for something that came so easily to me." After Brooklyn College, and a spell in the army, Kramer was assistant to Diane and Allan Arbus, then Philippe Halsman, who included him in his project *Jump Book*, a 1959 collection of portraits of celebrities jumping in the air — Kramer's job was to wash the soles of Marilyn Monroe's feet after each jump.

Publications initially rejected Kramer's photographs of Dylan — "I don't need another scruffy kid with a guitar," one editor said — but as the singer's fame increased they began to appear in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, *Paris Match*, *Stern* and *Der Spiegel*. In 1967 Kramer published his portfolio, *Bob Dylan*.

In the Sixties he also shot Janis Joplin, Judy Collins, Johnny Cash and Pete Seeger, but it was Dylan who changed his approach to photography, making him more experimental and playful. The experience also led to a career in which Kramer photographed Norman Mailer, *The Godfather* author Mario Puzo and the US presidents Ronald Reagan, Harry Truman and George W. Bush. "I've had a writing lesson from Norman Mailer," he said, "a boxing lesson from Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali, and a harmonica lesson from Bob Dylan."

In 1968 he married Arline Cunningham, who was part of the management team for Harold Leventhal. She died in 2016, two years before Kramer released *A Year and a Day*, which contained some 200 pictures of his Dylan odyssey. At the time, he said, he had not been aware of how significant capturing that year had been. "You don't know someone's changing the world until the world's been changed," he said.

Daniel Kramer, photojournalist, was born on May 19, 1932. He died on April 29, 2024, aged 91

Ramón Fonseca

Lawyer at the centre of the Panama papers scandal, whose firm helped the rich, powerful and shady to hide their money

In his spare time Ramón Fonseca wrote popular novels, a couple of which won prizes. But none had a plot as dramatic as that which he created in his real life.

Fonseca co-founded and ran a Panamanian law firm which set up offshore shell companies for the world's rich and powerful, promising its clients absolute confidentiality. In many cases, the beneficiaries of those companies used them to hide their wealth, avoid tax, launder money, salt away ill-gotten gains or evade international sanctions.

Fonseca made a fortune, but his global empire came crashing down in April 2016 with the world's largest data leak, the "Panama papers" scandal.

An anonymous whistleblower passed 11.5 million files from Fonseca's law firm, Mossack Fonseca, to *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The German newspaper shared them with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which farmed them out to more than 100 news organisations in nearly 80 different countries. Having spent a year trawling through them, those organisations published the sensational results in April 2016.

The records stripped away the secrecy protecting more than 214,000 offshore entities in 21 jurisdictions including Guernsey, Jersey, the British Virgin Islands and the Isle of Man.

A dozen current or former world leaders were implicated. So were 128 other politicians and public officials, and hundreds of celebrities, sports stars, businessmen and billionaires from more than 200 countries.

They included associates of President Putin of Russia, the presidents of Argentina and Ukraine, the brother-in-law of President Xi of China, and three children of the Pakistani prime minister, Nawaz Sharif. They included Irani-

ans on a United Nations sanctions list. The prime minister of Iceland was forced to resign. David Cameron, then the UK prime minister, had to explain away an offshore fund set up by his late father.

In countries around the world, criminal investigations were started, financial regulations tightened and large sums of money recouped in back taxes and penalties.

Fonseca insisted he had done nothing wrong, and that the hacking of his firm's records was the only crime that had been committed.

In a written exchange with *The New York Times* he argued that his firm was not responsible for the actions of the shell companies it created. "We are like

'The factory is not responsible for what is done with the car'

a car factory who sells its cars to a dealer (a lawyer for example), and he sells it to a lady that hits someone. The factory is not responsible for what is done with the car."

That proposition was being tested in a Panamanian criminal court at the time of his death. Eight years after the scandal first erupted, Fonseca, his business partner Jürgen Mossack, and 25 other employees of his firm were standing trial on charges of money laundering. The evidence has been heard, but the judge has yet to deliver his verdict.

Ramón Fonseca Mora was born in Panama City in 1952. He earned a degree in law and political science at the University of Panama, and later studied at the London School of Economics. He then spent six years work-



Fonseca became wealthy himself, and advised successive Panamanian presidents

ing for the UN in Geneva. He was "trying to save the world", he claimed.

In the mid-1970s he returned to Panama just as the central American country was seeking to establish itself as an offshore banking centre with remarkably lax financial regulations. In 1977 he set up a one-man law firm that employed a single secretary and offered its services to clients around the world. In 1986 he joined forces with Mossack, who was pursuing the same business.

Over the subsequent decades Mossack Fonseca went from strength to strength. It set up affiliated offices in more than 40 countries, amassed a workforce of 500 and became a world leader in the business of setting up shell companies.

Fonseca, referring to the firm's size

and power, called it a "monster". *Vice* magazine was less flattering. In a 2014 profile headlined "The law firm that works with oligarchs, money launderers and dictators", it identified associates of Colonel Gaddafi, Robert Mugabe and President Assad of Syria as clients. "If shell companies are getaway companies for bank robbers, then Mossack Fonseca may be the world's shadiest car dealership," it said.

Mossack, the son of a member of the Waffen-SS who moved to Panama in the 1960s, kept a low profile. Fonseca was gregarious. He hosted lavish parties at his villa. He married, had six children and divorced (his ex-wife, Elizabeth Ward Neiman, is now Panama's ambassador to the Netherlands, and a son, Eduardo, served as ambassador to

the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia).

Following the overthrow of Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian dictator, by US forces in 1989 Fonseca became a confidant and adviser to successive Panamanian presidents, and wrote several novels. Two — *Dance of the Butterflies* (1994) and *Dream City* (1998) — won Panama's top literary award.

His own dreams ended with the leak of the Panama papers. He stood down as president of the ruling Panameñista party. His firm's offices were raided by the Panamanian authorities in connection with alleged corruption in Brazil: he and Mossack were jailed for several months before being released on bail.

In 2018 the two men closed Mossack Fonseca, though they continued to protest their innocence.

In 2019 they sought unsuccessfully to block *The Laundromat*, a Netflix series based on the Panama papers scandal, arguing that their depiction by the actors Antonio Banderas and Gary Oldman was defamatory. The two men were acquitted in a money-laundering case in 2022, but still faced several other lawsuits.

Their latest trial opened in early April, but by then Fonseca was too ill to attend the hearings.

In a recent newspaper article his children blamed the Panama papers leak for his deteriorating health. "Overnight, our father's impeccable legacy went from being that of a writer, idealist, fighter and successful lawyer to the biggest scumbag in Panama," they wrote. "As you can imagine, this affected our dad greatly."

Ramón Fonseca Mora, lawyer, was born on July 14, 1952. He died on May 8, 2024, aged 71

Keith Wainwright

Stylist to the stars — from Bowie to Elton John — who helped to create the bold punk look at Smile, his pioneering unisex salon

"Don't ask me which rock stars I've done," said Keith Wainwright, better known as Keith at Smile, in an interview with *The Sunday Times* in 1993. "There is almost nobody I haven't done."

By the Nineties the hairdresser had styled David Bowie, Vivienne Westwood, Jimi Hendrix, Paul McCartney and Elton John at Smile, London's first unisex salon, which he opened on King's Road, Chelsea, in 1969 with Leslie Russell (obituary January 25, 2023), the styling wizard who gave Anna Win-tour her distinctive bob.

They met at Leonard of Mayfair, the famed Sixties salon that created the "mop-top", a softer cut than the sharp bobs favoured by its competitor Vidal Sassoon. As an apprentice, Wainwright swept the floor for three years before graduating to the scissors to cater for such customers as Twiggy, the Beatles, Frank Sinatra and Mick Jagger, although he wasn't at first allowed to talk to the clients. "My accent was too broad," he explained. "And so I used to practise my elocution, but fairly soon I reverted to type."

By the end of the decade, however, Wainwright had enough clout to start his own salon with Russell (Leonard tried to sue them but lost his case). They sent out an edict: no rollers, only smooth, classic cuts: "Anyone wanting a naff bouffant need not apply."

Loud pop music blared in the background; men rubbed shoulders with women, rock stars with East Enders. "The concept was that because we wouldn't use rollers, we'd do men and women in the same place, and we'd set



Wainwright, right, and Leslie Russell eschewed rollers and played loud pop music

the salon out on a grid system," Wainwright explained. "We had blinds rigid up so that it could be private if you wanted it to be, or open. But it never got private — it was always open."

The salon was at the forefront of a movement in which hair, as much as clothes or music, became a way to rebel against the status quo (though at £3.50, the equivalent of about £35 today, a cut was a relatively expensive mutiny) and it ruptured the formality of traditional hairdressing in Mayfair or Knightsbridge: quiet, conservative and middle-aged, feminine. "With clothing and hair, you set a statement," said Wain-

wright. "You are saying something you believe in."

He blended "mod" fashion — tailored suits and sharp cuts — with the androgynous look of glam rock stars such as Bryan Ferry or Bowie: long, swept-back locks accompanied by gold trousers and leopard print jackets. He was probably the first hairdresser to be credited on an album cover — *Roxy Music* in 1972, the band's debut. A year later, in 1973, he styled Ferry's blue-black tinted wave for his album *These Foolish Things*. "It was just one big combing job," Wainwright shrugged.

By the late Seventies Wainwright was

an arbiter of modern style, working with chemists and hair technicians to experiment with colours dismissed as too avant-garde by other hairdressers — bright pink, blue and green. Within a few years the look would be popularised by the punk movement. When the model and Sex Pistols-muse Jordan Mooney (aka Pamela Rooke) (obituary April 8, 2022) was 14 she requested from Smile a large red mohican down the middle of her head and two pink strips down the back — a hairdo for which she would be suspended from school.

Wainwright styled the buzz cuts and mohicans in Derek Jarman's dystopian film *Jubilee* (1978), featuring Jordan and Adam Ant, and the music video for *Echo Beach* by Martha and the Muffins.

They had an edict: 'Anyone wanting a naff bouffant need not apply'

He was a consultant for *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, a documentary about the Sex Pistols. "The stranger the haircut the better for him," said one client. "Keith was quite influential as well. You'd get invited to things because you had punk hair."

Born into a working-class family in 1944 in Bermondsey, south London, Wainwright was a self-described "Mod" and as a teenager he was, like his clients, acutely image-conscious. He preferred pop over jazz: the first record he bought was by Doris Day and he listened to the likes of Fats Domino, the Everly Brothers and Buddy Holly. "Purple

hearts [amphetamines] weren't our thing," he said.

After his apprenticeship at Leonard's he got a job on a boat bound for South Africa, then a cruise liner around the Mediterranean. When he arrived back in London he did Jane Birkin's hair, and Mary Quant's for a while, "because she lived around the corner from the hairdressers where I worked before I worked on the boats", he recalled. Another early client was the socialite Lady Annabel Birley, after whom the famous Mayfair nightclub, Annabel's, was named.

In later years Wainwright styled hair for commercials for brands such as Brylcreem, a hair product, and for pop promos for Cliff Richard and Debbie Harry (Blondie). His help in styling the anti-establishment was rewarded by the powers that be in 2011 when he was appointed MBE. He is survived by his wife, the designer Pamela Motown.

Wainwright's styles fell out of fashion, and Smile closed its doors in 2014, but his cuts were immortalised in the song *Requiem in Denim And Leopard-skin* by the Pet Shop Boys, a love letter to the movers and shapers of the punk era. "The look is 'Let It Rock' / A Johnson's leather jacket / Hair by Keith at Smile / All you need to make it big / Is sex and style."

Keith Wainwright MBE, hairdresser and founder of Smile salon, was born on October 13, 1944. He died of undisclosed causes in April, aged 79

Memorial service Dame Ann Leslie

A memorial service to celebrate the life and work of Dame Ann Leslie was held yesterday on Thursday, May 23, at 11.30am in St Bride's Church, the Journalists' Church, London.

The service was led by the Rev Canon Dr Alison Joyce, the reactor of St Bride's.

The first reading, *I Corinthians xiii*, was given by Mr Michael Leslie, brother. Mr Michael Fletcher, husband, read *Adlestrop* by Edward Thomas and Dr Katharine Fletcher, daughter, read a tribute from the British Journalism Review. Dame Janet Suzman read an excerpt from Dame Ann's memoir, *Killing My Own Snakes*, and Mr Tom Conti read *Memorial* by James Fenton. The addresses were given by Mr Paul Dacre and Professor Laurie Taylor.

The choir sang Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*, Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere* and Paul Simon's *Graceland*. Mr James Pusey and Mr Denis Kucherov performed the main theme from *Pather Panchali* by Ravi Shankar.

Also among those present were: the Viscount and Viscountess Rothermere; the Hon Vere Harmsworth; Mr and Mrs Vyvyan Harmsworth.

Mr David Aaronovitch; Mr Steve Abbott; Mr Mustafa Abu Sneh; Mr Richard Addis; Mrs Samira Ahmed; Mrs Yasmin Alibhai-Brown; Mr Roger Alton; Ms Nazenin Ansari; Mr Potkin Azarmehr; Mrs Lynn Barber; Mr Alex Bannister; Mr Abdel Bari Atwan; Dr and Mrs David Barlow; Ms Anna Beale KC; Mr and Mrs Jeremy Bradshaw; Mr



Leslie was an influential foreign correspondent for the Daily Mail

Colin Brown; Mr Craig Brown; Mr Alex Brummer; Mr Mark Bryant; Dr Peter Christie; Mr Paul Connaw; Mr Andrew Copson; Mr Con Coughlin; Ms Anna Coren; Mr Adam Cumiskey; Ms Sarah Darling; Mr Adel Darwish; Ms Kitty Dumbleby; Ms Susan Douglas; Ms Catherine-Anne Drewett; Mr Adrian Evans; Mr Nigel Evans MP; Mr Ivan Fallon; Ms Sally Feldman; Baroness Fleet; Mr Kim Fletcher; Baroness Fox of Buckley; Ms Jane Fryer; Mr William Garrod; Mr Charles Garside; Mrs Gail Garside; Mr Rod Gilchrist; Ms Nicola Glucksmann; Ms Ysenda Maxtone Graham; Mr Trevor Grove; Mrs Valerie Grove; Mr Nigel Guthrie; Mr Bill Hagerty; Mr Liam Halligan; Mr Sarah Harding; Mr Robert Hardman; Mr Alexander Heald; Ms Kirsten Heald; Ms Lucy Heald; Ms Rebecca Heald; Mr Tristram Heald; Ms Dee Howey; Mr James Hughes-Howey;

low; Mr Gerry Hunt; Ms Liz Hunt; Mrs Jennifer Johnson; Mr Stanley Johnson; Mr Leaf Kalfayan; Mr Richard Kay; Mrs Mary Kenny; Mr Sam Kiley; Ms Ulla Kloster; Ms Sue Kyle; Ms Carla Lamkin; Ms Pat Lancaster; Ms Julia Langdon; Dr Megan Lawes; Mrs Nelly Leslie; Mr Geoff Levy; Mr Richard Littlejohn; Mrs Wendy Littlejohn; Sir Nicholas and Lady Lloyd; Ms Rachael Lloyd; Mr Bernard Lyall; Mr James MacManus; Mr John Mair; Mr Angus McGeoch; Ms Heather McGlone; Ms Kate McMillan; Mr Stanley McMurry; Mrs Eleanor Mills; Ms Deborah Moggach; Ms Jan Moir; Ms Bel Mooney; Mr and Mrs William Morris; Mr Colin Myler; Lord and Lady Patten of Barnes; Mr Robert Peston; Sir Trevor Phillips; Mr Andrew Pierce; Ms Jeanna Polley; Mrs Babs Powell; Mr Jeff Powell; Mr Robert Powell; Mr Richard Prince; Ms Anna Pukas; Mr Jay Rayner; Ms Sue Reid; Mr Steve Richards; Dame Stella Rimington; Mr Nick Robinson; Mr Joshua Rozenberg KC; Ms Joyce Samuels; Mr Kim Sengupta; Ms Ingrid Seward; Ms Geraldine Sharpe-Newton; Ms Jane Slade; Mr David Starkey; Ms Carole Stone; Mr Tom Toumazis; Ms Liz Vercoe; Mr Ted Verity; Ms Beverley Vine; Mr Mark Wardrop; Mr Nick Watt; Ms Tanya Wheway; Mr Michael White; Mr David Wigg; Mr David Williams; Mr Doug Willis; Mrs Kara Wilson; Mr Eugene Wolstenholme; Mr Joseph Wolstenholme; Mr Peter Wright; Mr Peter York; together with many more friends and colleagues.

Court Circular



Buckingham Palace

23rd May, 2024

The King held a Council at 10.30am.

There were present: the Rt Hon Penelope Mordaunt MP (Lord President), the Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP (Secretary of State for Health and Social Care), the Rt Hon Alistair Jack MP (Secretary of State for Scotland) and the Lord True (Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords).

Mr Richard Tilbrook was in attendance as Clerk of the Council. The Rt Hon Sir Clive Alderton (Principal Private Secretary to Their Majesties) was in attendance. The Rt Hon Penelope Mordaunt MP had an audience of His Majesty before the Council.

The King, President, The Prince's Trust, received Mr John Booth upon relinquishing his appointment as Chairman and Mr Thomas Lube upon assuming the appointment.

Palace of Holyroodhouse

23rd May, 2024

The Duke of Edinburgh, Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and The Duchess of Edinburgh this morning attended the General Assembly at Assembly Hall, Mound Place, Edinburgh.

His Royal Highness, Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and Her Royal Highness this afternoon attended the Closing Sederunt of the General Assembly at Assembly Hall.

St James's Palace

23rd May, 2024

The Princess Royal, Patron, this morning visited Hornet Services Sailing Club to mark its Sixtieth Anniversary and, having been received by His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire (Mr Nigel Atkinson), opened the Army Sailing Association Offshore Centre at Haslar Road, Gosport.

The Princess Royal, accompanied by Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence, held an Afternoon Party in the garden of Buckingham Palace to celebrate the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's Bicentenary.

The Duke of Kent was present. His Majesty's Body Guard of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms and The King's Body Guard of the Yeomen of the Guard were on duty.

The Band of the Royal Marines (Portsmouth) played selections of music during the afternoon.

Her Royal Highness, accompanied by Admiral Laurence, this evening visited the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, London SW3.

Kensington Palace

23rd May, 2024

The Duke of Gloucester, Royal Patron, this evening attended a Reception at the British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WCL.

The Duchess of Gloucester, Colonel-in-Chief, Adjutant General's Corps, this afternoon received Colonel Victoria Whiting upon relinquishing her appointment as Corps Colonel and Colonel Stuart Allen upon assuming the appointment, and Warrant Officer Class One Christopher Hastings upon assuming his appointment as Corps Sergeant Major.

Major Benjamin Culleton (Assistant Corps Secretary) was present.

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Births, Marriages and Deaths

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BUT SO much the more went there a fame abroad of him; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed. Luke 5.15-16 (AV)

Bible verses are provided by the Bible Society

Births

FABER on 29th April 2024 to Stella (née Weatherall) and Luke, a son, Nicholas (Nicky) Mark Percy.

LAMARQUE on 15th May 2024 to Bryony (née Barling) and Victor, a daughter, Eliza Cecilia, sister to Myles and Taiga.

MCLEAN on 10th May 2024 to Amelia (née Regan) and Charlie, a daughter, Cicely Sarah Frances, sister to Nico.

Forthcoming Marriages

MR A. A. D. DIJKSTRA

AND MISS S. N. MOLSON

The engagement is announced between Auguste, son of Mr and Mrs Antoine Dijkstra of Verbier, Switzerland, and Natasha, daughter of Mr R Ian Molson of Kingham, Oxfordshire, and Mrs Verena Molson of Chelsea, London.

MR T. A. J. WOFFENDEN

AND MISS A. C. RICHARDSON

The engagement is announced between Tom, son of Mr and Mrs Ken Woffenden of Loxwood, West Sussex, and Anna, elder daughter of Mr and Mrs Andy Richardson of Brough Sowerby, Cumbria.

MR E. R. TREVELYAN-JOHNSON

AND MISS H. E. SELIGMAN

The engagement is announced between Edmund Roland, only son of Mr and Mrs Peter Trevelyan-Johnson of Fulham, and Henrietta Eva, only daughter of Mr and Mrs David Seligman of South Kensington.

MR R. F. WINGFIELD DIGBY

AND MISS L. C. A. SEWELL

The engagement is announced between Richard, son of Mr and Mrs George Wingfield Digby of Oxfordshire, and Lucinda, youngest daughter of Mr and Mrs Mark Sewell of Idlicote, Warwickshire.

Marriages

DR A. P. H. PICOT

AND MISS E. R. DONNELLY

The marriage took place on 22nd July 2023, at the Church of the Holy Name, Esher, between Alexis Pierre Henri and Elizabeth Rose. Family and friends celebrated with the couple on 11th May 2024 at Hampton Court Palace.

Anniversaries

WITT : LEAN

Rex and Mary, 24.iv.1970 and 24.v.2011. "And only parents' love can last our lives." Richard and Cleo.

LEGAL, PUBLIC, COMPANY & PARLIAMENTARY NOTICES

To place notices for these sections please call 020 7782 7553

Notices are subject to confirmation and should be received by 11.30am three days prior to insertion



Deaths

ADAMS Alistair David FRCS (edn), MChB, BSc (hons) (Edinburgh) Peacefully on 17th May 2024 at Marie Curie Hospice Edinburgh. Alistair, dearly loved husband, father, stepfather and step-grandfather. Consultant eye surgeon (retired) at Edinburgh Eye Pavilion. Funeral service to take place at Warriston Crematorium, Lorimer Chapel, on Friday 31st May at 2pm to which all are invited. Family flowers only. Donations can be made to Marie Curie Hospice Edinburgh.

BILTON Godfrey Derek Ernest passed away peacefully on 19th May 2024, aged 86. Beloved husband of Gita, much-loved father to Anton, Laurence and Tanya, stepfather to James and Neila and grandfather to his many grandchildren. Private family cremation, there will be a memorial service in London in September.

BURKE John Joseph, Air Commodore (Rtd), died peacefully at home on Saturday 18th May 2024 after a long illness, aged 94. Beloved husband of Peggy for 69 years. Dearly loved and wonderful father to Rosie, Sean, Maggie and Louise, much-loved and proud grandfather to Gemma, Anna, Meghan, Tom, Ellie, Matt, Caitlin and John. Father-in-law to Miguel and Tim. Family flowers only. Donations, if desired, to the RAF Benevolent Fund.

BUSH
John Barnard CVO, OBE, KStJ died peacefully on 11th May 2024, aged 87. Beloved husband of the late Pam and much-loved father of Alex and Carly, grandfather of five and great grandfather of three. Former Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire. Funeral at Edington Priory, Westbury, on Thursday 30th May at 2pm. All welcome.

CURLIE Michael James, died peacefully on 14th May 2024, aged 81. Beloved husband, father, grandfather, sibling, golfing partner and friend. Private family cremation. A memorial celebration will be arranged in due course.

DICKINSON
Crystal Rushbrooke Frobes (née Taylor) died on 10th May 2024, aged 87. Crystal was a social worker, foster carer and immigration rights advocate with strong ties to the Religious Society of Friends. She leaves behind her three children.

GREGG
Geoffrey John passed away on 15th May 2024, aged 82. Devoted husband to his late wife, Marion, father to Nick and Sophie and beloved grandfather to Olivia and Jack. A celebration of his life will be held in Blockley church in the Cotswolds on 20th July at 2pm.

MORGAN Paul John, former chairman of the Romeike Group, passed away on 16th May 2024, aged 91. Funeral service to be held at Birtton Crematorium, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, on Friday 7th June at 2pm. Flowers welcome or donations, if wished, to Alzheimer's Research UK c/o Wright Funeral Services, 105 High Street, Great Missenden, HP16 0BE.

STEAD Prima Lou died peacefully in hospital on 2nd May 2024, aged 81. A loving wife, mother and grandmother who will be greatly missed. Funeral service will be held at Sacred Heart Church, Caterham, on Friday 31st May at 130pm. Flowers welcome. Donations, if desired, to Sightsavers. All inquiries to BC Baker & Son 15/17 High Street, Caterham, CR3 5UE. Tel: 01883 343219.

TEEMAN Shirley, aged 91. Beloved wife of Ronald, devoted mother of Brian, Miriam and Oded and adored grandma of Leo Brosh. A lovely lady.

In Memoriam - Private

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Alexander John Williams
21.6.1971 - 24.5.2020
Always remembered with love and affection by family and friends

General Announcements

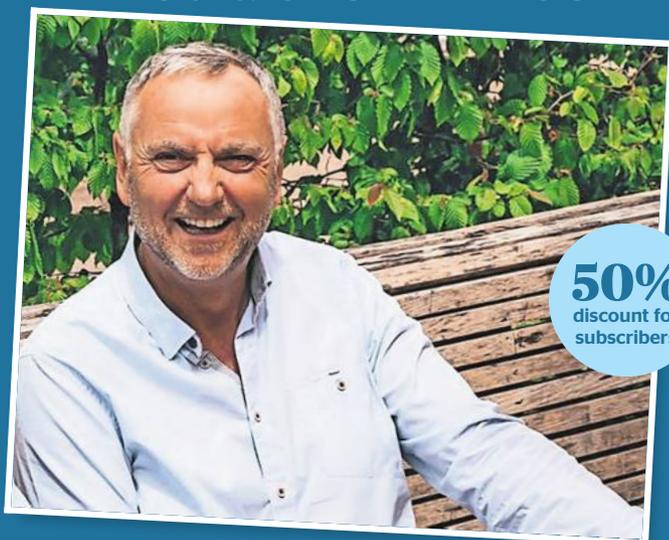
CHANGE OF NAME I Adam Malek s/o Ashwani Kumar Sharma r/o 12 Silver Way, UB10 0TD, have changed my name to Padam Sharma for all future purposes.

Birthdays

BETHANY GREGORY. Happy Birthday Bethany. Thinking of you. Love dad. X

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JAMES TYRRELL, WHO DIED AGED 60, APPEARED IN THE TIMES ON AUGUST 27, 2022

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THE TIMES

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Wed 10 **Cobh (for Cork), Ireland**

Thu 11 **St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly**

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Fri 12 **St. Peter Port, Guernsey**

Sat 13 **Portsmouth**

Sun 14 **Arrive in London Tilbury**

Dates not mentioned will be spent relaxing at sea

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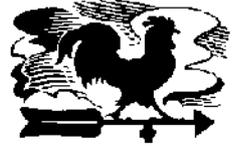
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Weather Eye
Paul Simons



‘What hath God wrought!’ read a message 180 years ago. This was May 24, 1844, when Samuel Morse sent the first official long-distance telegraph message using his newly invented Morse code, from Washington to Baltimore 40 miles away, passed down a single-wire telegraph line.

Morse was both an inventor and artist who became fascinated with rapid communication. He saw how electromagnets could send bursts of electric current down telegraph wires and pass messages using Morse code, sequences of dots and dashes representing the letters of the alphabet. The new messaging system grew so successful that a network of telegraph lines rapidly expanded across the United States. And when a telegraph cable successfully spanned the Atlantic between Newfoundland and Ireland on July 27, 1866, the age of instant global communication had begun.

The telegraph and Morse code also revolutionised weather forecasting. In February 1861 Admiral Robert FitzRoy, head of Britain’s Meteorological Department, pioneered what he called the storm warning service for shipping. Each day weather reports were telegraphed to London from stations around Britain and a few stations in Europe, from which FitzRoy could draw up a weather map. When he identified signs of an approaching storm, warnings were telegraphed to coastal stations where a system of cones and banners was hoisted up high for passing ships to read, giving basic information on the direction and strength of the storm. In the years after the number of lives lost at sea around Britain fell by about a third.

With the success of the storm warnings, FitzRoy became a hero to mariners, and boosted with confidence he then began the world’s first public weather forecast, published in The Times on August 1, 1861. These forecasts also relied on telegraphed reports, but it was a far more ambitious project and became so controversial it was suspended.

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WeatherQuest
weatherquest.co.uk

Today Warm in any sunny spells but the risk of showers or periods of rain in places. Max 19C (66F), min 3C (37F)

Around Britain

Key: b=bright, c=cloud, d=drizzle, pc=partly cloudy, du=dull, f=fair, fg=fog, h=hail, m=mist, r=rain, sh=showers, sl=sleet, sn=snow, ss=sun, t=thunder
*previous day **data not available

Temp C	Rain mm	Sun hr*
midday yesterday		
Aberdeen	13 D	14.6 0.0
Aberporth	10 C	0.0 0.0
Anglesey	10 C	8.8 0.0
Aviemore	10 R	19.0 0.8
Barnstaple	14 C	0.0 0.0
Befford	13 C	0.2 **
Belfast	10 C	0.0 **
Birmingham	12 C	3.2 **
Bournemouth	15 C	0.6 0.1
Bridlington	14 C	0.0 **
Bristol	13 C	0.2 0.0
Cardome	13 PC	0.6 0.7
Cardiff	12 C	0.2 1.6
Edinburgh	12 R	38.8 0.0
Eskdalemuir	12 R	19.6 0.0
Glasgow	11 R	26.2 0.0
Hereford	13 C	0.2 **
Herstmonceux	18 R	0.0 0.2
Ipswich	14 C	0.4 0.6
Isle of Man	10 C	29.6 0.0
Isle of Wight	16 C	0.4 **
Jersey	16 PC	0.0 11.8
Keswick	12 R	92.2 **
Kinloss	11 D	20.4 0.0
Leeds	11 C	20.2 **
Lerwick	12 R	26.2 2.6
Leuchars	12 R	11.0 0.0
Lincoln	13 C	0.4 0.0
Liverpool	11 R	20.6 **
London	14 C	3.6 0.0
Lynham	13 C	0.0 0.0
Manchester	11 D	15.2 0.0
Margate	18 C	0.2 1.7
Milford Haven	12 C	0.0 **
Newcastle	13 D	19.0 **
Nottingham	13 C	1.4 0.0
Orkney	12 **	11.8 0.3
Oxford	14 **	7.0 **
Plymouth	13 C	0.4 **
Portland	14 C	0.8 **
Scilly, St Mary's	13 C	0.4 **
Shoreham	16 C	2.0 0.1
Shrewsbury	13 C	7.8 0.0
Snowdonia	9 R	64.2 **
Southend	16 C	0.0 0.4
South Uist	10 C	0.0 **
Stornoway	10 D	0.6 0.0
Tiree	10 C	0.8 **
Whitehaven	11 R	58.2 0.0
Wick	11 D	15.6 **
Yeovilton	14 C	0.0 1.3

Five days ahead

Some dry and sunny periods but generally unsettled with spells of rain spreading eastwards

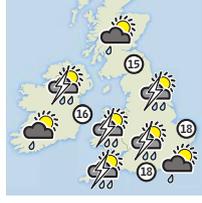
Tomorrow

Mainly dry with warm spells of sunshine over England, Scotland and Wales but the risk of a few showers, especially in the north and east. Increasingly cloudy with rain in Ireland. Max 20C, min 7C



Sunday

Sunny spells and a scattering of showers, heavy and thundery at times. Max 19C, min 5C



Monday

Sunny spells and scattered showers over Scotland, northern England, Wales and Ireland, heavy and thundery in places. Dry at first elsewhere but the risk of an isolated shower. Max 17C, min 5C



Tuesday

Dry at first with sunny spells over England, Wales and Scotland but showers spreading in from the west in the afternoon. Sunny spells with heavy and thundery showers in Ireland. Max 17C, min 8C



Wednesday

Any thick cloud and rain around at first will clear eastern England to bring a day of sunny spells and scattered showers over the British Isles, heavy and thundery at times. Max 18C, min 7C



The world

All readings local midday yesterday

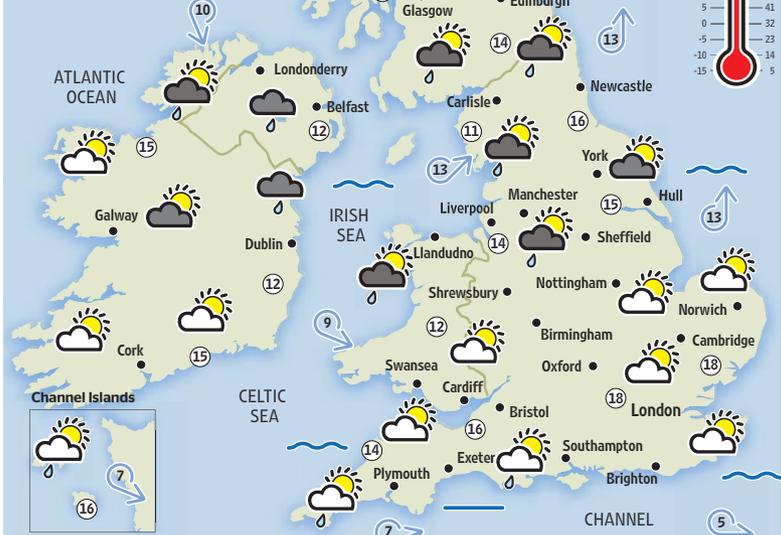
Alicante	22 PC	Madeira	23 PC
Amsterdam	19 PC	Madrid	22 S
Athens	29 B	Malaga	20 S
Auckland	15 B	Mallorca	23 PC
Bahrain	36 S	Malta	28 S
Bangkok	31 C	Melbourne	14 B
Barbados	32 PC	Mexico City	30 PC
Barcelona	19 PC	Miami	31 PC
Beijing	29 S	Milan	15 R
Beirut	28 S	Mombasa	** **
Belgrade	16 R	Montreal	27 B
Berlin	23 PC	Moscow	18 S
Bermuda	24 C	Mumbai	33 **
Bordeaux	17 B	Munich	20 PC
Brussels	18 PC	Nairobi	22 B
Bucharest	17 S	Naples	22 PC
Budapest	24 PC	New Orleans	31 PC
Buenos Aires	13 B	New York	23 PC
Cairo	36 S	Nice	18 T
Calcutta	34 **	Nicosia	30 PC
Canberra	14 B	Oslo	24 S
Cape Town	18 B	Paris	19 B
Chicago	22 PC	Perth	26 S
Copenhagen	18 S	Praque	19 PC
Corfu	27 PC	Reykjavik	10 B
Delhi	38 **	Riga	26 S
Dubai	40 S	Rio de Janeiro	27 S
Dublin	13 B	Riyadh	40 S
Faro	21 S	Rome	22 PC
Florence	22 PC	San Francisco	19 PC
Frankfurt	21 S	Santiago	9 R
Geneva	16 T	Sao Paulo	24 S
Gibraltar	19 S	Seoul	19 S
Helsinki	22 S	Seychelles	31 PC
Hong Kong	29 PC	Singapore	31 B
Honolulu	28 PC	St Petersburg	22 S
Istanbul	23 B	Stockholm	21 S
Jerusalem	33 S	Sydney	18 PC
Johannesburg	17 S	Tel Aviv	33 S
Kuala Lumpur	34 PC	Tenerife	24 B
Kyiv	** **	Tokyo	23 B
Lanzarote	25 PC	Vancouver	13 PC
Las Palmas	24 C	Venice	21 PC
Lima	16 M	Vienna	22 PC
Lisbon	23 S	Warsaw	22 **
Los Angeles	18 B	Washington	32 B
Luxor	41 S	Zurich	11 R

Wind speed 34 (mph)
Temperature 28 (degrees C)

Sea state
Calm
Slight
Moderate
Rough

Flood alerts and warnings

At 17:00 on Thursday there were 65 flood alerts and four warnings in England, three flood alerts and no warnings in Wales and 11 flood alerts and four warnings in Scotland. For further information and updates in England visit flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk, for Wales naturalresources.wales/flooding and for Scotland SEPA.gov.uk



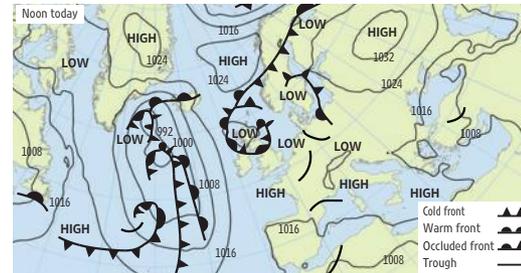
General situation: Rather cloudy with showery rain in northern Britain but sunnier further south with mainly isolated showers.
E Eng, E Anglia, SE Eng, London: A dry day with sunny spells and areas of patchy cloud. Light west or southwesterly wind. Maximum 19C (66F), minimum 5C (41F).
Republic of Ireland: Rather cloudy with showery rain in northern and eastern areas but mainly dry with sunny spells further south and west.

Light westerly wind. Maximum 17C (63F), minimum 5C (41F).
Can S Eng, S Wales, SW Eng, Midlands, Channel Is: Sunny spells and the risk of a few light showers, especially in the afternoon. Light to moderate westerly wind. Maximum 17C (63F), minimum 3C (37F).
Can N Eng, NW Eng, N Wales, NE Eng, Lake District, SW Scotland, Borders, Edinburgh and Dundee, Aberdeen, IoM, Glasgow, NE Scotland, NW Scotland, N Isles: Cloudy and misty during the

morning outbreaks of rain, becoming sunnier in places in the afternoon with showers. Some heavy and perhaps thundery showers over high ground. Light and variable winds, perhaps moderate near the coast. Maximum 17C (63F), minimum 5C (41F).
Can Highland, Moray Firth, Argyll: Dry at first with some mist patches and sunny spells but cloud soon increasing to bring a scattering of showers. Light and variable winds. Maximum 15C (59F), minimum 7C (45F).

Tides
Tidal predictions. Heights in metres

Today	Ht	Ht
Aberdeen	02:30 4.0	14:51 4.0
Avonmouth	08:30 12.2	20:49 12.4
Belfast	--:--	12:23 3.3
Cardiff	08:17 11.5	20:35 11.7
Devonport	07:07 5.1	19:23 5.2
Dover	--:--	12:20 6.3
Dublin	11:59 3.9	--:--
Falmouth	06:33 4.7	18:48 4.8
Greenock	01:45 3.3	13:42 3.2
Harwich	--:--	13:06 3.8
Holyhead	11:39 5.2	23:56 5.3
Hull	07:32 7.1	19:52 6.9
Lough	03:48 5.2	16:12 5.2
Liverpool	--:--	12:25 8.6
London Bridge	03:01 6.9	15:20 6.7
Lowestoft	10:49 2.4	23:05 2.3
Milford Haven	07:27 6.5	19:45 6.6
Morecambe	--:--	12:27 8.6
Newhaven	--:--	12:27 6.3
Newquay	06:17 6.4	18:35 6.6
Oban	06:54 3.7	19:14 3.7
Penzance	05:50 5.1	18:10 5.3
Portsmouth	--:--	12:57 4.4
Shoreham	--:--	12:33 5.8
Southampton	02:27 4.1	12:27 4.3
Swansea	07:37 8.8	19:54 9.0
Tees	04:47 5.2	17:08 5.2
Weymouth	08:06 1.9	20:31 2.1



Synoptic situation
An area of low pressure will slowly fill over northern Britain and the north of Ireland with an occluded front bringing rather cloudy skies and showers or longer periods of rain. Mainly dry with sunny spells over southern Britain and the south of Ireland, but the risk of an isolated afternoon shower. Low pressure in the Atlantic will move into Ireland tomorrow.

Highs and lows
24hrs to 5pm yesterday
Warmest: Frittenden, Kent, 19.9C
Coldest: Aonach Mor, 2.2C
Wettest: Keswick, Cumbria, 92.2mm
Sunniest: Jersey, 11.8hrs*

Sun and moon
For Greenwich
Sun rises: 04:55
Sun sets: 20:58
Moon rises: 22:50
Moon sets: 05:29 Sat
Third quarter: May 30

Hours of darkness

Aberdeen	22:08-04:00
Belfast	22:08-04:31
Birmingham	21:40-04:27
Cardiff	21:40-04:37
Exeter	21:38-04:42
Glasgow	22:08-04:17
Liverpool	21:49-04:26
London	21:28-04:24
Manchester	21:47-04:23
Newcastle	21:52-04:12
Norwich	21:28-04:13
Penzance	21:44-04:52
Sheffield	21:43-04:20

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UNI WORLD BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISES

Sport

Wada part of 'cover-up' in doping case

Swimming

Matt Lawton, Craig Lord

The World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) and swimming's global governing body have been accused of a cover-up with their "mishandled" review of the decision to clear without challenge 23 Chinese swimmers accused of doping.

World Aquatics has also been accused of undermining the credibility of its supposedly independent integrity unit, with a leading sports lawyer who brought down Lance Armstrong and Alberto Salazar claiming the committee now appointed to review World Aquatics' role in the scandal has been "designed to fail".

In a 12-page letter sent to senior figures at World Aquatics, and supported by a forensic 80-page report on "the cover-up... and mishandling" of the Chinese cases, Bill Bock, one of the world's most experienced clean-sport investigators, criticises Wada and World Aquatics over their "seriously incorrect, unduly secretive, and non-transparent decisions".

The 23 swimmers' positive tests in 2021 were explained away by the Chinese anti-doping authorities (Chinada) by saying that state security had found traces of trimetazidine (TMZ) in the kitchen at the hotel where the swimmers had been staying ten weeks or so earlier. It was on the strength of the Chinada report that Wada and World Aquatics decided to accept that "mass contamination" had occurred inadvertently. There was no challenge to the decision and the file was marked confidential, but the German broadcaster ARD and The New York Times revealed the 23 cases on April 20 this year.

In the letter and accompanying report seen by The Times, Bock criticises them for ignoring all requests for information from him and other members of the independent Anti-Doping Advisory Board (Adab), suggesting that World Aquatics "sought to justify the unjustifiable". He describes a "refusal"

by Brent Nowicki, the former Wada counsel who took over the reins at Fina (later World Aquatics) in June 2021, to share information about the cases as "obstruction of the constitutionally required independent review process".

Bock calls on the board to instruct Nowicki to hand over all the documentation on the cases to Adab "immediately". He says he finds it "frankly inexcusable that Wada and World Aquatics are even now treating these non-confidential documents as if they were reports from the Manhattan Project in the middle of World War Two". He adds that World Aquatics had replaced its "robust, independent expert review process" with a "narrowly scoped, insider-driven" process that will "inevitably fail to get to the bottom of" the decision to clear the 23 swimmers.

Bock wants the regulator to publish the Chinada report and "all related data and attachments, and all communications between Wada and Fina". He also instructs the International Testing Agency to follow standard procedure, "potentially leading to a hearing or hearings in the kitchen theory is tested". Only then, he says, can World Aquatics and Wada begin to regain trust from athletes and the public.

World Aquatics formed an "audit review committee" this month, which includes three athletes and a coach alongside the top two officials at the "independent" Aquatics Integrity Unit (AIU): chairman Miguel Cardenal and vice-chairman Ken Lalo. Bock believes the committee is "unfit" for purpose and notes that the group has been told "not to re-examine the science or legal decisions made, and it is not to re-open this procedure in any form of investigation".

As The Times reported last week, only Dr Jordi Segura, the chairman of Adab, was informed of the Chinese positives. And even then, Bock says, Segura was not given all the documents in the case and acted "under the direction of the Fina legal team" to produce a "con-



Wang Shun, who won gold in the 200m individual medley at the Tokyo Olympics, was one of 23 swimmers who tested positive for TMZ before the Games in 2021

clusory two-page report that plainly did not address all the scientific issues". Bock says the athletes and coach do not have the experience and knowledge required for a review and takes aim at the integrity unit leaders, writing: "It is concerning that Mr Cardenal and Mr Lalo have joined in blocking a review of this matter through the independent AIU they pledged to uphold. Their actions have undermined the credibility of the Integrity Unit — they are supposed to participate in leading at arms' length and independently from World Aquatics."

Bock adds that their collaboration with World Aquatics means it "cannot at this point be credibly called an 'independent' aquatics integrity unit". In a direct challenge to swimming's leader-

ship, Bock notes: "No serious review of any sort, and certainly no serious review of anti-doping decision-making, begins by putting on blinders that prevent consideration of legal and scientific questions."

The audit committee was also "irretrievably hamstrung by World Aquatics imposing upon it a scope of review so incredibly narrow that... any conclusions the committee does reach are likely to be so uninformed that they will deserve to be regarded as more farcical than forensically legitimate."

Wada has been approached for comment but has consistently denied accusations of a cover-up. World Aquatics and Nowicki have also been approached for comment.

No bodycam, but Scheffler charges stand

Golf

Rick Broadbent

The detective who arrested Scottie Scheffler has been disciplined by the Louisville Metro Police Department for failing to follow bodycam policy, but the charges against the world No1 golfer have not been dropped.

Scheffler, 27, was accused of accelerating away from Detective Bryan Gillis outside Valhalla Golf Club and causing injuries that required hospital treatment last Friday. Yesterday the LMPD released videos from a police dashcam and from a stationary camera across the road from the golf club's Gate 1, but neither appeared to validate the policeman's claims.

The case does remain active, however, and Scheffler is due to be arraigned on June 3 on charges of second-degree assault on a police officer, third-degree criminal mischief, reckless driving and disregarding an officer's signals.

His lawyer, Steve Romines, reiterated his claim that Scheffler is innocent. "We're not interested in settling the case," he said. "We'll either try it or it will be dismissed. All the evidence that comes out continues to support what Scottie said all along, that this was a chaotic situation and he didn't do anything wrong."

At a press conference in Louisville, the city's mayor, Craig Greenberg, said there was no video footage that showed the "initial interaction" between Gillis and Scheffler in "dark, rainy, intense conditions". The focus was heavily on Gillis's failure to provide that footage. Jacquelyn Gwinn-Villaroel, chief of LMPD, said: "Detective Gillis should have turned on his body-worn camera but did not. His failure to do so is a violation of LMPD policy. We understand the seriousness of the failure to capture this interaction, which is why our officer has received corrective action for this policy violation."

It has been an extraordinary week for Scheffler, who is well aware the media scrutiny of his arrest has detracted from the tragedy that occurred when a man, John Mills, was killed after a shuttle bus struck him outside the golf club.

One of the newly released police videos shows a policeman running after Scheffler's car, but he was not being dragged along and the car quickly stopped. The other shows Scheffler being led away in handcuffs.

Results

Football

Scottish Premiership play-off final first leg

Raith Rovers 1 Ross County 2.

Cricket

England Women v Pakistan Women

First ODI Derby (Pakistan won toss and elected to bowl) England beat Pakistan by 37 runs

England Women (balls)

T T Beaumont lbw b Hani 33 (40)

M E Boucher lbw b Sundhu 17 (24)

*H C Knight c Alvi b Riaz 29 (49)

N R Sciver-Brunnt c Alvi b Riaz 31 (34)

A R Capse c and b Sundhu 44 (65)

IA E Dean b Dar 37 (38)

S Ecclestone c Shamas b Dar 20 (21)

S Glenn not out 1 (5)

K L Cross c Sundhu b Hani 6 (7)

L K Bell not out 1 (4)

Extras (lb w) 8

Total (9 wks, 50 overs) 243

Fall of wickets 1-45, 2-61, 3-107, 4-118, 5-185, 6-216, 7-218, 8-227, 9-236.

Bowling Khan 6-0-39-0; Baig 4-0-22-0; Sundhu 10-0-41-2; Hani 10-0-43-2; Dar 10-0-56-3; Riaz 6-0-24-2; Zafar 4-0-18-0.

Pakistan Women

S Shamas b Ecclestone 28 (48)

S Amin c Jones b Bell 2 (18)

M A Siddiqui c Jones b Bell 34 (60)

A Zafar b Ecclestone 8 (17)

*N R Dar c Beaumont b Dean 26 (38)

A Riaz lbw b Dean 21 (32)

F S Khan lbw b Ecclestone 5 (5)

†N Alvi not out 26 (57)

U Hani b Cross 1 (4)

D Baig c Sciver-Brunnt b Cross 9 (8)

N Sundhu not out 6 (15)

Extras (b 1, lb 6, w 31, nb 2) 40

Total (9 wks, 50 overs) 206

Fall of wickets 1-37, 2-67, 3-79, 4-117, 5-149, 6-154, 7-156, 8-163, 9-178.

Bowling Cross 10-0-46-2; Bell 10-0-42-2; Ecclestone 10-1-26-3; Dean 10-1-39-2; Glenn 10-0-46-0.

Twenty20 Tri-Series: Scotland v Ireland

Scotland won toss; Ireland beat Scotland by five wickets

Scotland (balls)

H G Haines c Campher b Young 12 (12)

O J Murray c Tector b Adair 9 (8)

*R D Berrington b Delany 23 (12)

*R D Berrington c Stirling b White 13 (11)

†M H Cross lbw Young 35 (30)

M A Greaves b Adair 34 (26)

C N Leask not out 9 (12)

M R J Watt b Adair 1 (2)

C B Sole c Campher b Young 6 (6)

S M Sharif not out 3 (2)

Extras (lb 6, w 5, nb 1) 12

Total (8 wks, 20 overs) 157

B J Currie did not bat

Fall of wickets 1-16, 2-22, 3-59, 4-65, 5-120, 6-139, 7-143, 8-154.

Bowling Adair 4-0-36-3; McCarthy 4-0-39-0; Young 4-0-31-3; White 3-0-22-1; Delany 4-0-18-1; Dockrell 1-0-5-0.

Ireland (balls)

A Balbirnie c Greaves b Sole 56 (46)

*P R Stirling b Greaves 32 (21)

†J J Tucker run out 55 (38)

H T Tector c Leask b Sole 3 (5)

C Campher b Sole 0 (1)

G H Dockrell not out 4 (5)

G J Delany not out 1 (1)

Extras (lb 7) 7

Total (5 wks, 19.3 overs) 158

M R Adair, B J McCarthy, C A Young and B C White did not bat.

Fall of wickets 1-66, 2-131, 3-143, 4-143, 5-157.

Bowling Watt 4-0-27-0; Sole 4-0-28-3; Currie 4-0-29-0; Sharif 3-3-0-27-0; Greaves 3-0-28-1; Leask 1-0-12-0.

Cycling

Giro d'Italia Stage 18 (Fiera di primiero-Padova, 166.0 km, flat stage) 1, Merlier (Bel), Soudal Quick-Step

3hr 45min 44sec; 2, J Milan (It, Lidl-Trek); 3, K Groves (Aus, Alpecin-Deceuninck); 4, A Dainese (It, Tudor Pro Cycling Team); 5, S Aniolowski (Pol, Cofidis) all same time.

Overall leaders 1, T Pogacar (Slovenia, UAE Team Emirates) 67hr 17min 2sec; 2, D Martinez (Col, BORA-Hansgrohe) at 7min 42sec; 3, G Thomas (GB, INEOS Grenadiers) at 8min 45sec.

Tennis

ATP Geneva Open Quarter-finals T Machac (Cz) bt A Michelsen (US) 6-1, 7-6 (7-2); N Djokovic (Serbia) bt T Griekspoor (Neth) 7-5, 6-1; F Cobolli (It) bt S Shevchenko (Kaz) 6-4, 6-4; C Ruud (Nor) bt S Baez (Arg) 6-3, 3-6, 6-4.

ATP Lyon Open Quarter-finals T M Etcheverry (Arg) bt D Koepfer (Ger) 6-4, 6-1; A Bublik (Kaz) bt P Kotov (Russ) 6-7 (4-7), 7-6 (7-4); 6-3; G Mpetshi Perricard (Fr) bt H Gaston (Fr) 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

WTA Morocco Open Quarter-finals V Tomov (Bul) bt L Siegemund (Ger) 6-4, 6-3; P Stearns (US) bt L Bronzetti (It) 6-4, 4-4, 7-5; S Sorribes Tormo (Sp) bt M Sherrif (Egy) 6-3, 6-3; K Rakhimova (Russ) bt E Cocciaretto (It) 7-5, 7-5.

WTA Internationaux de Strasbourg Quarter-finals L Samsonova (Russ) bt B Haddad Maia (Br) 6-3, 6-0; M Keys (US) bt M Linette (Pol) 6-1, 6-3; D Collins (US) bt C Burel (Fr) 6-1, 6-3.

Ladies European Tour Jabra Ladies Open Evian Resort Golf Club: First round scores (GB and Ire unless stated): 62 S Jones (NZ), 64 R Langasque (Fr); I Elvira (Sp); M Jordan; N Noergaard Moeller (Den); A Wilson, 65 C Nyeme, 66 M Baldwin; A Cockerill (Can); A Fitzpatrick; A Del Rey (Sp); R Fisher; J Blixt (Swe); N von Dellingshausen (Ger).

Ladies European Tour Jabra Ladies Open Evian Resort Golf Club: First round scores (GB and Ire unless stated): 66 A Sauzon (Fr);

I Laktalech (Mor), 67 J Melichova (Cz); M Metraux (Switz), 68 J Gustavsson (Swe); C Palomares-Herbin (Fr); N Nadaud (Fra); A Belac (Slovenia).

Cricket

Vitality County Championship (all first day of four, all 11.0) Division One Durham v Somerset; Hampshire v Surrey; Kent v Essex; Lancashire v Warwickshire; Worcestershire v Nottinghamshire. Division Two Gloucestershire v Derbyshire; Leicestershire v Glamorgan; Middlesex v Sussex; Northamptonshire v Yorkshire.

Darts

Rosmalen: Dutch Championship

Motor racing

Monte Carlo: Monaco Grand Prix practice (3.0)

Rugby league

Betfred Super League (all 8.0): Castleford v Hull; Huddersfield v Leigh; St Helens v Leeds Rhinos.

Rugby union

European Challenge Cup final, Tottenham Gloucester v Sharks (8.0).

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Racing Sport

Goodwood Rob Wright

1.50 Inca Trail 4.10 Aurora Dawn
 2.25 Maxident (nb) 4.40 Zain Blue
 3.00 True Wisdom (nap) 5.10 Safari Dream
 3.55 Isle Of Jura

Going: good, good to soft in places
 Draw: 7f-1m 2f, 1w numbers best

1.50 Novice Stakes (£10,308: 2m) (10)

- 1 (10) ARABIAN SUN C Cox 9-7 H Turner
- 2 (5) ASHEN M Trengrove 9-7 H Turner
- 3 (6) BERSHIRE KAMEO A Baling 9-7 O Murphy
- 4 (7) 50 BOWINDER 3J Portman 9-7 David Egan
- 5 (1) HUCKLESBROOK R Teal 9-7 J Whelan
- 6 (8) INCA TRAIL M Trengrove 9-7 L Morris
- 7 (9) ORIGINAL OUTLAW R Beckett 9-7 H Couch
- 8 (4) RED SAND 18 E Walker 9-7 S Osborne
- 9 (2) SIEGEN 18 R Fleming 9-7 P Dobbs
- 10 (6) 3 THE HLYING SEAGULL 15 H Palmer 9-7 W Buick

7-2 Original Outlaw, 9-2 The Flying Seagull, 5-1 Red Sand, 6-1 others.
 Rob Wright's choice: Inca Trail, whose dam was a group three winner, appeals Dangers Original Outlaw, Red Sand

2.25 Handicap (£10,308: 2m) (10)

- 1 (10) 2102-TEMPORIZER 212 (O) R Guest 5-9-12 K Stott
- 2 (9) 4052-VINO VICTRIX 170 (C) H Morrison 6-9-11 O Murphy
- 3 (4) 013-PLEDGEOFFALEGANCE 26 (P) Sir M Prescott 4-9-8 L Morris
- 4 (7) 20-32 YORBERT JOHNSON 35 (D) P Kirby 6-9-8 C Beasley
- 5 (6) 114-4 YORKNONESS 14 (D) Johnston 5-9-7 J Fanning
- 6 (5) 40-23 MAXIDENT 20 (D) F Davis 4-9-4 David Egan
- 7 (8) 111-2 MANXMAN 21 (D) S & E Crisford 4-9-3 R Havlin
- 8 (1) 44-64 HURLE WALLOW 3 J Boyle 4-9-1 P Cosgrave
- 9 (3) 11-34 PLUS POINT 20 Harry Eustace 4-9-0 G Wood
- 10 (2) 64-44 VALAIA 20 G & J Moore 5-8-13 W Buick

9-2 Havlin, 5-1 Manxman, 11-2 Maxident, Robert Johnson, 6-1 others.
 Wright's choice: Maxident was a good third here last time and is unexposed at this trip Dangers TempORIZer, Valaia

3.00 Handicap (£25,770: 1m 4f) (11)

- 1 (10) 0112-DIVINA GRACE 230 (D) R Guest 4-10-2 D Keenan
- 2 (5) 10-42 SWEET FANTASY 27 (D) James Owen 5-10-0 C Shephard
- 3 (4) 10-25 AYIAR 65 S Woods 4-9-11 W Buick
- 4 (7) 513-JUNA NIKES 231 (H) Harry Charlton 4-9-11 W Buick
- 5 (4) 20-4 NO NIKI 19 (B) O'Neill 8-7-8-10 K Stott
- 6 (9) 002-0 ENTRACEMENT 34 (C) G Muscari 4-9-8 O Murphy
- 7 (8) 4213 AVON LIGHT 13 (T) W Muir & C Grandier 4-9-7 S Osborne
- 8 (1) 41-2 YA HAFHD 28 (B) Varian 4-9-4 R Dawson
- 9 (3) 014-2 TRUE WISDOM 44 J Johnston 3-8-8 J Fanning
- 10 (11) 621-2 STRUTTING 19 J & T Gordon 3-8-6 T Heard (3)
- 11 (6) 06-23 MATVILLERY 21 J Chapple-Hyam 3-8-4 H Turner

9-2 Ya Hafhd, 5-1 Juna Nikes, 13-2 Matvillery, 8-1 True Wisdom, 10-1 others.
 Wright's choice: True Wisdom shaped well at Kempton; she should relish this trip Dangers Matvillery, Juna Nikes

3.35 Listed Stakes (£34,026: 1m 2f) (8)

- 1 (8) 2-11 ISLE OF JURU 7 (D) G Scott 4-9-6 C Shephard
- 2 (5) 0115-ROYAL RHYME 216 (T) C R Burke 4-9-6 C Lee
- 3 (7) 5-406 CLAYMORE 37 (D) Chapple-Hyam 5-9-3 David Egan
- 4 (6) 0-20 MUIRBAIR 18 (D) Haggas 5-9-3 W Buick
- 5 (6) 4500 PASSION AND GLORY 25 (C) S Muro 5-9-3 K Stott
- 6 (2) 1106-ELEGANCIA 195 (H) Harry Charlton 4-8-12 T Whelan
- 7 (4) 2364-EMPRESS WU 199 (D) M Simeck 4-8-12 L Morris
- 8 (1) 50-4 SEA OF ROSES 20 A Baling 4-8-12 O Murphy

11-10 Royal Rhyme, 9-2 Mujtaba, Sea Of Roses, 6-1 Isle Of Jura, 7-1 others.
 Wright's choice: Isle Of Jura has been in fine form in Bahrain; still unexposed Dangers Sea Of Roses, Elegancia

4.10 Handicap (£10,468: 7f) (12)

- 1 (3) 12-41 WILD TIGER 20 (P) S bin Suroor 5-9-11 O Murphy
- 2 (2) 46-12 TOYMY TOY 33 (D) K P De Fay 6-9-10 H Couch
- 3 (11) 00-20 STROMY SUN 33 (D) De Meunier 5-9-9 Kyle Stroydom
- 4 (8) 22-20 SMOKY MOUNTAIN 76 (D) C Fellows 4-9-4 C Shephard
- 5 (1) 41030 HERONYMUS 34 (P) D Baker 9-9-4 C Bishop
- 6 (12) 60-02 RACINGBROS RYDER 20 (C) Hills 4-9-4 W Buick
- 7 (4) 40-04 CRAGROG 13 (P) R Teal 4-9-4 C Lee
- 8 (10) 110-6 BE FRANK 21 H Conly 4-8-3 T Whelan
- 9 (3) 20-03 ARLE KANE 18 (D) B Millman 7-9-1 C Oakley
- 10 (5) 121-5 AURORA DAWN 39 (D) E Walker 4-9-1 S Osborne
- 11 (7) 00-04 BOB OF LIFE 33 (D) Williams 4-9-1 David Egan
- 12 (9) 031-0 TAHITIEN PRINCE 23 (P) D Baker 7-8-13 P Cosgrave

5-8 Wild Tiger, 4-1 Be Frank, 10-1 Street Kid, Smoly Mountain, 12-1 others.
 Wright's choice: Aurora Dawn needed the run when fifth at Kempton; more to come Dangers Be Frank, Wild Tiger

4.40 Handicap (3-Y-O: £6,621: 1m) (11)

- 1 (7) 04-52 ARAGON CASTLE 27 (D) A Baling 9-9-0 O Murphy
- 2 (5) 31-04 MARY'S REGIN 24 H Walker 9-7 S Osborne
- 3 (9) 2-10 RAL BALOO 23 (D) R Hamon 9-7 J Leavy (5)
- 4 (1) 44-1-0 BOYFRIEND 14 R Hamon 9-7 P Dobbs
- 5 (3) 0-360 BETTIES BAY 20 G Nicholls 9-6 J Bryan
- 6 (11) 416-MR MONACO 224 R Beckett 9-6 H Couch
- 7 (8) 24-2 ZAIN BLUE 14 Butler 9-5 L Morris
- 8 (2) 3330-SPANISH BLAZE 224 M Trengrove 9-4 T Whelan
- 9 (6) 01-11 RUKANA 13 (D) C Hills 9-1 W Buick
- 10 (4) 04-20 MIGUEL 33 (D) J Channon 9-2 G Bass (3)
- 11 (2) 52-40 THE SMILING WOLF 14 J Channon 8-3 C Bishop

4-1 Rukana, 11-2 Zain Blue, 6-1 Mr Monaco, B Baloo, 8-1 others.
 Wright's choice: Zain Blue runs off the same mark as when a good second at Ascot Dangers Aragon Castle, Mr Monaco

Yesterday's racing results

Catterick

Going: soft (heavy in places)
 1.20 (5f) 1. Brazilian Belle (C Beasley, 13-8), 2. Stat Goddess (NS-1), 3. Harwell David (11-8 faw), 4. ran. NR: Isla Bella, J Street, 3/4, 1/2, M Dods
 2.24 (5f) 1. Birkenhead (D Nolan, 5-1), 2. One For The Ladies (5-9 faw), 3. Rain Cap (11-7), 4. ran. NR: Gordon Rainbow, Modular Magic, Resilience, 3/4, 2, P T Midgley
 3.30 (1m 4f 13yd) 1. See The Green (O'Ro, 4-9 faw), 2. Graze On Phoenix (20-3), 3. Postivita (20-3), 7. ran. NR: My Dream World, 1/2, nk, O Burrows
 3.40 (5f 212yd) 1. Wichaphi (A Breslin, 7-2), 2. La Lu Luerative (11-), 3. Bestie (11-4 faw), 7. ran. NR: Lady Of The Garr, Caesars Pearl, Dicky Rainstorm, Noisy Music, Oriental Prince, nk, 4, B Smart
 4.10 (5f 212yd) 1. King Of Tonga (D Nolan, 6-1), 2. Dazy Mazy (7-4 faw), 3. Music Society (10-1), 6. ran. NR: A Pint Of Bear, Caesars Pearl, Dicky The Legend, Ghanthanar, Profitable Edge, Quercus, NK, 1/2, D Carroll
 4.40 (7f 6yd) 1. Cori Glory (J Garrity, 6-1), 2.

5.10 Handicap (£10,468: 5f) (10)

- 1 (9) 5030 DREAM COMPOSER 14 (P) D H Evans 6-9-9 J Leavy (5)
- 2 (8) 21-12 MOPUS CROWN 21 E Hougham 4-9-7 C Bishop
- 3 (6) 0006-AKLAM EXPRESS 230 (D) C Cox 6-9-6 K Stott
- 4 (3) 20-1-2 FAIR WIND 23 (D) Owen Burrows 6-9-6 P Dobbs
- 5 (1) 42215 NIGHT ON EARTH 15 (T) J Williams 6-9-5 S Osborne
- 6 (4) 2-06-6 SPENDING BLOOM 38 (D) R Eddy 7-9-3 D Keenan
- 7 (2) 0-40-0 WATCHING A 4 Baker 5-9-3 P Cosgrave
- 8 (5) 40-33 SAFARI DREAM 19 (R) B Ford 4-9-3 O Murphy
- 9 (10) 40-06 ANGLE LAND 25 (V) C D Millman 4-9-3 H Turner
- 10 (7) 63954 LHOU 19 (C) P Evans 8-9-7 David Egan

7-2 Bishop's Crown, 4-1 Fair Wind, 5-1 Dream Composer, 13-2 Night On Earth, 8-1 Safari Dream, 10-1 Lihou, Angle Land, 12-1 Spring Bloom.
 Wright's choice: Safari Dream was hampered when a fair third at Sandown Park Dangers Fair Wind, Angle Land

Bath Rob Wright

2.15 Ottoman Force 4.30 Starproof
 2.50 Blytheford 5.00 Bittalemon
 3.25 Symbol Of Hope 5.30 City Escape
 4.00 Liosa 6.10 Havana Goldrush

Going: good to soft
 Draw: no advantage Sky Sports Racing

2.15 Handicap (3-Y-O: £3,716: 6f) (9)

- 1 (2) 31116 GOGO YUBARI 13 (D) Conha 9-11 R Clutterbuck
- 2 (9) 520-0 OTTOMAN FORCE 22 (B) Darryll Hillhead 9-9-8 Loughane
- 3 (5) 036-0 CALL TIME 32 J S Moore 9-9-1 Keniry
- 4 (6) 064-5 DARK FANDANGO 18 C Hills 9-8 W Cox
- 5 (3) 0-515 TEN CLUB 23 (H,B,F) J Osborne 9-8-8 W Carver (3)
- 6 (7) 501-2 PROFIT STREET 21 N Tinkler 9-8-1 A Jary (5)
- 7 (1) 03201 HEARTFORTHEBOYS 25 (D) Carroll 9-7 J Doughty (7)
- 8 (4) 5-52 RICHMOND FLYING 2 E Johnston 9-3 G Wood
- 9 (4) 13340 MOE'S LEGACY 35 (B, D) J Harris 9-3 C Fallon

2-1 Profit Street, 7-2 Heartfortheboys, 6-1 Gogo Yubari, 1-1 others

2.50 Novice Stakes (£3,402: 5f) (11)

- 1 (9) 1 BINADHAM 11 (O) K P De Fay 9-11 B Sayette
- 2 (10) ASTERUS A Watson 9-11 James Doyle
- 3 (4) AROLENES E Walker 9-4 Billy Loughane
- 4 (5) 2 BOLD NEIGHS 20 (R) Beckett 9-4 R Clutterbuck
- 5 (7) GLENDINE P Evans 9-4 G Downing
- 6 (3) MUKABER H Hannon 9-4 M Levey
- 7 (8) REDRAGON C Cox 9-4 J Fahy
- 8 (4) 4 SIR PALANDEHS 20 C Fellows 9-4 M Ghiani
- 9 (11) 60 BIDABLE 15 D Dascambe 9-1 W Cox
- 10 (1) 5 EMPORIS 19 B Millman 8-13 Gina Mangon (3)
- 11 (2) 34 SUCOSINTOSHANNON 11 J Channon 8-13 E Greatrex

3-1 Asterius, 7-2 Binadham, 5-1 Bole Neighs, 7-1 Mukaber, 8-1 others.

3.25 Handicap (£2,983: 6f) (10)

- 1 (10) 00-04 SYMBOL OF HOPE 18 (P,D) J & R Flint 6-9-11 E Jones (7)
- 2 (1) 41046 SAVANNAH SMILES 10 (D) G Harris 4-9-10C Hutchinson (3)
- 3 (4) 50002 MEDIA GUEST 15 (P,D) M Gillard 4-9-9 Keniry
- 4 (5) 4055-ATYR'S EDGE 227 (C) M Mason 8-9-8 W Cox
- 5 (4) 0036-MORE THAN LIKELY (C) Mrs N Evans 8-9-7H Murray (2)
- 6 (7) 23-23 RICHMOND FLYING 2 Joe Bentley 4-9-4 K O'Neill
- 7 (11) 20-46 CLOUDY REBEL 225 (6 J) Moore 4-9-2 R Clutterbuck
- 8 (11) 24-50 WENDY REUNITED 18 (D) M Blake 7-9-2 L Catton (5)
- 9 (5) 0-345 KANGAROO 25 (T) C Mckenzie 4-9-0 G McEntee (3)
- 10 (7) 0-39-43 ESSAME 13 (R) C Cook & J Bridger 4-9-0 W Carson

8 (2) 00046 INDEPENDENT BEAUTY 73 (H) Williamson 6-9-0A Jary (5)
 4-1 Midnight Flame, 9-2 Media Guest, 5-1 Symbol Of Hope, 7-1 others.

4.00 Handicap (£2,983: 6f) (10)

- 1 (8) 400-4 DIOSA 25 (B,F) W Kittow 4-9-10 G Rooke
- 2 (3) 009-0 LIAAMONT COTTAGE 3 (D) M Saunders 7-9-9 W Carson
- 3 (10) 00105 VITALLINE 39 (B,F,D) K Burke 6-9-9 Josephine Gordon
- 4 (1) 00130 PORT NOIR 10 (C) D Stophens 4-9-7 Jack Doughty (7)
- 5 (4) 4-003 BANIA LAMA 18 (D) B Millman 6-9-6 O Seave (7)
- 6 (9) 0-6450 JOSIES KID 3 (P) Alice Hayes 5-9-4 K O'Neill
- 7 (7) 0-4500 JAMES TRIZE 10 (H,D) D Faulkner 8-9-0 L Coughlan (3)
- 8 (5) 450-2 MALHAM TARN COVE 9 (P) D Steph Hillshead 5-9-4 D Costello
- 9 (5) 22540 LUSSET FLOSSY PUP 15 (D) G Brown 4-9-4 W Cottrell
- 10 (4) 60-02 BOASTED 27 R Frost 4-9-4 Alec Volkshansky (3)

2-1 Bama Lama, 7-2 Malham Tarn Cove, 5-1 Vitalline, 6-1 Liosa, 8-1 others.

4.30 Handicap (£3,716: 6f) (10)

- 1 (8) 14611 CINCIE VERDE 8 (D) A Carroll 4-9-10(Sov) J Doughty (7)
- 2 (1) 360-0 REDDORON 10 (D) M Saunders 7-9-9 W Carson
- 3 (9) 028-5 STARPROOF 13 (D) W Muir & C Grandier 4-9-9 W Currie
- 4 (6) 00010 SHE'S CENTINENTAL 15 (D) Alice Hayes 4-9-9K O'Neill
- 5 (10) -2022 CONNIE'S ROSE 10 (B,F,C) G Harris 5-9-9C Hutchinson (3)
- 6 (7) 529-0 JAY EDGE 32 (C) M Mason 4-9-3 Gina Mangon (3)
- 7 (4) 56-40 SILENT FLAME 26 (D) B Millman 6-9-3 G Downing
- 8 (5) 54140 SAREH'S VERSE 13 (C) B Hills 7-9-3-0 M Ghiani
- 9 (2) 1122-2 WHISTLE MIST 37 (T,V,D) Mrs I G Leveque 4-8-8 J Quinn
- 10 (5) 0422- PAPPABELLA 191 W Kittow 4-8-7 G Rooke

5-2 Cinque Verde, 5-1 Starproof, White Mist, 6-1 Connie's Rose, 7-1 others.

5.00 Novice Stakes (£3,942: 1m 2f) (10)

- 1 (7) POPPYDORA N Knight 4-10-2 M Ghiani
- 2 (1) 5 ALL TOO WELL 16 J & T Gosden 3-9-2 B Sayette
- 3 (6) 6 BITTLEMEAL 35 W Haggas 3-9-2 C Fallon
- 4 (5) 3- CATCH THE LIGHT 259 A Baling 3-9-2 James Doyle
- 5 (3) 6-4 DIVINE PRESENCE 21 J & T Gosden 3-9-2 K O'Neill
- 6 (4) 265-2 LOVE YOU DARLING 20 R Brookhouse 3-9-2A Rawlinson
- 7 (2) 5-3 SEA STREAM 41 Hills 3-9-2 Billy Loughane
- 8 (4) Love You Daring, 3-1 Bittlemeal, 9-2 Catch The Light, 5-1 others.

5.30 Handicap (£2,983: 1m 2f) (14)

- 1 (10) 500-1 FLAME OF KODIA 10 (P) J & R Flint 4-9-13(Sov) E Jones (7)
- 2 (13) -2035 PHIK LILY 14 (D) R Hamon 4-9-9 Alec Volkshansky (3)
- 3 (6) 14620 EXPOS ANGEA 26 (T,SP) N Mulholland 5-9-8 M Ghiani
- 4 (1) 32-1 CAREY STREET 126 (D) A Carroll 6-9-7 W Carson
- 5 (14) 2465- CHANGE OF FORTUNE 214 B Llewellyn 5-9-5 D Bowen (5)
- 6 (2) 00304 DAFINN 25 (D) J & R Flint 4-9-7 B Sanderson (3)
- 7 (12) 2-620 GALACTIC GLOW 4 (P,B,F) Tickle 7-9-6 T Fisher (3)
- 8 (7) 50034 CITY ESCAPE 9 (B,E,D) Loughane 7-9-6 B Loughane
- 9 (9) 2755- SISTERANDROTH 211 (H) C Hillin 6-9-5P Clutterbuck
- 10 (11) 004-4 WIDE HERO 26 (H,C) A Winkle 4-9-4 G Rooke
- 11 (3) 01-0-0 ROMAN TEMPEST 15 (S) D Saw 5-9-2 C Howarth (3)
- 12 (5) -4000 ZAMBEZI MAGIC 36 (D) B Llewellyn 7-8-12 W Cox
- 13 (4) 145-4 JIMMY MARG 32 (D) W Kittow 4-9-10C Hutchinson (3)
- 14 (6) 63600 UPTON PENDERAGON 9 (D) J S Moore 9-8-9-5 Mohd (7)

3-1 Carey Street, 2-7 Flame Of Kodia, 6-1 City Escape, 7-1 others.

6.10 Handicap (£2,983: 1m) (13)

- 1 (1) 40212 LUNARIO 14 (D,T) Alice Hayes 4-9-11 K O'Neill
- 2 (9) 2024-0 GERT LUSH 46 H Teal 7-9-9 W Cox
- 3 (6) 759-4 MAWADA 18 (H) A Winkle 4-9-7 Billy Loughane
- 4 (11) 43-00 NIGHT BREEZE 31 Williams 4-9-5 D Costello
- 5 (6) 50-4 JADE COUNTRY 35 (D) J & R Flint 4-9-4 C Bennett
- 6 (7) 4001 RACING DEMON 10 (H,D) E De Gelles 4-9-4(Sov) G Rooke
- 7 (12) -4026 EVE OF THE WATER 10 (H,D) E Harris 9-9-2 C Fallon
- 8 (9) 34031 HAVANA GOLDRUSH 26 (B,F,C) J S Moore 5-9-2-5 Mohd (7)
- 9 (8) 00-03 RIVAL CEB 10 (D) J & R Flint 6-9-1 Ethan Jones (7)
- 10 (13) 2-402 LONAL 26 L J Carroll 11-8-12 W Carson
- 11 (2) 5046- NUR COM 199 (V) P Chamings 4-8-12 A Farragher
- 12 (10) 00-0 DYNAMITE KATIE 26 (H) G Harris 4-8-10C Hutchinson (3)
- 13 (10) 6-504 OWER STARLIGHT 27 (P,D) Betsy Millman 6-9-10A Volkshansky (3)

11-1 Racing Bemo, 9-2 Lonal, 5-1 Eve Of The Water, 6-1 others.

Handy Park Rob Wright

2.05 Miners Gamble 4.20 Azure Blue
 2.40 Thewind Cries Mary 4.50 Doha
 3.15 Green Storm 5.25 Rogue Raider
 3.5, Earthy

Going: soft
 Draw: no advantage Racing TV

2.05 Handicap (3-Y-O: £4,817: 1m) (10)

- 1 (9) 0-354 MYSTERYOFTHESANDS 18 (T) Easterby 10-10 A Allan
- 2 (6) 40-03 BETWEEN ME AND U 22 (P,D) Alice Hayes 9-9-5 S De Sousa
- 3 (8) 551-4 KORROOR 13 J Camacho 9-9-4 C Rodriguez
- 4 (10) 4231- LADY AURA 246 D Dunlop 9-9-4 Rossa Ryan
- 5 (7) 25-5 MASWELL 25 (T) D O'Meara 9-8 D Tudhope
- 6 (5) 06-21 DANDY LICHOUS 7 T Davidson 9-8 A Mullen
- 7 (1) 654 QUESTIONNAIRE 19 D & K Culber 9-8 J Crowley
- 8 (8) 52005 REVEAL 21 Miss L Perratt 9-5 Tommie Jakes (5)
- 9 (3) 0-352 MINERS GAMBLE 27 (B) E Ellison 9-4 B Robinson
- 10 (2) 2-402 HELLO COTTA 1 (B) A West 9-4 S Kerrane

4-1 Lady Aura, 9-2 Hello Cotta, 5-1 Mysteryofthesands, 6-1 others.

2.40 Novice Stakes (3-Y-O: £5,400: 1m) (7)

- 1 (4) 1-3 SHEMOZZLE 27 (B,F) R Beckett 9-9-4 Rossa Ryan
- 2 (3) 2-1 FLAVISS 15 (D) J T Gosden 9-7 Doubtful
- 3 (2) 1- MIZUUMI 163 (D) M Boffi 9-5 Morgan Cole (5)
- 4 (7) DESERT TIME H Candy 5-2 H Davies
- 5 (6) FOSDALLE E Bethell 9-2 D Tudhope
- 6 (5) 00-9 SPING OF APPIN B Meehan 9-2 T Marquand
- 7 (1) 3 THEWIND CRIES MARY 13 E Bethell 9-2 C Rodriguez

5-4 Shemozzle, 11-4 Thewind Cries Mary, 7-1 Mizuumi, 8-1 others.

3.15 Novice Stakes (2-Y-O: £5,400: 7f) (8)

- 1 (7) CAVALLO BAY J Appleby 9-7 Doubtful
- 2 (8) CHELSEA EMBANKMENT R Beckett 9-7 Rossa Ryan
- 3 (6) GREEN STORM J Johnston 9-7 D Muscatt
- 4 (3) MOON SMIPER R Muir & C Grandier 9-7 L Edmunds
- 5 (2) SEAGULLS HLEVEN H Palmer 9-7 H Davies
- 6 (1) 0 YAROUGH 11 E Gosden 9-7 T Marquand
- 7 (4) APHRODITES RACK T Dascambe 9-2 P-L Jamn
- 8 (6) BALIEYS HONEYMOON Miss A Murphy 9-2 S De Sousa

9-4 Green Storm, 3-1 Chelsea Embankment, 5-1 Yarough, 15-2 others.

3.50 Maiden Stakes (2-Y-O: £5,400: 6f) (13)

- 1 (2) BINORELLA BAY Tom Clover 9-2 D Tudhope
- 2 (13) EARTHLY MISS A Murphy 9-2 D Tudhope
- 3 (10) EMGATIC PRINCESS B Millman 9-2 L Edmunds
- 4 (8) 33 GO ON ROSE 14 N Tinkler 9-2 F McManoman
- 5 (6) 1- WUTULIN 27 (P) J Ferguson 9-2 D Muscatt
- 6 (7) LOCH LEVEN LIEV Sanger 9-2 Rossa Ryan
- 7 (6) PURE ARTISTRY M Bell 9-2 T Marquand
- 8 (11) 6 STAGE EFFECT 23 E Walker 9-2 T Marquand
- 9 (9) TOOMUCHFORME R R Burke 9-2 S James
- 10 (12) 4430 FAR ABOVE MARY 15 H Palmer 9-0 H Davies
- 11 (3) MAKE LOVE James Horton 9-2 P-L Jamn
- 12 (1) JOHN'S DRAGON T Dascambe 9-2 P-L Jamn
- 13 (4) LIBERTY BIRD 11 C Johnston 9-2 S De Sousa

13-4 Toomuchforme, 7-2 Loch Leven, 4-1 Far Above Mary, 15-2 others.

4.20 Listed Stakes (Fillies and mares: £28,356: 6f) (10)

- 1 (5) 116-4 AZURE BLUE 9 (D) D Dods 5-9-7 P Mulrennan
- 2 (7) 11-2 ELECTRIC STORM 33 (D) Tate 4-9-7 D Tudhope
- 3 (9) 21-1 MIDREEM 27 (D) E Walker 4-9-7 K Shoemaker
- 4 (4) 13000 PREMIERE BEAUTY 20 (H) K S Williams 4-9-7 Rossa Ryan
- 5 (3) 02-04 SOPHIA'S STARLIGHT 35 (D) Tuer 4-9-7 S De Sousa
- 6 (5) 0-1360 GO TO LOVE A GREY 23 (R) C Burke 3-9-1 S James
- 7 (1) 41- GUSTY GIRL 275 (C) C Fellows 3-8-12 H Davies
- 8 (2) 11232 QUEEN OF ZAFEN 21 H Hughes 3-8-12 F Marsh

4.45 Handicap (£6,281: 1m 2f) (9)

- 1 (8) 44-14 PEARL EVE 15 (P) Darryll Hillhead 4-9-11 Jason Watson
- 2 (7) 510-4 NEVER ENDING 22 (D) D O'Meara 4-9-10 D Tudhope
- 3 (9) 30-6 KARRENDALE 23 (P) E Bethell 4-9-7 C Rodriguez
- 4 (2) 341-DOHA 212 B Beckett 4-9-6 Rossa Ryan
- 5 (3) 0-000 LIGHT SPEED 38 (G) Tutty 4-9-6 Joanna Mason
- 6 (1) 00-60 BODORGAN 20 (T) C Hills 4-9-3 T Marquand
- 7 (5) 24500 BASHFUL 2 (P

Counties reach Hundred deal – now money can start rolling in

Mike Atherton

Chief Cricket Correspondent



On Tuesday, at the ECB's board meeting, Mark McCafferty, the Warwickshire chairman, was able to announce that the 18 counties and MCC had finally come to a consensus over the proposed capital distribution from any future private investment into the Hundred. That should bring closer the next stage of the process, where the American investment bank Raine starts to flush out potential investors.

The talks between the eight host grounds of the Hundred and 11 non-hosts (Middlesex counts as a non-host as Lord's falls under the auspices of MCC) had stalled for a while, but a series of meetings on Monday and early Tuesday broke the deadlock. Separately, the non-hosts and hosts met on Monday to discuss their respective positions, followed by their representatives — McCafferty for the hosts and Tim Bostock and Ryan Duckett, the chief executives of Durham and Derbyshire respectively, for the non-hosts — who brought the agreement to a close.

There was a general acceptance that an agreement was in everyone's interests, that time was tight, and that any further stand-off might have resulted in a missed opportunity, with players and money disappearing elsewhere as the English season gets continually squeezed. Some counties are feeling the financial pinch and franchised tournaments are increasingly encroaching into the English season, with Major League Cricket, for example, taking off in the United States.

Each side recognised that their own position carried limitations. The hosts need the 11 votes from the non-hosts to get any future formal binding vote through. The non-hosts recognise that without the historic venues, such as Lord's, the Oval and Old Trafford, any franchised tournament has no future. Each side needs the other. All of them need (or want) the money, of course.

As agreed, the split will mean the host grounds are gifted a 51 per cent share of their franchise, to do with as they please. The ECB's 49 per cent, which will be sold in its entirety, will be distributed as follows: 10 per cent to the recreational game and, of the remaining 90 per cent, the first £275 million will be evenly distributed between the 18 counties and MCC; the next £150 million will go to the non-hosts only and anything above £425 million will again be distributed evenly.

The non-hosts will retain a share or an interest in the 51 per cent gifted to the hosts on anything above the base price. The base price will be set at what price the ECB gets for its 49 per cent share, and 10 per cent of anything above that will go to the non-hosts, should the host grounds sell off their stake. It means the non-hosts retain

McCafferty revealed the general consensus



As well as being the home ground of the London Spirit franchise, Lord's hosts the Hundred final every summer. Last August it was won by the Oval Invincibles

an incentive in seeing the tournament grow and succeed.

Much more detail is required around governance, any expansion criteria (under the present deal, the host broadcaster would have a significant say in that matter) which could open up the eventual possibility of a team or teams in areas of the country not served — such as the North East and South West — and compensation for non-host counties who lose their players in August.

The recent confusion over the reorganisation of the women's game, whereby the ECB changed its mind on a decision around Yorkshire's Tier One status in the face of public criticism and pressure from the club — has done little to bolster public confidence in the ECB's decision-making capabilities at a critical time for the game. Given the complexity of the proposed 51-49 split, and how much detail is still to be determined, there is a lot that could yet go wrong.

That said, there is now a level consensus among the 18 counties and that, paired with a determination to get on with the job of injecting private capital into the game, should enable the process to continue. Expect to see the red carpet being rolled out during this year's Hundred competition to potential investors from India, the US and elsewhere.

Q&A

Elizabeth Ammon

The injection of private capital into teams presently owned and run by the ECB is expected to generate hundreds of millions of pounds — but what happens next and who might these private investors be?

Indian Premier League

There has already been significant interest from IPL franchise owners and at least five teams are already exploring which Hundred side they might bid for.

There is a precedent for IPL franchises to own teams in other leagues. For example, Chennai Super Kings own Joburg Super Kings in the South Africa T20 league and co-own the Texas Super Kings in Major League Cricket in the United States.

Mumbai Indians also have a stake in three other teams — MI Cape Town in the SA20, MI Emirates in the ILT20 and MI New York in MLC. They have shown some interest in buying a stake in MCC-owned

franchise London Spirit. It is expected that the Lord's-based team will have the highest value of the eight.

Separately, the owners of Rajasthan Royals and Delhi Capitals are in talks with Yorkshire and Hampshire respectively about buying those county cricket clubs.

American investors

One of the ICC's key strategic aims is to expand cricket into the US and this is a pivotal year for trying to reach the American audience, with the T20 World Cup in June taking place in New York, Florida and Texas as well as in the Caribbean.

There is an enormous amount of potential revenue from American investors and the T20 Major League Cricket (MLC) already has backing from the likes of Adobe and Microsoft.

English football clubs

There has been interest from a number of English Premier League football clubs who believe they could have a fruitful tie-up with their local Hundred franchise. This could involve joint branding, similar kits and joint sponsorships.

Saudi Arabia

The kingdom is already involved in several sports and is expected to want to buy into English cricket in some way. However, this may not happen until 2029, when there is likely to be some expansion of the Hundred, and Saudi interest could come via a joint bid with Newcastle United (who are owned by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund) for a new Durham-based franchise.

What happens next?

The ECB is keen to push forward with the process, believing there is a window of opportunity this year. Cricket's profile in the US will be raised by the T20 World Cup and the feeling is that potential investors could be tempted to move into the sport. However, if the Americans choose to invest in MLC — which already partially clashes with the Hundred and offers bigger salaries — there is a fear that the Hundred will not remain competitive unless it has the backing of private investors, which would allow for much higher-value contracts to be offered to big-name players. The equity sell-off will be

run by the Raine Group, the American investment bank that was involved in the takeovers of Chelsea and Manchester United. It will draw up a prospectus for investors setting out exactly what they would be buying — for example naming and branding rights — and what level of control they would have. Work done by Deloitte has put a broad value on each of the eight teams, with the two London-based sides — London Spirit and Oval Invincibles — by far the most valuable.

One area that will form part of the equity sale prospectus is the extent to which the investors will have control over the name of the team they are buying a stake in. Hypothetically, if Mumbai Indians did purchase a stake in the Lord's franchise, it is likely they would want the Mumbai Indians brand in the name. There is some concern about this within the ECB and the host venues as they believe the eight team names, established in 2021, are starting to gain some traction and brand recognition.

A formal bidding process is likely later in the year.

Mott wants City psychologist 'to find side's mojo'

T20 World Cup

Simon Wilde

England have recruited a sports psychologist to help with the defence of their T20 World Cup crown after last year's failure at the 50-over tournament.

David Young, who works with Manchester City and has been involved with England's cricketers in the past, was signed up on a part-time deal three months ago and will travel with the team to the West Indies when they leave for Barbados next Friday.

Matthew Mott, England's white-ball head coach, said that Young's primary role would be to make sure the players kept faith with their best methods, in what amounted to an acknowledgement that this failed to happen during the disastrous 50-over World Cup campaign in India, when England lost six of their first seven matches and were knocked out at the group stage.

Speaking after the first T20 against Pakistan at Headingley was washed out on Wednesday, Mott said: "When you've had the kick in the pants like we've had, you just can't go business as usual. You have to redefine how you go.

"My style of coaching has always been more of a co-operative approach, just keep asking the questions [of players] on what does their game look like at its best, and if they're veering away from that to drag them back on track.

"He [Young] has already been a great ally in messages back to me, making sure my messages are clear. It's always good to have someone who's a bit removed from the squad to make sure you're landing your messages — making sure the players are staying true to their best game."

Mott accepted that this did not happen in India. "The numbers don't lie," he said. "There were a number of players out of form and there's probably no worse place to be out of form than India.

"It can be all-consuming. On reflection,

we didn't react as well as we should have after the start. We were craving a good start and we didn't get it, but next time we get into that, can we find a way to turn it around quicker?"

During a frank press conference, Mott also said that recent team meetings had included some "open and robust" conversations and had revealed a desire to be more open with each other in dealing with setbacks.

"As a group we've made a commitment to be more open in and around our training sessions to help each other out more," he said. "In India, all of us were guilty of being a bit insular and trying to problem-solve ourselves. We've made a commitment to open up and be a bit more vulnerable as a group so that we're helping each other.

"We've had time off to reflect. We openly said we got a few things wrong and you learn from your mistakes. That's a big reason why we were so keen to get up here [to Leeds] and prepare well.

"We feel like it's time to get the mojo back and go out and really express ourselves as a team. I think T20 as opposed to ODI is so much clearer in the way the players can approach it. You have to go out and really take the game on from the start. Most teams are going to go that way, so it's going to be an exciting World Cup."

England now move on to Birmingham, where the second game in the four-match series against Pakistan is due to take place at Edgbaston tomorrow afternoon.

Mott confirmed that neither Liam Livingstone nor Mark Wood, both of whom have slight injury issues, would feature, but he said they would take part in the series at some stage.

England must submit their final squad for the T20 World Cup to tournament organisers tomorrow morning, but there are no plans to make any changes to the 15 players named in the provisional group on April 30 and who are now involved in the Pakistan matches.



Ecclestone's pinpoint accuracy and three wickets for 26 helped England to victory

Ecclestone spins a win again

England v Pakistan

Derby (Pakistan won toss): England won by 37 runs

First one-day international Elizabeth Ammon

Sophie Ecclestone led England Women to a 37-run win over Pakistan Women in the first one-day international of the series.

The left-arm spinner took three for 26 from ten overs to give the hosts a comfortable win after completing a 3-0 clean sweep in the preceding T20 series. All-rounder Alice Capsey top-scored for England with a solid 44 runs — her highest ODI score — and there were helpful starts from the opener Tammy Beaumont, Heather Knight,

Nat Sciver-Brunt and the wicketkeeper Amy Jones, but none pushed on to make a big score as England made 243 for nine from their 50 overs. England were without the usual powerful hitting of Danni Wyatt who was ill.

Pakistan made a strong start in an opening partnership of 37 in 73 overs before seamer Lauren Bell struck, but it was the control and skill of Ecclestone that made the most impact. There were some good signs for Pakistan though, who struggled badly in the T20 series, and they were within 100 with six wickets in hand at one point.

England's spinners took control of the second half of the innings and strangled Pakistan's ability to score. Although they weren't bowled out, they could not keep up with the run rate.

Tough draw for Nadal's Paris finale

Tennis

Stuart Fraser Tennis Correspondent

There is no tournament that Rafael Nadal has enjoyed more in his great career than the French Open, but the 14-times champion will be cursing his luck after the draw at Roland Garros yesterday pitted him against Alexander Zverev, the No 4 seed, in the first round of what is set to be his last appearance at this grand-slam tournament.

This was the juiciest major draw in some time. Minutes after gasps had been heard from the audience at Nadal's draw, Andy Murray was drawn to face Stan Wawrinka in a throwback between a veteran pair of three-times grand-slam champions.

There will barely be a seat free in the Court Philippe Chatrier as the French Open crowd gathers to potentially say farewell to Nadal for the last time. Nadal, who turns 38 on June 3, has won five of the eight matches he has played during this year's European clay-court swing, a reasonable record considering the various physical issues he has suffered over the past two years. This is a considerable step up, though, against the winner of last week's Italian Open.

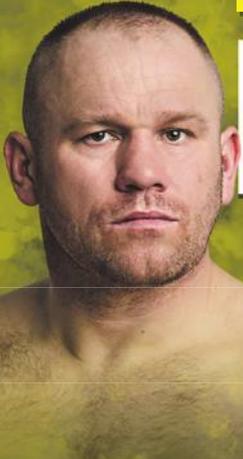
There is also a remarkable statistic at stake. Throughout Nadal's 20-year career on the ATP Tour, he has never lost back-to-back matches on his favoured surface of clay. A defeat by Zverev would end that, after Nadal's loss to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in the second round in Rome.

Murray's draw against Wawrinka means that each of his past three matches at Roland Garros will have been against the 39-year-old Swiss, the other two being a five-set defeat in the 2017 semi-finals and a straight-sets loss in the first round of the 2020 event.

If Murray wins, he could face an all-British battle in the second round against Cameron Norrie, the No 32 seed who faces Pavel Kotov, the world No 57. Dan Evans faces a tough task against Holger Rune, the No 13 seed.

The world No 1, Iga Swiatek, will face Naomi Osaka in the second round of the women's singles if both survive their openers. Britain's Katie Boulter, the No 26 seed, faces Spain's Paula Badosa, while Harriet Dart takes on Linda Noskova, the Czech No 27 seed.

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Sport Rugby union

Zach Mercer sought help to cope with England rejection but is still hoping for elusive call, he tells **Will Kelleher**

Four months ago Zach Mercer said that he was “done” with England. Worn down by constant selection snubs from Steve Borthwick, the head coach, he could not cope any more with the toll that missing out was having on his mental health and the person it was making him become.

Yet now — before the summer tour to Japan and New Zealand — the Gloucester No8 is ready to reiterate his desire. Borthwick — if you are listening — Mercer is all-in again.

“I want to play for England,” the 26-year-old says. “I’m here, available for selection and if Steve picks me I will go into camp, will give my absolute all, and will work my arse off.

“I understand there are some unbelievable No8s and back-rows in this country, so we’ll see what happens in the upcoming weeks with regards to selection. What will be, will be. If it doesn’t happen this summer I’ll come back in pre-season, work hard and try again to represent England.

“My aspiration to play for England is bigger than ever. I want to be on the international stage, I want to play for England, the British & Irish Lions, and have done since I was a kid, so I’ll keep fighting for that.”

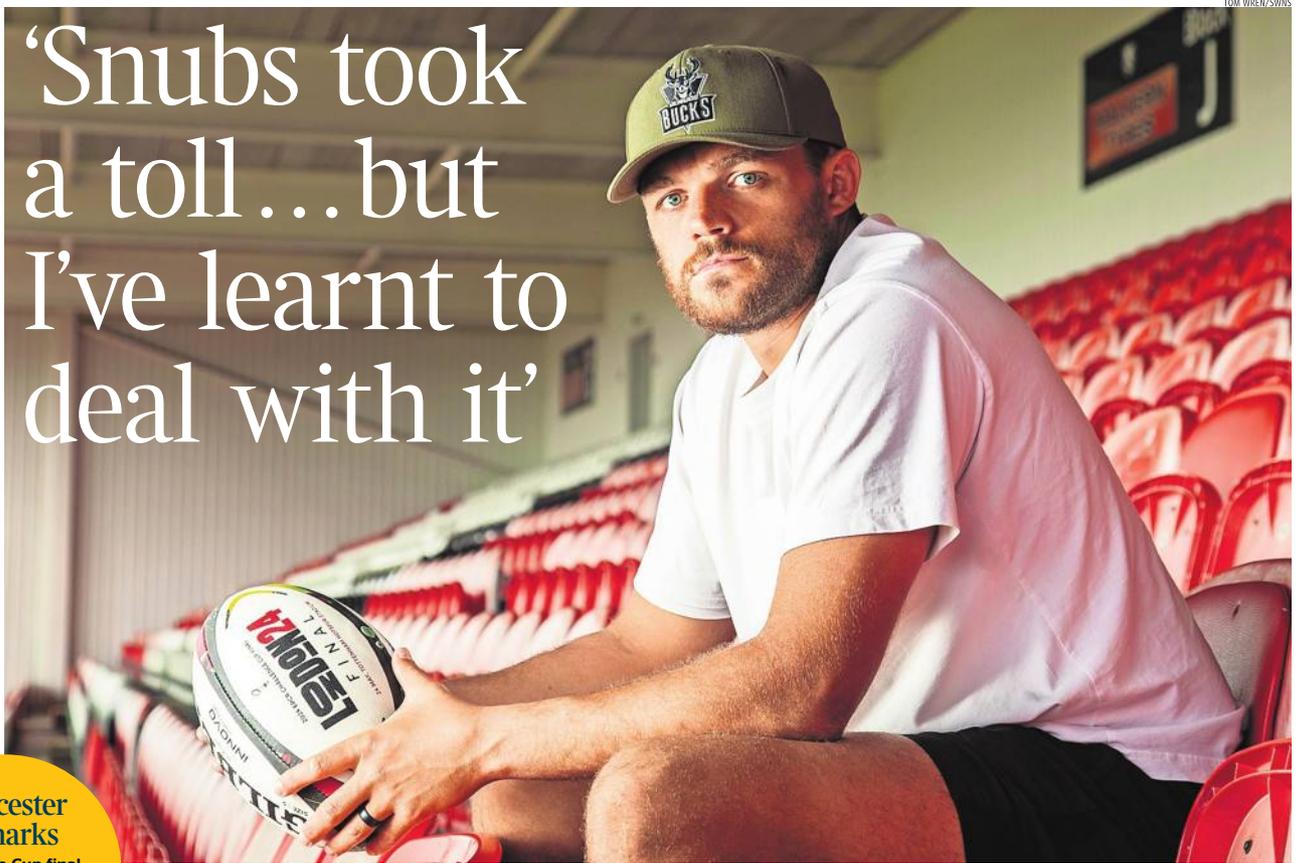
Mercer returned from two successful seasons at Montpellier last summer to join Gloucester in the hope of being selected for England at the 2023 World Cup. He was dropped after one summer training camp.

By the time the 2024 Six Nations came, Mercer was just returning from an ankle injury which had put him out of action for eight weeks, so was not picked then either. It has not helped Mercer’s cause that Ben Earl has been England’s standout star of the past year at No8.

When he said he was “done” in January, Mercer did not mean that he had given up on England or had thrown in the towel, which was why he enlisted the help of Don Macpherson, known as “the Monkey Whisperer” because his methods centre on the Chinese Buddhist theory of “Monkey Mind”, whom Mercer knew from his time at Bath. Working with the sports psychologist, he realised he had to stop stressing about Test selection because it was ruining his family life.

“People don’t talk about it, but mental health is massive in rugby, and when you keep getting told ‘no’ it does take a toll and does affect things outside the rugby pitch, whether that’s at home, with your family, or whatever,” Mercer says. “You’re just not the same person.

‘Snubs took a toll... but I’ve learnt to deal with it’



Gloucester v Sharks

Challenge Cup final
Tottenham Hotspur Stadium
Tonight, 8pm
TV: TNT Sports 1

Mercer knows Gloucester face a tall task against a Sharks side packed full of double World Cup-winning Springboks, but is brimming with self-belief

Unfortunately you’re just not very nice, and you take it out on people close to you — they wear it and it’s not nice on them. Something had to change.

“It was, ‘Right, Zach, I’m not going to be selected, so crack on.’ I believe that was best for me in France — I had no pressure on selection, as I couldn’t be selected because of the eligibility rules.

“I just put my pure focus on Montpellier at the time and that’s what I believe I’m doing at Gloucester now. [But] I’m ready to put the [England] jersey on if I get an opportunity.

“I feel a lot better and that’s credit to Don and the work I’ve been doing. It was a massive weight lifted off my shoulders. I’m probably mentally stronger and ready to take on the challenge of what’s to come.”

Mercer — who has no intention of returning to France or trying to play for New Zealand as his dad, Gary, was born there — does not believe he needs to call Borthwick to tell him this. He hopes that George Skivington, his director of rugby at Gloucester, will relay the message.

He has been chosen to represent the Barbarians against Fiji at Twickenham,

the same day England play Japan in Tokyo on June 22, but will turn that opportunity down if Borthwick calls him. The next few days will therefore be pivotal.

Tonight Mercer hopes to win the Challenge Cup for Gloucester against the Sharks — packed full of double World Cup-winning Springboks such as Eben Etzebeth, Lukhanyo Am and Makazole Mapimpi — and then on Sunday will discover whether Borthwick wants him in for England training, which starts next Monday for those not in the Gallagher Premiership play-offs.

“I think Steve will know I’m ready to play for England again,” Mercer says. “I’m sure Skivs will have my side on that, when he speaks to him. I don’t believe I need to have a conversation with him. If he rings me, no matter what the feedback is, I’ll be ready to take that, whether it’s positive or negative.

“Right now I’m committed to playing for the BaaBaas [Barbarians] as I don’t have any other news — if something changes, something changes.”

Mercer’s focus this week, as it has been for the past four months, is with Gloucester. Despite missing two months of the season he was named both the players’ and supporters’ player of the year at the club’s end-of-season

awards. He is proud to have made such an impact at his new club, and hungry to keep delivering for them.

Anyone who has watched Mercer this season has marvelled at the way he has grabbed games, broken tackles and lifted a club in the doldrums. His influence tonight at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium must be mighty again if Gloucester are to save their season.

A ninth-place finish in the Premiership and that sickening 90-0 humiliation away to Northampton Saints, have heaped pressure on Skivington and the club, after they prioritised cup success.

Ending the season with two minor trophies — the Premiership Rugby Cup and Challenge Cup — will, in Mercer’s mind, show Skivington made the right call and will bring much needed optimism to the Kingsholm faithful. Eighteen coachloads of Gloucester fans, officially at least, are going to Spurs in the hope of victory and a first European trophy since the Challenge Cup in 2015, having been beaten finalists in 2017 and 2018. This is a big club with supporters weary with underachievement.

“I just want the fans to know that as a playing group and a coaching staff we’re not happy with how the Premiership has gone, not at all. There will be

serious questions asked in the off-season, trying to work out what went wrong,” Mercer says. “Skivs was right to shift the focus — the Premiership was gone. There are only ten teams in the Premiership, so if you lose eight games your top-four chances are pretty much gone. That’s what happened to us.

“Look what happened when we shifted focus; we put 100 per cent focus on the Premiership Cup and won, then the Challenge Cup and we’re in the final.

“I understand the frustration of the fans, but all we ask is that they come to Tottenham and support us.”

Mercer knows Gloucester face a tall task against the Sharks but is brimming with self-belief.

“We know it’s going to be a massive physical battle, [that] they’re full of superstars, but we’re ready for it,” he says. “Finals are different; they’re never the prettiest of games, you’ve just got to do what it takes to win. It would be amazing to sign off like that. For the fans it would be very special.”

In that sense there are parallels with Mercer’s international ambitions. He has stopped worrying about the whims of Borthwick’s selection, and proved himself worthy of a recall. It is up to the coach now.

Time-trial? Special tyres? Drivers debate F1’s Monaco problem

Formula One
Molly Hudson Monte Carlo

Monaco is the crown jewel of the Formula 1 calendar. Picturesque, the circuit is steeped in history, and even for those who have driven in this race for years, the novelty does not wear off.

Lewis Hamilton remembers watching this race as a child, transfixed and dreaming of replicating his heroes, such as Ayrton Senna.

But now that he is in the race, the magic has long worn off for Hamilton as he joins a 78-lap procession.

“Do you guys [media] not fall asleep on Sunday watching the race?” Hamilton joked. “Until Sunday, it is the best

weekend of the year,” Fernando Alonso added. Both are race winners here.

The modern era of this sport is increasingly about entertainment, with circuits and sprint races that are designed for thrills, spills and overtaking. In Monaco that is almost impossible.

Qualifying on Saturday is the highlight of the weekend, and perhaps the most important of the entire season. “If you qualify bad the weekend is pretty much done,” Daniel Ricciardo, the Visa Cash App Red Bull driver who won in Monaco in 2018, said.

While the circuit has never been particularly suited to overtaking, the present generation of cars has exacerbated the problem. They are wider than

ever, and with the focus on aerodynamics, the front-wing sections of the car are crucial. This has influenced visibility, with Ricciardo explaining that the section leading into the tunnel, and the final corner, are approached without being able to see the apex.

In part, that only adds to the excitement of Saturday’s qualifying session, with non-existent run-off areas and millimetres separating the cars from the walls — or in the case of Max Verstappen on pole lap last year, touching them.

If you do not push enough or push too hard and find yourself at the back of the grid, race day becomes a glorified exercise in staring at the rear of the car in front. Ricciardo suggested a three-

day time-trial format, and Hamilton also believes a unique solution for these surroundings could be necessary. “I wish we had more, bigger roads, and the track could be wider, but I don’t think that’s ever going to be the case in Monaco because it’s just a small place — it’s a one-stop race,” he said.

“I would say maybe special tyres for this race [could be introduced], so you have more pitstops that create more variability. Whether or not we have sprint weekends or... they could definitely come out with a specific weekend. You’ve got the sprint things that they’ve added, but for this... I think they should come up with some new formula for it rather than it just be the same.”

Formula 1 may require a solution to Monaco, but it does appear to be closer to a genuine challenge to Verstappen’s more general dominance of the sport.

After Lando Norris’s maiden victory in Miami was backed up by finishing less than a second behind Verstappen in Imola, the world champion and two-times winner at this race has admitted his bid for a fourth consecutive title is no longer a certainty.

“He [Norris] is really in the mix,” Verstappen said. “He is quite a few points down but if they suddenly start winning, that can turn around quite quickly. It has closed up, which makes it very important to be at our very best, and 100 per cent. We need to be on it.”

'Ten Hag has been amazing – but leaders take the bullet'

Man United's Diogo Dalot tells Paul Hirst why players should take some responsibility for the club's poor season

Cristiano Ronaldo's second coming at Old Trafford is viewed quite dimly owing to the tantrums, his failure to adhere to the manager's playing style and that famous interview, but his influence did have a positive effect on one player at least.

Like most Portuguese football enthusiasts of his age, Diogo Dalot grew up idolising Ronaldo, so it was no surprise that the 25-year-old full back latched on to him when he returned to Manchester United in the summer of 2021.

One piece of advice stuck in his mind more than any other. "For him, his first focus was not on the quality of his football, it was about ensuring he was available." Dalot, who joined United from Porto in 2018, says. "You can't play if you're not physically and mentally available."

"During the early stages of my career I had some problems with injuries and that was consuming me, so after meeting Cristiano and spending time with him, I became obsessed with this idea. If you are available, you can evolve the other parts of your game, you become more confident because of the number of minutes you play."

Dalot tweaked his training schedule and diet, and started using all manner of gadgets to help give him the best chance of staying fit.

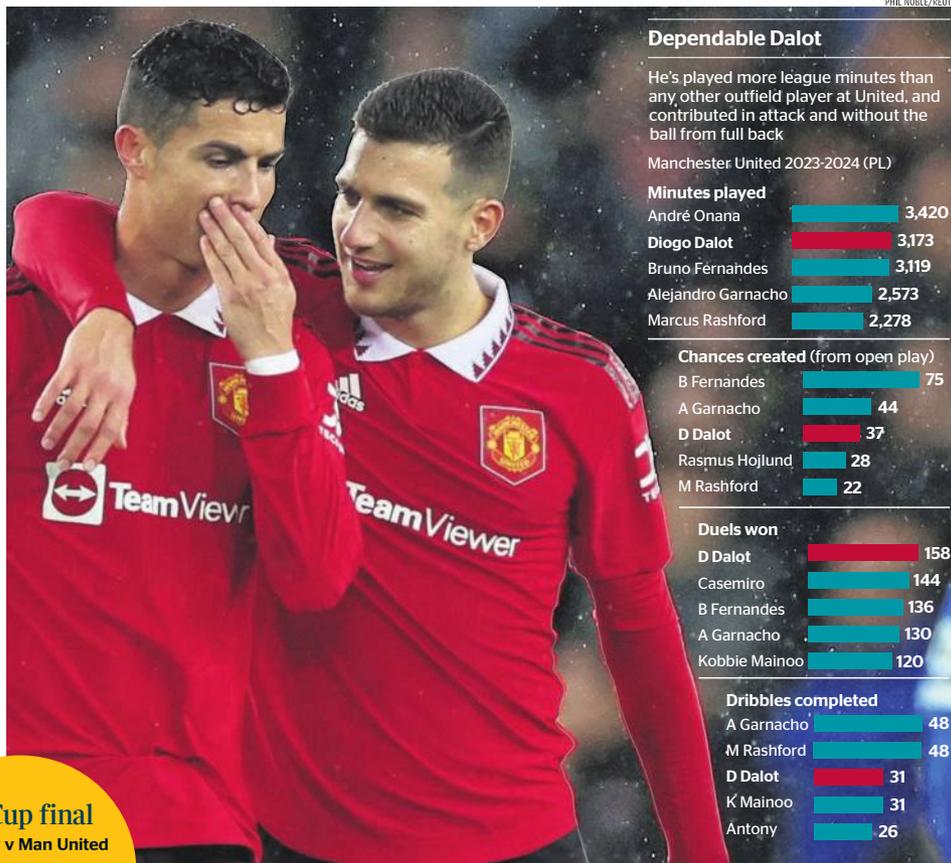
He points to his latest bit of kit, a Whoop band on his right wrist, not long into our in-depth chat at United's Carrington training ground.

"It's just a tool I use to track a little bit of what I'm doing every day," Dalot says of the band, which links to an app on his phone that tells him how much sleep he has had the previous night, the quality of that sleep, and how much strain that morning's training session has had on his body.

"I've been looking at my sleeping patterns, nutrition, and recovery."

The hard work has paid off. The Portugal defender has played 4,274 minutes this season, which is more than any other outfield player at the club. He will make his 51st appearance of the season in Saturday's FA Cup final against Manchester City.

Dalot has missed only one game — the defeat by West Ham United two days before Christmas — because he



FA Cup final
Man City v Man United
Wembley Stadium
Tomorrow, 3pm
TV: BBC1, ITV
Radio: BBC 5 Live

Dalot, right, grew up idolising Ronaldo, left, and learnt the importance of being available from him

was sent off in the 0-0 draw against Liverpool, and he has clocked the fastest speed for a full back in the Premier League this season (35.3km/h). With so much time in the first team, the quality of his game has improved, a fact recognised by his team-mates, who voted him the players' player of the season.

Heaven knows why most of Dalot's team-mates have been unable to maintain their fitness this season — that is the subject of an investigation being carried out by the club's medical staff. But it is safe to say that without Dalot's presence, United would be in an even bigger hole than they are now.

When asked whether he had played through the pain barrier this season, Dalot nods and says: "Yes, that's part of being a footballer. The team needs you because there are no players."

There is almost an air of exasperation in Dalot's voice when he comes to the end of this sentence. Erik ten Hag has had to contend with more than 60 individual cases of injury or illness this season, with many in defence.

"I don't remember playing three games in a row with the same centre back next to me or the same midfielder in front of me," Dalot says. "I don't like to use it as an excuse but it's a reality. You can't recreate your routine, the dynamics, the patterns of play. It was a struggle this season."

Dalot admits that even with the injuries they have had, United should have performed better. That has had repercussions for Ten Hag. After finishing eighth in the Premier League, even an FA Cup triumph may not be enough to save the manager from the sack.

"We look to him as our leader and they always take the bullets," he says.

"But make no mistake, we take responsibility for what we do on the pitch. He's been an amazing manager in terms of trying to put us back on top."

The 4-0 hiding that United received from Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park in early May springs to mind as one of the low points. Dalot will never forget seeing the travelling fans clap the players off after the match. United's match-going support has always been incredibly loyal and supportive. For that reason, he feels the players owe it to their supporters to win at Wembley, especially after City beat them in last year's final.

"We're going to try to give the fans a special afternoon," he says. "We finished the game last year feeling that we could have won — now we have another opportunity. We're playing a great team, but with a final, as we say in my country, 'Finals are there to win and not to just play in.' We want to win."

Maguire to miss cup final with Euros looming

Paul Hirst

Harry Maguire has been ruled out of the FA Cup final and will join England's Euro 2024 squad having not played a game since April.

The Manchester United centre back set himself the target of recovering from a muscular problem in time for tomorrow's game at Wembley against Manchester City, but Erik ten Hag said that the injury had not healed as expected. Yet the 31-year-old, who has remained one of Gareth Southgate's most trusted defenders, even while struggling for United, is confident that

he will be fit for the Euros, which begin on June 14. Southgate, who is without several injured defenders for the tournament in Germany, has to submit his final 26-man squad on June 7. He will be at Wembley tomorrow with Steve Holland, his assistant.

Ten Hag, the United manager, said that Maguire, Tyrell Malacia and Luke Shaw are not available to face City. Shaw is also in England's provisional 33-man Euros squad.

"Maguire is unavailable but the rest, including Mason Mount, Victor Lindelof and Anthony Martial, are back," Ten Hag said.

Maguire has not started any of the four finals that United have played in since he joined the club from Leicester City in the summer of 2019.

Ten Hag said that Marcus Rashford, who was omitted from the England squad, will be out to prove Southgate wrong at Wembley.

"He looks good," Ten Hag said. "He will be highly motivated [tomorrow]. He will speak with his feet. I'm sure he will get over this and get more goals."

Ten Hag needs Rashford and his team-mates to be at their best as his position as manager is under threat after the club's eighth-placed finish in

the Premier League. The Dutchman argues that he should not be judged on his impact this season as he has had to deal with more than 60 cases of injury or illness. He also brushed off claims that this would be his last game in charge.

"I am just focusing on the job," Ten Hag, who won the Carabao Cup in his first year in charge, said. "I came here to win trophies. On Saturday, I have the next opportunity to win a trophy."

"Underneath there are very good things, players coming up and players developing, values coming up, and at the same time we have on Saturday a big opportunity to win the next trophy."

Regulator shelved for now because of election

Martyn Ziegler Chief Sports Reporter

The independent football regulator will not be approved by parliament before the general election in a blow to campaigners who were pushing for the new body.

The Football Governance Bill had yet to go to the House of Lords, and Whitehall insiders said there was an acceptance that there was not enough time before the dissolution of Parliament on May 30 to pass the legislation. Other bills that are further down the line will be prioritised for the "wash-up" period, in which certain legislation is accelerated before an election.

Tracey Crouch, the MP who headed the fan-led review of football that brought about the plans for the regulator, said: "Unfortunately the Football Governance Bill will progress no further and although there is a ready-made bill for the next government, I won't be here to see it pass. I just wanted to say a massive thank you to everyone who helped shape this bill."

Crouch, who is standing down as an MP at the election, called on the Premier League and the EFL to agree a financial settlement as soon as possible. The top-flight clubs have so far refused to agree to a deal worth an extra £125million a year. The Premier League opposes a regulator, fearing its potential level of influence and interference.

She added in a statement: "A lot of people have poured their heart and soul into the bill — officials, politicians, authorities, clubs and of course fans. I am 100 per cent convinced there will be an independent regulator for football, thanks to the efforts of others and the desire for sustainability."

"My final plea is to the Premier League and EFL... please, for the sake of football, sit back down and start negotiating a deal. The impasse is infuriating. I know it is complex. But please, agree a deal."

The Labour Party, who are the run-away favourites to win the election on July 4, are also in favour of a regulator, but may decide they want to change some parts of the legislation.

One senior football figure said the best hope was for the bill not to go through in this Parliament, but to re-emerge in a different form under Labour, with added clauses to address cost control. "The bill was flawed — there is a chance now for a much better regulator that can really protect English football," the source said.

Some hope that Labour would look more kindly on a block on nation states owning football clubs, and to change the clause in the bill stating that the independent regulator's decisions on owners and directors "must also have regard to the [government's] foreign and trade policy objectives".

A quicker process may mean that suggested amendments — such as for the regulator to insist on FA Cup replays — would not be voted on. That would also remove a threat of the legislation contravening Fifa's rules on governments not interfering with football.

The FA's chief executive, Mark Bullingham, said that the idea of the regulator ruling on FA Cup replays would risk opposition from Fifa and Uefa.

"It could be an issue for them and for us," he said. "We have always been very supportive of it being a financial regulator. But we've always been very clear — and we've told Uefa and Fifa — that we would resist any further amendments that go beyond that."

Deadlines, drama and Mourinho

In his final column, **Matt Dickinson** pays tribute to the man who taught him to 'ruffle a few feathers' and shares his career highlights



Mr Porter was — is — one of those teachers whose passion was unmistakable even for the most recalcitrant pupil. In his English classes, plays were to be performed with feeling, language savoured, novels brought to vivid life.

So when, what can both feel like yesterday and 100 years ago, Mr Porter — or Tony, as I am allowed to call him these days — suggested that I should involve myself in the school magazine, the offer came with irresistible enthusiasm.

I had no thought then of writing for a living (vague memories of wanting to join CID, probably too much *Starsky & Hutch*) but perhaps he saw how captivated I was by the newspapers in the school library, always starting from the back to savour the latest piece from Hugh McLvanney or Brian Glanville.

He invited me to have a go, so I wrote my first polemic about the absurdity of a boys' school in England banning its pupils from playing football, the national sport. In that encouragement to express myself through journalism, Tony may just have changed my life.

That was the first column I ever wrote — and this, almost 40 years later, is my last, as I explained in an email to Tony the other day. We have stayed in regular contact. Tony writes to point out the good and bad in my arguments (no B-minus these days, though perhaps the odd "could do better") and to engage over all the big sporting issues or his beloved Arsenal.

When I wrote to tell him that I was leaving *The Times* after more than 26 years to pursue other interests (psychotherapy and writing books), it was with heartfelt gratitude.

"Great teachers have an influence that can last a lifetime," I wrote. "My deepest thanks."

"We ruffled a few feathers," he replied, able even four decades later to recall various pieces that dared to challenge the school system. Among many things, he taught me that journalism is meant to stir things up, to challenge the status quo, as one of its vital qualities.

Then he added: "I've lived vicariously as the journalist I secretly wanted to be through you, and so my gratitude also." As a way to wrap things up, it really could not have been more touching.

Who has been your biggest influence? It is a question I must have asked countless times of people in sport, trying to find out who and what shaped them. We all need coaches, mentors, guides: people generous enough to give a little of their time, and of themselves.

Well, I have had more help than I can possibly say, and it all started with an inspirational teacher. It was Tony who showed me how I could take my love of sport and turn it into a job. And what a precious gift that was because sport, for me as for so many, has been one of the wonderful



constants in my life. Sport sucks us in so deep that it can feel like the whole world is teetering on the final few minutes of a Champions League final in the Nou Camp in 1999, or Lewis Hamilton steering his crumbling tyres into one last overtake in São Paulo in 2008, or a clammy hand lining up a putt for the Ryder Cup at Medinah in 2012.

In this trade, you watch those moments from a ringside seat and then realise you have five minutes to deadline and 1,000 words to make sense of it all. It should feel a privilege and, especially when you are replaying it all with happy disbelief a couple of hours later over a cold drink, it undoubtedly does.

An imperfect profession by its very nature — first draft of history, and all that — we grapple with racing minds to capture the iconic moment, to explain sporting greatness or wrestle with those moral conundrums that sport seems to throw at us more incessantly than ever.

Is it ever just sport? The rehabilitation of dopers; boxing's place (no thanks) in a world of concussion sensibilities; the



To be close to leaders of such vast stature, full of and contradictions and brilliance is a highlight

Middle Eastern land grab of sport; whether our sports stars really are role models.

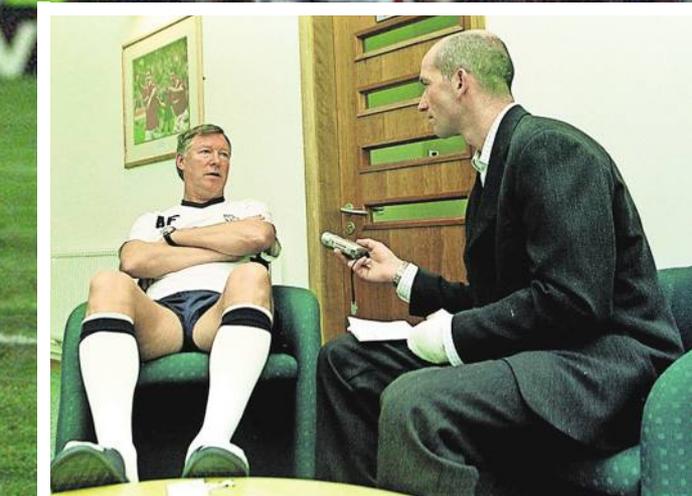
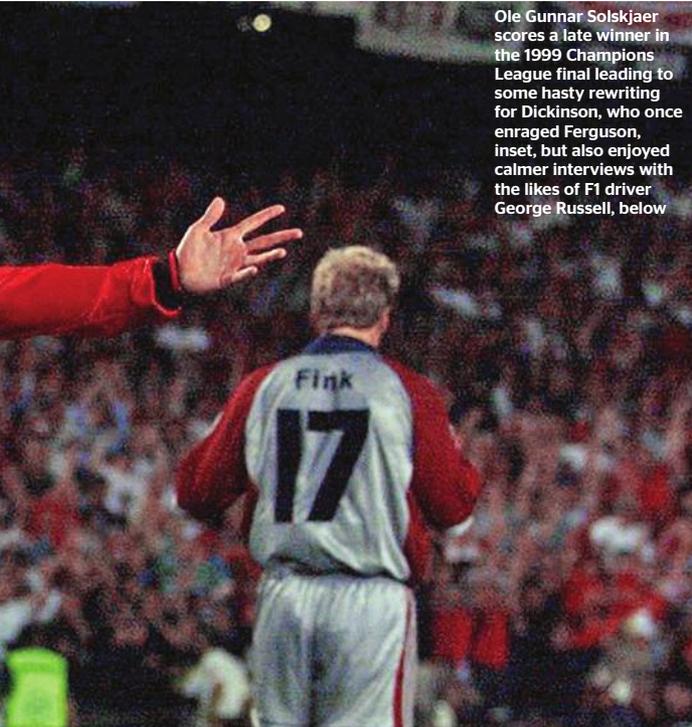
In therapy, there is a saying that all parts are welcome. Welcome or not, they certainly exist in sport because sport contains all of human life. The wondrous and the ugly; the sublime and the ridiculous; greatness and pratfalls. Collapses, redemption stories, all the complex shades of human nature. It can be a physical expression of creativity or a battle for survival.

So thank you, Tony, for opening the door to a world in which I could be pinned to a wall by a raging Sir Alex Ferguson and sit under the shade of a tree in Barcelona listening to Johan Cruyff dispense his singular

in a basket

TIMES PHOTOGRAPHERS MARC ASPLAND & MICHAEL POWELL

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer scores a late winner in the 1999 Champions League final leading to some hasty rewriting for Dickinson, who once enraged Ferguson, inset, but also enjoyed calmer interviews with the likes of F1 driver George Russell, below



wisdom. To be up close to leaders of such vast stature, full of brilliance and contradictions, sits among the highlights.

As does standing at the childhood home of Diego Maradona, a dilapidated shack in a slum town outside Buenos Aires, wondering whether it was only peerless sporting talent that could propel a poor kid from there to the top of the world.

What a joy to tell such stories and especially to break some news because, much as the media landscape has transformed, one constant is that revealing something unknown remains the most precious currency.

After all these years, one of my favourites involves something as absurd as José Mourinho 19 years ago escaping from the Stamford Bridge dressing room hidden in a laundry basket.

A couple of us learnt the truth of his defiance against a Uefa ban from a very good source the morning after Mourinho pulled that stunt. It took two years — of denials, dead ends, no comments — before we could write the full story. Why care? Why chase

it for so long? Because as an insight into one of the biggest figures in football, it captured the ego and the chutzpah that was both Mourinho's greatest strength and his downfall. It was a daft episode yet explained so much. And as a wise saying goes, sport does not build so much as reveal character.

When I think back to those English classes, it was character and motivation that Tony loved to make us debate — Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Macbeth* — and whether it was destiny, vicissitudes of life or personality that shaped a hero's fate.

What drives her? What makes him so special? Why did he do that? What lay behind that triumph, or failure?

They were questions he wanted us to contemplate in plays and novels and if I think of what journalism has meant to me, on many of the best days, it has been asking those same questions up close of so many extraordinary men and women in sport. And sport is, for so many of us, the greatest drama of them all.

Premier League clubs plotting to bring Atalanta's hero home

Paul Joyce
Northern Football Correspondent

Ferenc Puskas did it first and Alfredo Di Stéfano followed. Now, thanks to a poacher's instinct and some thunderous finishing, Ademola Lookman has elevated himself into the company of football's giants.

The winger's clinical hat-trick in Atalanta's superb Europa League final victory over Bayer Leverkusen represented a remarkable chapter in the career of the 26-year-old, who grew up in the Peckham and Camberwell areas of south London.

Lookman will be for ever feted in Bergamo after the Italians won the first European trophy in their history, and their first silverware of any sort since 1963 — in the process joining the ranks of Puskas and Di Stéfano in scoring a hat-trick in an European final. How long they get to enjoy him, however, remains to be seen.

Even before his eye-catching exploits in Dublin inflicted a first defeat of the season on Xabi Alonso's Bundesliga champions, Atalanta were braced for offers for the former England Under-21 international who has represented Nigeria since 2022. His headline act at the Aviva Stadium will only heighten that interest. Clubs in Germany and the Premier League have been closely monitoring Lookman, who has three years left on his contract and may cost about £30 million.

That would represent a sizeable profit for Atalanta on the €8 million (£6.8 million) they paid RB Leipzig for him two years ago, while still representing good value for a talent whose career has always hinted at the sort of explosive night that made jaws drop.

Lookman boasts 46 goal involvements (30 goals, 16 assists) in 76 matches in all competitions since moving to Serie A, the sort of eye-catching tally of which many supporters in England would have been unaware, preferring to see Lookman through the prism of an nomadic, early existence as he made his debut for Charlton Athletic aged 18, moved to Everton at 19, joined Leipzig permanently at 21 and then had loan spells at Fulham and Leicester City.

During his time at the King Power in 2021-22, he scored six goals in 26 league appearances but Leicester balked at triggering an exclusive option to buy him for £14 million. Lee Congerton, who



Lookman's mother was in Dublin to watch his trophy-winning performance

European club final hat-tricks

- Puskas scored four and Di Stéfano three for Real Madrid in their 7-3 success over Eintracht Frankfurt in the 1960 European Cup final
- Puskas then claimed a hat-trick against Benfica in Real's 5-3 defeat in the 1962 European Cup final
- Pierino Prati scored three for AC Milan in their 4-1 win over Ajax in 1969 European Cup final
- Jupp Heynckes scored three for Borussia Mönchengladbach against FC Twente in the second leg of the Uefa Cup final in 1975

Italian players which would mean they have to be paid more in the future to earn the same as they do now.

Lookman, who lost in the final of the Africa Cup of Nations with Nigeria in February but was named in the team of the tournament, told *The Times* last month that a switch in mindset has been responsible for the gear change in his career. He is focused on the here and now, rather than thinking too far ahead, and has been watching *Together: Treble Winners*, the story behind Manchester City's 2022-23 season on Netflix, in an attempt to pick up tips on how Pep Guardiola's side maintain their relentless mentality.

He also takes inspiration from a range of sporting figures, including Sadio Mané, LeBron James, boxing's Gervonta Davis and the clutch point guard for the Milwaukee Bucks basketball team, Damian Lillard.

Before he downed Leverkusen, Lookman scored in the semi-final success over Marseille. Add in a brace during a Serie A victory over champions AC Milan last season and it is clear that Lookman is emerging as a big-game player in his own right.

was Leicester's head of recruitment at the time, moved to Atalanta in a similar role before the end of that season, and he subsequently pushed Gian Piero Gasperini's side to recruit him. Congerton is now working for Al-Ahli in Saudi Arabia, though it is unlikely that Lookman will consider the Middle East for his next career move.

Staying in Italy could be complicated by an impending tax change for non-

West Ham get 'deep thinker' Lopetegui

Gary Jacob

Julen Lopetegui has been appointed by West Ham United as their new head coach. The 57-year-old former Spain, Real Madrid and Wolverhampton Wanderers manager succeeds David Moyes, who achieved two of the club's five best top-flight finishes and also delivered their first trophy for 43 years by winning the Europa Conference League in 2023.

Lopetegui, who has signed a two-year deal with an option for a third, must balance the demands of following one of West Ham's most successful managers while also satisfying fans who want to see more entertaining football, and freshening up a squad in need of improvement at both ends of the pitch.

Moyes departed West Ham after a 4½-year second spell in charge by saying that West Ham have so much potential and room for improvement. The club were ranked the 18th richest in

the world in the latest Deloitte Football Money League and had the second-largest average attendance in the Premier League this season, while their performances in Europe over the past few years have raised their profile. However, a ninth-placed finish this season meant they missed out on European football, and with fans grumbling about a defensive, pragmatic style of play there is plenty of room for growth when Lopetegui begins work on July 1.

"My ambition is always to be better and better, to achieve more and bigger aims and to encourage and improve the players, the team, and to compete," the

The former Wolves boss has signed a two-year deal

Spaniard said in a statement. "I am where I want to be. For us it was a fantastic day when we closed our agreement here because our commitment is 100 per cent to be here."

West Ham technical director Tim Steidten said Lopetegui was the club's primary target, adding: "His career shows that, wherever he has coached, he has improved players and teams, and we are looking forward to seeing him work with our squad."

"Julen lives and breathes football. He thinks deeply about the game, he is tactically astute and he has shown he can adapt to work in different leagues, in different countries, with national teams, and in each situation he has shown his outstanding qualities."



Sport Football

Paquetá charges are grave, but so is game's addiction to gambling

Jonathan Northcroft



Lucas Paquetá plays like an individual who dances to the beat of his own drum and his upbringing was colourful and quirky. A boy christened Lucas Tolentino Coelho de Lima adopted the moniker “Paquetá” in tribute to island of the same name, off Rio de Janeiro, where he was raised.

On it, there are no cars; only bicycles, dirt-track roads and football-mad, bare-chested kids. He was a cheeky one — his dad was in the army, his mum cut hair and he would grab tourists off the boat and offer to show them round for a little cash.

West Ham United love a maverick and football needs them too, but some things cannot be indulged.

There is nothing loveably unconventional about cheating your team, or endangering opponents, or compromising the integrity of your sport. These are what Paquetá will have done if shown to be guilty as charged by the FA.

When the fun stops, stop, as they say, and that's the feeling — that a player whose football made you want to grin is now someone not to smile about at all. He denies his guilt, but when the FA prosecutes under its betting rules it is almost inevitable that the player is convicted. If proven, what the Brazilian is accused of is almost unprecedentedly serious — spot-fixing in the highest echelon of the English game — and a long ban will follow. Perhaps for life.

There are four alleged breaches of FA Rule E5.1. With each, Paquetá is charged with deliberately getting booked so he and/or his friends could benefit from betting on him receiving yellow cards.

You look at the incidents in question. One (in November 2022) involved him being cautioned for a “lunge” on Leicester City's Boubakary Soumaré. Another saw him booked for a “lunging challenge” on Aston Villa's John McGinn (in March 2023). He could have risked hurting opponents and both bookings were at points where

West Ham were in a precarious position in their match (1-0 down against Leicester and at 1-1 versus Villa) and didn't need a key player on a yellow card. This was also true of another caution under scrutiny, for pulling back Crysencio Summerville when it was 1-1 between West Ham and Leeds United in May 2023.

And the bigger picture is more serious. With these bookings and the fourth one being investigated (for a handball in stoppage time against Bournemouth in August 2023) Paquetá stands accused of transgressing a principle that is crucial to protecting our game. The spectators who pay so much to it, through the turnstiles and via television subscriptions, have to be confident that what they are watching is the real thing. That it is sport; that participants are competing properly, not faking things or producing actions for any reason other than trying to win. Getting yourself a little booking might sound minor initially — until you think it through properly. What if all the players were coming up with stuff not to help their teams, but for their own little schemes on the side? That is why there are no smiles with this one, why the fun of Paquetá's football feels like it might be about to stop.

It's why this case feels more serious than several others. Ivan Toney was banned for eight months for a significantly greater number of offences (232 breaches of Rule E8) of which 29 involved placing bets on his own club — but he was not on the pitch in any of the games involved.

Joey Barton's playing career was effectively ended by an 18-month ban (later reduced to 13 months) for placing 1,260 bets over a ten-year period, but his bets were small, only two were in matches he played in and the FA accepted his betting was “not calculated to make money” and that he was not trying to “fix” games. He had counselling for his gambling addiction — similar to Newcastle's Sandro Tonali, who is currently serving a ban for offences in Italy.

Meanwhile the high-profile cases of Kieran Trippier and Daniel Sturridge involved bans for providing information about potential transfers to friends of family members who were interested in placing bets — not for anything to do with matches.

Paquetá's situation is potentially more grave than any of those. His charges will devastate people at West Ham, from those in the dressing room, where he is a popular, livewire presence, to those in the boardroom who may have shared the Brazilian's hope that Manchester City would revive their interest in a £85 million transfer — funds that could have been funnelled to the new manager, Julen Lopetegui, to help with rebuilding.

Fans will be disappointed too and clinging to the hope that their No 10 — whose lordly pass set up Jarrod Bowen to score the winning goal in last season's Europa Conference League final and deliver a first trophy in 43 years — can prove his innocence. “I am extremely surprised and upset that the FA has decided to charge me,” Paquetá said in a statement on social media. “I deny the charges in their entirety and will fight with every breath to clear my name.”

West Ham also released a statement, standing by their man. It is understandable they are supporting him. However, the club — and the English game itself — could take this opportunity to reflect on its relationship with gambling.

Of course it's right to crack down on players when there are betting offences. But if gambling is such a threat to integrity, why take so much money, so eagerly, from the gambling industry?

Paquetá was charged last August after several bookmakers reported suspicious betting patterns from a cluster of accounts on Paquetá Island, a 0.5 square mile spit of land with 3,000 residents. The first bookmaker to raise concerns was Betway, West Ham's own shirt sponsor — and a company fined £408,915 by the Gambling Commission in 2022 for marketing on the children's pages of the West Ham club website. In 2020, the Gambling Commission fined Betway £11.6 million for social responsibility and money laundering failings.

The FA ended all its sponsor deals with gambling companies in 2017 but Premier League clubs persist with them. Seven had shirt sponsorships from betting firms last season. If Paquetá is guilty, the punishment should be stern — but whatever the outcome, it is time for a wider conversation about the game and gambling.

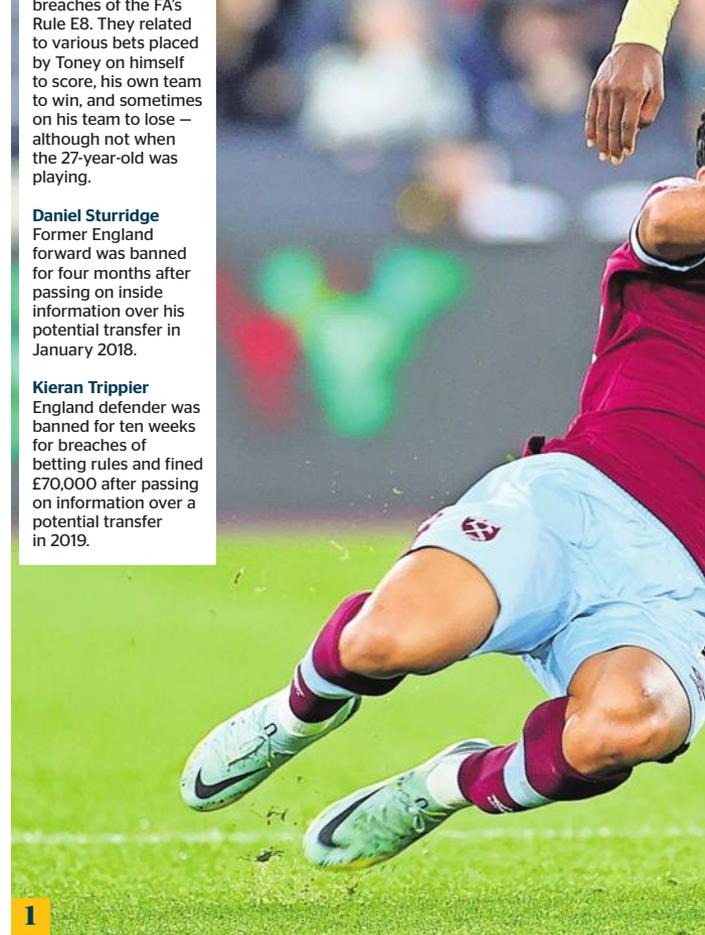
Four who transgressed

Sandro Tonali
Italian midfielder is banned until August for betting on matches in Italy, and this month received a two-month suspended ban by the FA for 50 breaches of its betting rules.

Ivan Toney
Brentford striker was banned for eight months for 232 breaches of the FA's Rule E8. They related to various bets placed by Toney on himself to score, his own team to win, and sometimes on his team to lose — although not when the 27-year-old was playing.

Daniel Sturridge
Former England forward was banned for four months after passing on inside information over his potential transfer in January 2018.

Kieran Trippier
England defender was banned for ten weeks for breaches of betting rules and fined £70,000 after passing on information over a potential transfer in 2019.



CONTINUED FROM BACK

was shown a yellow card on the hour mark against Leicester for a lunge on Boubakary Soumaré, against Villa for a late tackle on John McGinn in the 70th minute, and against Leeds in the 65th minute for pulling back Crysencio Summerville. His booking against Bournemouth at the start of this season came in stoppage time for handball.

“I am extremely surprised and upset that the FA has decided to charge me,” Paquetá said in a statement on social media. “For nine months, I have co-operated with every step of their investigation and provided all the information I can.

“I deny the charges in their entirety and will fight with every breath to clear my name. Due to the ongoing process,

I will not be providing any further comment.”

A West Ham statement said: “Lucas categorically denies the breach and will continue to robustly defend his position. The club will continue to stand by and support the player throughout the process.”

Paquetá was withdrawn from the Brazil squad in August after news broke that he was under investigation. The Brazilian news website Globo reported that suspicious gambling patterns were identified around bets being placed in Brazil on Paquetá being booked against Villa in March 2023 and his compatriot Luiz Henrique receiving a yellow card while playing for Real Betis against Villarreal in Spain's La Liga.

Both players were booked during the games. Globo reported that the bets

had been made on Betway, West Ham's sponsor, via accounts by people linked to the players.

The investigation into Paquetá's bookings centred on bets traced to accounts registered on Paquetá Island, off Rio de Janeiro. The bets were not placed by the 26-year-old, but people close to him were investigated. Paquetá's real name is Lucas Tolentino Coelho de Lima but he takes his nickname from where he grew up.

FA and club sources said there was no indication that police would become involved in the case. A match-fixing scandal in 1964 resulted in ten players being jailed, while the Liverpool goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar was cleared by a jury of match-fixing in 1994. In 2011, three Pakistan cricketers were given prison sentences for spot-fixing.

PLUMB IMAGES/LEICESTER CITY FC/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID LOVEDAY/TGS PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK



1) Paquetá was cautioned for lunging at Soumaré
 2) He also produced a "lunging challenge" on McGinn
 3) He pulled back Leeds' Summerville
 4) A handball in stoppage time is also under scrutiny



Scapegoat under Solskjaer, now McKenna is on United shortlist

Ulsterman, criticised by players at Old Trafford, has proven himself with Ipswich's success, writes **Charlotte Duncker**

What a difference 2½ years has made to the reputation of Kieran McKenna.

From the supposedly underrated assistant at Manchester United, who became a scapegoat when the wheels fell off during Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's reign at the end of 2021, to a newly promoted Premier League manager, who is on the radar of at least three clubs having guided Ipswich Town from League One to the top flight for the first time in 22 years, in just 870 days.

For those who worked with and watched McKenna while he was at university, his rise has come as no surprise. The Northern Irishman graduated 12 years ago with a degree in sport and exercise science from Loughborough University after his playing career was cut short aged 22 due to a chronic hip problem when he was at Tottenham Hotspur.

Months after retiring in 2009, he produced his first coaching document and it is something he has kept. McKenna knew from a young age precisely what he would want to see from his teams, and after his playing career finished he set about creating his own ideology for when he graduated and moved into coaching. Even when he was coaching the football sides at Loughborough, he would drill into the students the importance of standards and professionalism.

Those traits have followed him throughout his career. Upon graduating, he joined Tottenham as the under-18 coach, with Clive Allen, the former Spurs striker, noting his fierce work ethic and sharp intellect. However, those who watched his sessions knew that he would soon be poached, so it came as little surprise when he took charge of United's under-18 side a year later in 2016.

He won the Under-18 Premier League North title in 2018 and some of that squad have hailed him as one of the best coaches they have worked with because of how he tailored every training session to individual development and the strengths and weaknesses of their next opponents. His talent did not bypass José Mourinho either, so when the Portuguese lost his assistant Rui Faria in 2018 he appointed the Northern Irishman as his assistant. The promotion met a lot of questions from the outside as to who he was but those working within the game were already well aware of his pedigree and potential.

It is why, when Mourinho was sacked and replaced by Solskjaer, he was retained as one of the Norwegian's key men. Solskjaer was impressed with McKenna's eye for detail and ability to put across game plans and tactics in a coherent

McKenna guided Ipswich to the Premier League after consecutive promotions

Doubts over fiery Tuchel

CONTINUED FROM BACK

and Chelsea, although the structure being built by Sir Jim Ratcliffe and Ineos, the new United co-owners, could possibly absorb those issues.

McKenna has become one of the most sought-after managers in the Premier League because of his success in leading Ipswich Town from League One to the top flight in successive seasons. He grew up a United fan and spent almost six years at Old Trafford working under José Mourinho, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and, briefly, Ralf Rangnick. He had previously gained a reputation as an elite coach at Tottenham Hotspur's academy under John McDermott, who is now the FA's technical director. He joined Ipswich in December 2021.

The Northern Irishman, 38, is subject to a three-way tug-of-war between United, Chelsea and Brighton & Hove Albion. Both Brighton and Chelsea are willing to match his demands and would have to pay a £6 million compensation fee. Ipswich have in the past 24 hours offered McKenna a new contract worth £6 million a season to try to keep him.

Frank, the Brentford manager, is also on Chelsea's shortlist. The Danish coach, who took over the west London side in 2018, won promotion to the Premier League in 2021 and has since established them as a top-flight fixture.

Ten Hag, who has one year left on his contract, is under serious pressure after guiding the club to eighth place in the Premier League, their worst finish since 1990. He has been unable to repeat the success of

his first season, in which he won the Carabao Cup and finished third.

United failed to reach the knockout stage of the Champions League and Ten Hag had a public fallout with the winger Jadon Sancho, who was first frozen out and then sent on loan to Borussia Dortmund for £73 million in 2021, is set to line up for them in the Champions League final against Real Madrid at Wembley on June 1.

Potter has been linked with the United job and has been out of work since leaving Chelsea in April 2023. He has rejected a number of approaches from clubs, most recently Ajax.

If Brighton fail to land McKenna they are considering returning to Potter, 49, who was replaced at the Amex Stadium by Roberto De Zerbi, 44, when he joined Chelsea.

De Zerbi, who left Brighton at the end of this season, has been linked with Barcelona and has also been considered by Chelsea. However, the Catalan club have also been in advanced talks with Hansi Flick, who is a free agent after being sacked as the German national team manager last year.

Meanwhile, Wayne Rooney could return to management, with Plymouth Argyle keen to appoint the former Manchester United and England striker. Rooney is understood to be interested in joining the Championship side and has been invited to an interview this week. The 38-year-old's most recent job in management was at Birmingham City, where he was sacked in January after losing nine of his 15 games in charge.

way. But while Solskjaer still talks about McKenna in glowing terms and recalls how impressed he was with his tactical knowledge, the 38-year-old soon became a target when Solskjaer's team fell into decline.

With underperforming players looking to pass the blame, their feedback was that McKenna was too "teacher-like" with his information-heavy sessions. They were also uninspired by his sessions with a feeling that they should be coached by someone more senior, acknowledging his quick rise from under-18s to first-team football.

Those complaints first started to leak as results turned at United but when Solskjaer was sacked McKenna stayed under Ralf Rangnick. Then came the opportunity at Portman Road a month later in December 2021.

This was the start of a journey in which he would prove that those verdicts made by factious United players were misjudged. His work ethic comes from his parents, who run a hotel in

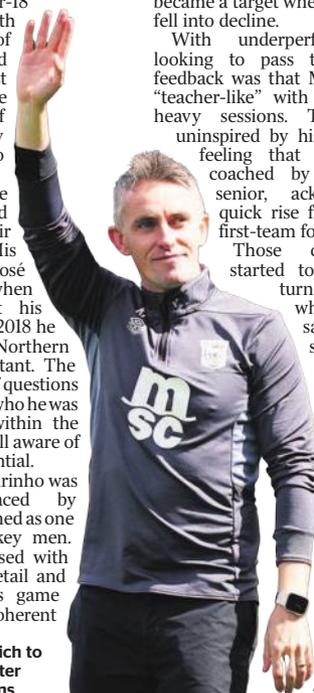
Northern Ireland. He was inspired by their commitment and drive and has taken those traits with him.

At Ipswich he has two pitches set up for training in different ways so the players can switch between sessions without wasting time setting up. To cut out the outside noise he banned rolling Sky Sports News footage in the training ground canteen, instead replacing it with drone footage of training or highlights from a recent match.

Since the first day at Ipswich he has commanded the respect of his players and it has contributed to a harmonious squad who fully buy in to his methods. He works hard with players on individual development, especially to make them feel more comfortable with the ball, and the players are committed to producing the free-flowing, press-beating, attacking football that McKenna wants. He leads sessions and holds a debrief after each one.

In his first full season at Ipswich the team scored 101 goals, gaining 98 points as they were promoted to the Championship, and the figures from this season are equally impressive. They scored the most goals in the division (92) and won the most points from losing positions to become only the fifth club in the Premier League era to win back-to-back promotions to reach the top flight.

That 15-year-old coaching document full of every drill, training models, sessions and meetings is full of the secrets to his success and one of those top Premier League sides will be hoping he has plenty more chapters to add to it.



Sport

It's goodbye from me

In his final column Matt Dickinson reflects on 26 years at The Times

Page 62



HENRY BROWNE/GETTY IMAGES

Paquetá facing long ban

West Ham midfielder accused of four instances of spot-fixing, almost certainly ending hopes of move to Manchester City

Martyn Ziegler
Chief Sports Reporter

West Ham United's playmaker Lucas Paquetá is facing a ban from football that could stretch into years after being charged with four separate instances of spot-fixing — among the most serious charges ever brought against a Premier League player.

Paquetá, the 26-year-old Brazil midfielder, has been charged by the FA with deliberately getting yellow cards in matches against Leicester City, Aston Villa, Leeds United and Bournemouth across the past two seasons. The charges will almost certainly end any prospect of Manchester City meeting the £85 million release clause in his contract and signing him this summer.

The charge alleges that he did so in order that "one or more persons" could profit financially from betting on him being booked.

The FA's sanctioning guidelines state that a ban of between six months and a lifetime should be imposed for spot-fixing. In 2022, the FA imposed a ten-year ban on a former Reading defender, Kynan Isaac, for spot-fixing after he got deliberately booked in an FA Cup tie in which he played for the Southern Premier League side Stratford Town. He was given a further 18-month ban for betting offences and 12 more months for not co-operating. Paquetá, who earns a reported £150,000 a week, Continued on page 64



Paquetá is shown a yellow card by referee Peter Banks for a deliberate handball in stoppage time during West Ham's 1-1 draw against Bournemouth last August

Four on the shortlist for United job

Matt Lawton, Charlotte Duncker

Manchester United have drawn up a four-man shortlist of managerial candidates should they sack Erik ten Hag.

Mauricio Pochettino, who has become available after leaving Chelsea this week and would be keen on a move to Old Trafford, is on the list alongside Thomas Tuchel, Kieran McKenna and Thomas Frank.

United maintain that no decision has been made on Ten Hag's future and that tomorrow's FA Cup final against Manchester City will not determine their course of action. However they have been forced to accelerate their contingency plans in light of Chelsea choosing to part company with Pochettino and discussions with representatives have been taking place this week.

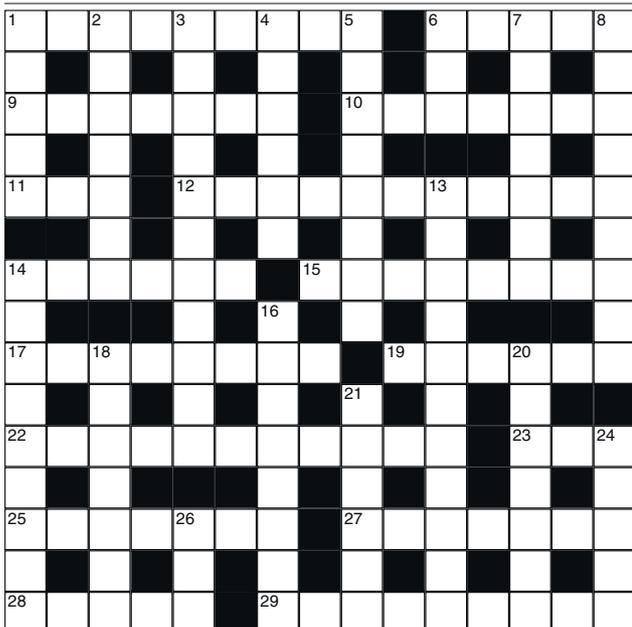
Pochettino's work at Tottenham Hotspur, where he brought through young players, developed a coherent style of play and took the club to their first Champions League final, would make him attractive appointment given United are trying to create a new ethos.

The 52-year-old left Chelsea by mutual consent having disagreed with the club's owners about their strategy despite losing only one of his final 15 matches in charge and remaining popular with the players.

Tuchel is leaving Bayern Munich this summer after the German club failed to win the Bundesliga for the first time since 2012. The former Chelsea manager, 50, is keen on a return to the Premier League. Tuchel won the Champions League with Chelsea in his first season at Stamford Bridge but was sacked and replaced by Graham Potter only a month into the first full season after the club's takeover by Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital.

There have been some doubts over Tuchel's apparent clashes with his previous employers at Borussia Dortmund Continued on page 65

Times Crossword 28,925



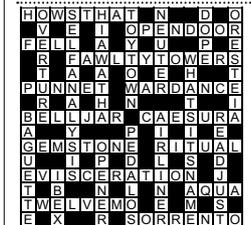
ACROSS

- 1 Burning desire of dad to collar younger Arab (9)
- 6 In US law officer, it reflects rank (5)
- 9 Archbishop, returning bow note, waves to Richelieu (7)
- 10 Not only post, presumably, that's slow (7)
- 11 For speaking out, dissenting voice is called before the union (3)
- 12 It's the march forming a line to the right (11)
- 14 Graft, to acquire spending money (6)
- 15 Fifty-one assigned to cat? Over forty fewer? (8)
- 17 Gave advice from a fan of marriage? Only the one time (8)
- 19 High Court writ dismissing case stops a corporation (6)
- 22 Book date with PTA for arranging simple course (5,6)
- 23 Canon listing all works primarily (3)
- 25 Tips for improvements (7)
- 27 Quiet bore gets promoted (7)
- 28 Fresh case of Sauternes to have in for one (5)
- 29 Carol's bloke on lookout from place his young lady might be picked up? (9)

DOWN

- 1 New spade alone maybe with power to pull up tree (5)
- 2 Tear around neighbourhood, nearly causing prang (4-3)
- 3 Say nothing of parent's promise to pen article (4,3,4)
- 4 Country never without king or queen (6)
- 5 Utterly disorganised prince turning back on elegance (8)
- 6 Passing fancy female, attorney spun around (3)
- 7 Failing to conceal bottom, one's skimpy costume (7)
- 8 Group of players without a match? (5,4)
- 13 Put in — or put up — pleasing dispatch in chair? (11)
- 14 Bubble, say, flying low after delivery (4,5)
- 16 On returning, wasn't keeping a single tool (5,3)
- 18 Part of state visit of queen maybe mostly to streets (2,5)
- 20 One's going to miss tracking European criminal (7)
- 21 Obstruct, confine or stifle (6)
- 24 Whiskey and fish deliveries one on strike couldn't touch (5)
- 26 Little hope of end to downpour, indeed! (3)

Yesterday's solution 28,924



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2 ARTS



**Star Wars
made me ill
with stress**

**Daisy Ridley on her journey
from Jedi master to indie queen**

the arts column

Richard Morrison

Is Scarlett Johansson right to worry? I spent a morning with AI to find out



In a striking turn of events, Scarlett Johansson, the luminous star whose voice has enchanted audiences in roles from *Her* to *The Avengers*, has raised her voice in a different key — against the very technology that once amplified her allure. Johansson has expressed vehement criticism of an AI bot that audaciously mimicked her sultry tones. She denounced this digital doppelgänger as an unsettling harbinger of a future where artistic authenticity is threatened by synthetic simulacra.

OK, let's stop there. If you've read thus far, congratulations. You've been duped. Since my subject this week is artificial intelligence, and particularly Johansson's claim that ChatGPT recreated and used her voice without permission, I thought I'd try out the thing myself.

So I asked ChatGPT to write something about the Johansson row "in the style of Richard Morrison of *The Times*". That opening paragraph is what the machine dreamt up, or at least the start of it (it witters on for hundreds of words, just like me). I'm not sure whether to be worried or amused.

Worried because it shows the potential of this tool to transform my inky trade, just as it could transform or obliterate hundreds of other jobs, including Johansson's. That existential threat is one reason Hollywood's actors and screenwriters went on strike last year.

And amused because, actually, that paragraph isn't a bad parody of me in my more flowery moments. I don't think I've ever called anyone a "luminous star" (aren't all stars luminous?) or referred to someone's "sultry tones". These days you'd probably be arrested by the woke police for that. But ChatGPT has nailed my horrible habit of aimless alliteration, as my A-level English teacher put it, by wheeling out "digital doppelgänger", "artistic authenticity" and "synthetic simulacra" (which sounds like what I used to wear in my cycling days).

And, creepily, it also seems to have analysed my seven million published words diligently enough to realise that I write a lot about music. In that one paragraph we get Johansson "raising her voice in a different key" and her allure being "amplified", while further on in the essay there's an assertion that her words will "resonate like a symphony of caution".

A symphony of caution! That sounds as if someone has set to

music the list of possible side-effects on a packet of paracetamol. Yet I must admit it's a striking phrase. And it's certainly true that you can hear symphonies of caution every day now, as governments and business leaders wake up to AI's implications and particularly its potential to dupe even the world's sharpest minds, let alone dullards like me.

Case in point? Consider the great engineering firm of Arup. I've interviewed numerous Arup people over the decades and — unsurprisingly because, from Sydney's Opera House to Gaudi's



Scarlett Johansson

Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, they are the brains stopping the world's most visionary buildings from falling down — I've never met one who wasn't super-smart.

Yet this week Arup revealed it had lost £20 million in a scam when an employee, acting on instructions received in video conference calls apparently from senior colleagues, sent payments to five different bank accounts. In fact the talking heads on the calls — so cogent and plausible — were "deepfakes".

Which shows that, as with other epoch-changing scientific achievements (think of splitting the atom or sequencing the human genome), the AI breakthrough itself is awe-inspiring, yet its potential uses could be disastrous — possibly even more disastrous than the theft of a Hollywood actress's voice or the faking of a journalist's prose. Which is

“The only winners will be lawyers. Who wants that?”

presumably why Rishi Sunak took time off this week from plotting a general election to warn a virtual gathering of world leaders about their "profound responsibilities" with regard to AI (I hope he checked the other leaders on the call were real).

With such great minds focused on the damage that AI could do to society, work, national security and our species generally, I will merely make a few suggestions about its impact on my little area of supposed expertise: arts and entertainment. First, Johansson is right to kick up a fuss if her "sultry tones" have been hijacked by an AI bot without her consent. The same applies to anyone who performs or creates original content. However, with AI becoming ever more sophisticated, and more adept at obscuring its sources, proving copyright theft will become increasingly difficult as well as insanely expensive. The only winners will be the lawyers. Who wants that?

Second, if composers, screenwriters and other content creators are so worried about big corporations replacing them with AI bots that have learnt how to imitate their ditties or dialogue, the obvious answer is to become more original and less easy to imitate. As the screenwriter Larry Gross put it: "The worst thing about movies today is that they feel like they're being written by computers already."

And third, what may happen in the cultural sphere, paradoxically, is that rather than making the online world even more powerful, AI could devalue it completely. Metaphorically, the technology could eat itself. How so? Well, if we can no longer trust that anything we see on a screen is genuine, we may abandon screens and return to experiencing the world at first hand. By which I mean reasserting live entertainment as the driving force in our culture.

Of course, a backlash such as that — a global surge of mistrust in the virtual world — would have effects well beyond the entertainment sector. People in big businesses may check face-to-face with their bosses before transferring £20 million into unknown bank accounts.

Is such wishful thinking merely evidence of a pathetic desire on my part to stuff the AI genie back into the bottle? Maybe. But I would prefer to describe it as a strong feeling that we should proceed with ... well, what was that useful phrase my digital doppelgänger invented just now? Oh yes, a symphony of caution.

‘At 60, I tried

As the sport heads to the Paris Olympics, former British champion Roxy Milliner tutors Phil Hilton

The goal for many when dancing in public is to pass unnoticed, to move in a way that allows us to join in without attracting ridicule. The mantra for this approach is "keep it small". Breaking is the total opposite of keeping it small.

Breaking (no one in the community calls it breakdancing) will feature as an event in this summer's Olympics, in Paris, for the first time. The big day for UK breaking hopefuls is looming fast — the qualifying rounds take place on June 20-23 in Budapest. After an exhausting and humbling lesson, I feel an inkling of what it takes to excel at this dance form.

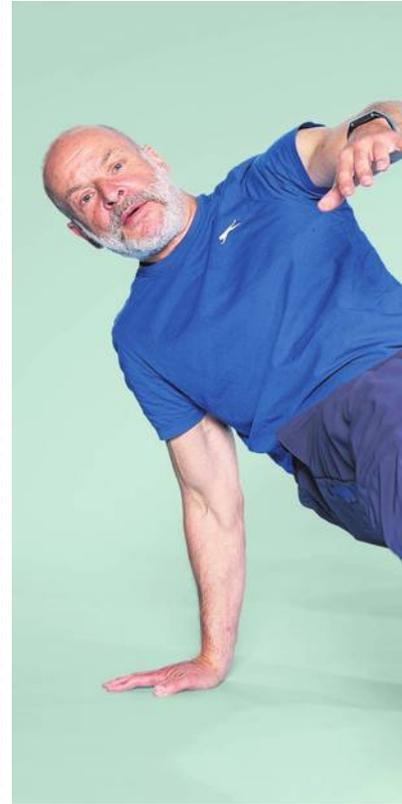
My tutor is B-girl Roxy Milliner (dancers are B-boys and B-girls). She is a former national champion and the Guinness world record holder for the most head spins in one minute. She is one of the most respected British breakers, a public advocate for the sport and a member of the umbrella organisation Breaking GB.

As she demonstrates moves for our photographer, her strength, flexibility and creativity verge on the supernatural. The athleticism is extraordinary. You know a small, smiley woman is spinning on the floor and supporting her weight with her wrists but at the same time you feel it can't really be happening.

Milliner, 34, from south London, does all this with a casual swagger. She is master of the freeze — the moment at which you stop and hold a pose. Holding the pose hints at the heart of this street-born art form.

The head-pumping most of us settle for at the back of a Chemical Brothers festival performance is unlikely to bring us cachet and respect but breaking is about gaining kudos. The sport emerged in the Bronx in New York, and grew out of poor black and Hispanic teenagers competing with each other on sheets of cardboard on the ground. It was part of the hip-hop and graffiti art movements, and didn't find its way into the limelight until the second generation of dancers were picked up by mainstream media in the early 1980s. It continues to provide solace and focus for young people in difficult circumstances.

Milliner desperately needed something new when she discovered her dancing abilities. "My parents did an amazing job bringing me up in south London and keeping me on the straight and narrow, but I had a boyfriend who was involved in gangs and he went to prison just before I started breaking. I was really in a dark place before I started."



The community, along with the sheer physicality of the dance style, provided the perfect healing environment. "Breaking was a whole new world. Also, there were the endorphins generated by physical exercise. Breaking uses muscles you didn't know existed."

These muscles declared their presence as soon as Milliner took me through my initial moves. First of all, it's worth acknowledging an almost overwhelming feeling of ridiculousness. If I were to make a list of activities a 60-year-old shouldn't try for the first time in public, breaking would be up there with synchronised swimming and freestyle rap.

“Anyone watching would have been hard pushed to see it as dance

If Milliner did collapse into mocking laughter, she did so in private. Throughout my stumbling efforts she was calmly encouraging and incredibly patient.

The music itself was the first barrier. Its complicated beats aren't based around the pounding "four on the floor" disco and techno we've all been enjoying for decades. The complex and choppy time signatures meant even the most basic standing dance step caused me problems.

Then I moved down to the floor and Milliner taught me the six-step sequence. We moved through each part very slowly. Anyone watching

to breakdance'

MICHAEL LECKIE FOR THE TIMES



would have been hard pushed to see this activity as a form of dance. I was playing solo Twister.

As a keen gym-goer who'd been doing more mobility work of late, I came to this with some pride on the line. The six-step was, I must admit, a blow to my self-esteem. The most interesting part of the instruction dealt with my attitude. I was tentative, embarrassed, the dad at the back of the gig, keeping it small. Milliner told me to move with definite emphasis, to fold my arms and stand like a hero.

When not dancing, Milliner is a master of self-deprecating humour but when she performs, her personality takes on an element of display and pride. "I'll be crying and a nervous wreck backstage and as soon as I get out there, people say, 'You are so confident!' All the nerves and all the energy are channelled into breaking and being a show-off."

I remember being a teenager, dancing in the nightclubs of east London, and that feeling of being lost in the flow and half aware of looking pretty good as I moved. Milliner and breaking took me back to a time before the inhibiting self-consciousness of adulthood.

Someone who believes firmly in the importance of dance to less privileged communities is DJ Kevin Renegade Gopie, an elder statesman of the UK scene. Gopie now coaches dancers and was part of the team that created the Olympic judging system. "I was 12, 13 years old when I started and you got social currency from it, for sure. You became a bit of an

Phil Hilton and Roxy Milliner



estate celebrity," he says, laughing.

Renegade, now 54, became one of the first UK breakers after seeing Malcolm McLaren's hit single *Buffalo Gals* on *Top of the Pops* in 1982. The video featured breakers the Rock Steady Crew, who were filmed dancing on the streets of New York. This had a mesmerising effect on a young Gopie and his friends.

"Everybody had seen it, *Top of the Pops* being what it was, and we were trying to figure out what the hell was going on," he says. "We'd seen someone spin on their back."

He places breaking in a tradition of styles with roots in impoverished places. It provided a chance to escape through movement and the opportunity to demonstrate to a fairly indifferent world that you do indeed have accomplishments. "To be in a trance is the reason for doing all these dances, from English country dancing to morris dancing, northern soul. There's folk dancing in every community."

Seeking a release from the grind of everyday life unites all these styles, he says. "Dancing is where you've had a shit week at work, you go out at the weekend, everybody is jamming and getting down and you're all sweaty and smelly, then you have a kebab and go to bed."

I vow to reclaim some of that spirit next time I dance anywhere and make an unbreakable appointment to watch what will be one of the most spectacular events of Paris 2024. Breaking is surely set for one of its periodic bursts of popularity. Keep it big ... very big.

I went on a sten do (a combined stag and hen do). Here's what happened

When I got the notification inviting me to a "sten do" I thought, oh God, what's happened?

Heart problems are the last thing my friends need. Then I found out a sten do has nothing to do with stents or bypasses or terrifyingly premature coronary heart diseases, not to mention stenograms or Second World War machine guns. It's actually a joint stag and hen do. Now my heart was really racing.

The bride and groom had planned three nights in Ibiza. I had visions. A gang of two dozen boys and girls (men and women, on paper), all competing for first place on the Richter scale of ridiculousness. Only Ned and Phoebe, for whom I'm best man in September, could come up with this, I thought. But no. Stens became a thing about five years ago. Vicky Pattison, the 2015 *I'm a Celebrity* winner, has just had one, and soap writers can't stop using them to spice up their storylines.

My first thought was that it sounded expensive. I know what boys are like. They want beer, loads of it, and food, loads of it. I also know what my girl friends are like. They want wine, plenty of it, probably cocktails, which even the boys are now into, and nice food, containing vegetables. And Ibiza is trying to throw off the shackles of mass tourism in favour of the more exclusive, pricey kind.

The main problem, though, is that stag and hen dos are meant to be a kind of sending off, a chance to embarrass your mate one last time before they ascend into marital bliss. Arriving on a bright blue Thursday afternoon, I wondered how either Ned or Phoebe could have that experience with the other looking on.

The boys had one villa and the girls had another, a ten-minute walk away. That was the first good move, despite the fact the girls' villa was suspiciously much nicer than ours, which meant they did all the hosting and the bulk of the washing-up afterwards. Separate villas meant the girls were free to have a lovely brunch one morning, with games, fizz and hanging origami, while we flatulated at will and devised a violent version of blind man's buff involving a belt and rubber chickens strapped to our feet. Then, when the two groups were together, which was most of the time, we felt like a real party rather than a roving zoo.

The costs turned out to be comparable to other stags I've been on — the organising committee, which consisted mostly of girls, had booked everything in advance, drawing it up on a shared spreadsheet of nine tabs, so we didn't have to think about money at the time (the 24 of us spent £16,000 in total over the weekend, about £650 each). The girls' influence meant I came home full of calamari and tuna tartar feeling like I'd had a holiday, despite the debauchery, of which there was still plenty.

Some of the group went to get tattoos at 10.30pm on the Saturday. Simple Brits-abroad behaviour. But at least they didn't have to crawl home hiding them from their partners, because their partners were there too.

There was an evening when the girls locked Phoebe in a bathroom, told us boys to go away and performed on her the kind of traditional hen-do stunt best not mentioned. But we found out what it was and followed suit with Ned in the bedroom next door. It felt a bit weird but somehow nicer than it would have had it been done in secret.

Being together stopped things getting too out of control but that's not to say everything was perfect. Late one night the girls were woken to a noise complaint passed on by the booking agent, which had been prompted by the boys searching for a wicket deep into a game of rooftop cricket. Voices



Bride and groom Phoebe and Ned

were raised once, when we were trying to get taxis home from a club, though that was the drinks talking. The boys were often late but not by much.

Overall the whole thing just felt fitting. It was genuinely touching seeing Ned and Phoebe canoodling on the dancefloor and jumping into the Mediterranean hand in hand in budgee smugglers and a veil. They like nothing more than each other's company. They have the same friends and have brought loads of friends together through their sheer love of life (and huge rented house in east London). It wouldn't have felt right for the boys and girls to be apart.

A lot of our generation are like that, with friendship groups more mixed up. Harry from *When Harry Met Sally* has emphatically lost his argument that men and women can't just be friends. According to rom-com norms I'm meant to feel sad, like I'm about to lose my best friend. But it's fine, I quite like Ned too. And by having a joint send-off, they have done the opposite of suggesting they are about to disappear. They have set a precedent. They'll never get rid of us now.

Richard Assheton

cover story

Daisy Ridley: Star Wars gave me a leaky gut

At 21 she was plucked from a bit part in *Casualty* to star in the world's biggest movie franchise. The actress tells **Jonathan Dean** about dealing with the fallout and reinventing herself in three new movies

Before *Star Wars*, Daisy Ridley's CV was a succession of bit parts and a canned appearance in a second *Inbetweeners* film. If you weren't blinking, you might have caught the actress in episodes of *Casualty* or *Silent Witness*.

She was a complete unknown when JJ Abrams took us back to the galaxy far, far away with his *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and gave her the lead role of Rey in the 2015 reboot. At 21 her career jumped to light speed and the stresses and strains of instant global fame gave the Londoner holes in her gut.

"Essentially, it was a leaky gut," she says. Medically, what she means is that all the anxiety of her new, wild life led to ulcers.

"I was just knackered," Ridley explains. "I'd never travelled that much, or done press junkets, and my body deals with stress in a very physical way, so my gut was manifesting an emotional reaction to travelling around the world, people saying hello to me in the street. And me going, 'What's going on?' And worrying."

Worrying about what? "Oh shit, should it be me?" or "Am I good enough?" And I only really felt I was by the third film, *The Rise of Skywalker* [2019]. By then, I felt, 'OK I was chosen for a reason.' But it took a long time. It was super intense."

How did she cope? "By focusing on the job at hand, rather than the feedback because, whether that was positive or negative there was a feeling of vulnerability." She pauses. "And I have a wonderful family and home life so I could come home and sit with my mum and cuddle the dog."

And is everything OK now? "Well, now I have an autoimmune disease, which is aside from anything and unfortunately is just genetic."

She shrugs, smiling. "It has been a heck of a decade. Mark Hamill was also a nobody when George Lucas cast him as Luke Skywalker but it was a different world in 1977, when attention was more avoidable. Indeed Ridley is 32 now and, in career terms, the only people you can compare her to are the

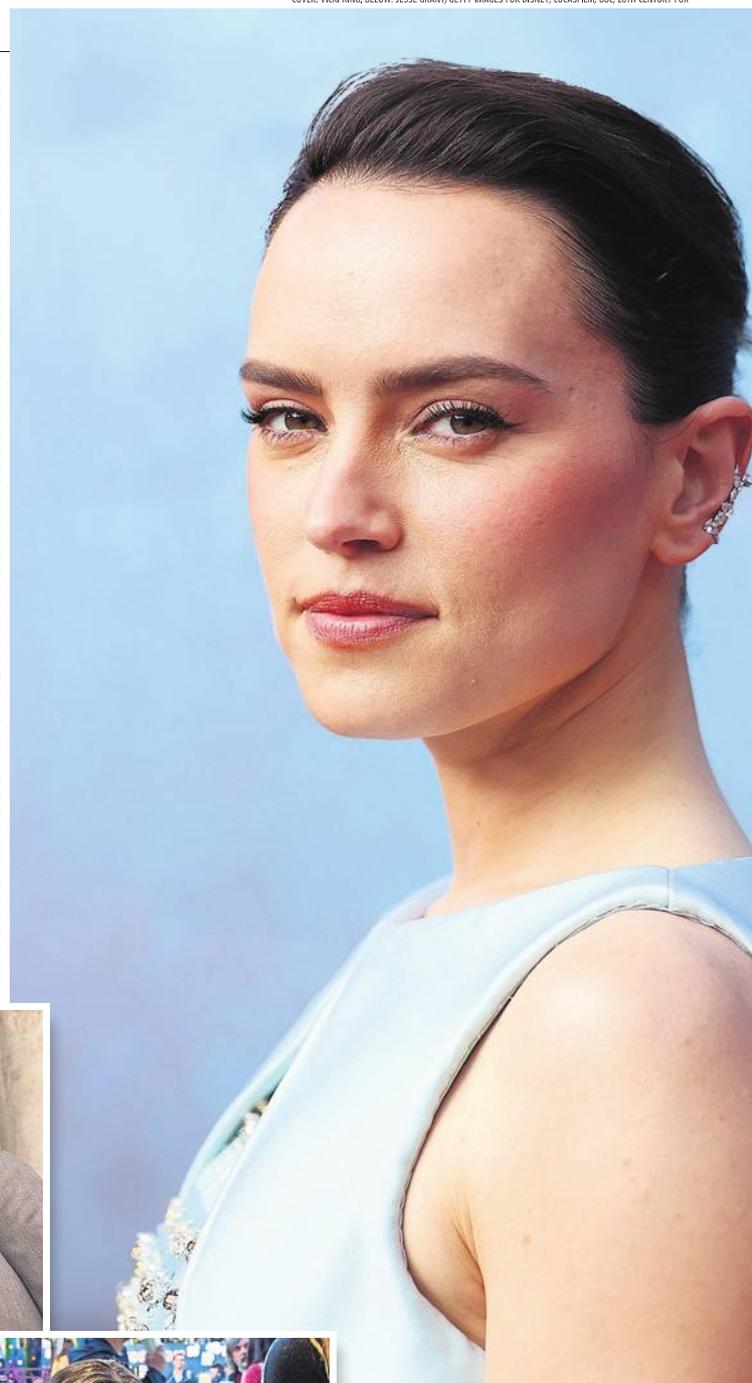
Harry Potter kids, Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint — similarly thrust from anonymity into the tight grip of a blockbuster franchise that keeps stars locked up for years.

However, while those three have led scattergun careers since Potter, Ridley has been laser-focused on throwing off the *Star Wars* shackle. We meet ostensibly to talk about a new biopic,



Main picture: Daisy Ridley. Top: in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Above: in *Young Woman and the Sea*. Above right: in *Casualty*. Top right: in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*

Young Woman and the Sea, which tells the story of the first woman to swim the English Channel. But that is just one of a trio of films she has either out now or imminently, with *Sometimes I Think About Dying*, an acclaimed indie about loneliness in which Ridley excelled, released in April, and *Magpie*, a delectable psychological thriller, due out soon.



One year after the end of *Star Wars*, Ridley made it on to The Sunday Times Young Rich List with £17 million, a wealth that can either lead to inaction or provide comfort to experiment. And right now she is doing the latter — after the anxiety of *Star Wars* she is in total control. In person, over brunch in central London, she is forthright and chipper, prone to speaking without pause, perhaps sometimes even surprised by what she has just come up with. (Never more so than in 2021, when she

baked a cake in the shape of a loo on *Celebrity Bake Off*. "I hadn't practised," she admits.)

She has been rushing about — New York, Paris, Australia, Texas, London, Rome, Los Angeles, New York, back to London. Good for the Air Miles at least? "I don't fly — unless it's for work," she replies. "We use trains, electric car. So it's making me very twitchy." Would she do the full Greta and take a boat to America? "There's never enough time."

She certainly won't be swimming there, or indeed anywhere, despite her role in *Young Woman and the Sea*. As the title suggests, the actress spent a lot of time in the water and so I assumed she was already a keen swimmer. "No," she says, bluntly. "My thing is to get in the water and flap my hands a bit." But she could swim? "No, I couldn't do front crawl!"

After half a length with an Olympic trainer she could barely breathe, so she trained four times a week for four months to film the final Channel swim, which took place over nine days on a set in the Black Sea. "That was



"Because I don't think I was aware of that when we were filming and when I watched it. I thought, 'Oh, it feels slightly of another time.' But it's joyful, not cynical. It makes people realise their dreams are possible ..." She cackles. "That sounds hilarious!"

The film is very much a product of its producer, Jerry Bruckheimer, the man with a Midas touch who dominated Hollywood with no-nonsense entertainment in the Eighties and Nineties. He is in the midst of putting together a female-fronted *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Can she have a word to get a role? "Oh, I

“I went around the world worrying, 'Am I good enough?'

had a word," she says, beaming. "I'm shameless. People think I'm one tool short of the box, but I was like, 'Please give me a *Pirates* job!'"

Ridley was born in London in 1992, daughter to Christopher, a photographer, and Louise, who did PR for a bank. As a teenager she went to board at Tring Park School for the Performing Arts on a scholarship before studying classical civilisation at Birkbeck, University of London. She did not finish her degree, opting instead to concentrate on acting, supported by various office, shop and bar jobs. Then came *Star Wars* and now comes the more personal, challenging work.

"I started in the big thing when I was 21," she says of her unusual path. "But I'm really proud that I'm flexing different muscles."

Magpie is her best role yet — she plays Anette, who stays at home with the baby while her ghostly husband, Ben, takes their older daughter to a film set for an acting role. What follows is a twisty infidelity romp of the sort they made so well in the Nineties. "Haven't hated a husband this much since *Gone Girl*!" one viewer said at a festival screening, which is funny because the film is based on an idea that Ridley had, which her husband, the actor Tom Bateman, then turned into a screenplay.

"We had to convince everybody it wasn't about us," she says, laughing. The couple met on the set of *Murder on the Orient Express* in 2017. "It's a conversation starter."

I like a line an actress says about how, despite her youth, the film industry is ready for her to "play the cranky grandma".

"Yes, that line was pointed," Ridley says, smiling. "When I was in my late twenties I was sent an offer to play the mother of a 17-year-old and so I responded and said, 'So, I was ... ten?'" After seven years Ridley is heading back to *Star Wars*, this time on her own terms and without, one hopes, a leaky gut. It certainly looks interesting. The as-yet-untitled Rey movie is written by Steven Knight of *Peaky Blinders* fame.

With this planned return she will clearly talk less openly than her old co-star John Boyega about *Star Wars* — he has criticised Disney for sidelining his character. And she nods along when I mention Boyega's statements. "I can only say what my personal feeling of those films is," she says. "And it is joy. My twenties were filled with this amazing thing, which is why I'm going back."

However, joy aside, she's well aware that the reboots — *The Force Awakens*, *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker* — were not without their critics. In the second film Rey, who had Jedi powers, was portrayed as having come from nothing, which was a bold move for a franchise obsessed with who everyone's father is. However, by the third film they had scrapped that and Rey was directly related to the evil Emperor after all. It did not go down well.

"I would say," she says about Rey's ancestry, "that my feelings are slightly beside the point. And I never want to invalidate someone else's feelings." Was her character's arc planned, or was it changed for the third film? "That was changed, I think. But I don't know. That's the thing. As an actor you submit yourself to the vision of someone else — I'm generally saying to the director that I trust them."

Yes, she is going back, but I do not think Ridley is simply being diplomatic — health aside, her experience on *Star Wars* just seems to be more positive than, say, Boyega's. "I haven't seen those guys for ages," she says of her old castmates.

Well, she has been busy, making the sort of film she wanted when she opted to get into this business. "And I've become more comfortable knowing everything is not for everyone," she says, smiling. "I mean, it's obviously nice when people like it, but knowing that does make things easier."

Young Woman and the Sea is released on May 31

Rotten Apple! This list of the greatest albums is comical

Apple Music has named Lauryn Hill's solo album as the best record of all time. **Will Hodgkinson** weighs in

Apple Music has spoken, and *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* is apparently the best album of all time — No 1 in a top 100 list the streaming service published this week.

My first thought is a predictable one: really? Yes, it is a wonderful piece of music — warm, soulful and historically significant, as Hill infused feminism and deep emotion into the predominantly masculine world of hip-hop. But is it really of greater significance than Stevie Wonder's *Songs in the Key of Life* (7), the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (20) and Love's *Forever Changes* (something has gone wrong — this is nowhere to be seen on the list)? No, it is not.

On top of that, some of the albums considered by Apple's panel (a mixture of "experts" and artists such as Nile Rodgers and Pharrell Williams) to be among the top 100 of the hundreds of thousands out there are, frankly, lame.

Jagged Little Pill (31!) by Alanis Morissette sounded like shouty, annoying pop-rock posing as grunge in 1995, and the past 30 years have done nothing to change that, just as *Rage Against the Machine* (97) will always be the rap-rock soundtrack to a teenage boy having a tantrum after being told to tidy his room. As for the Eagles' *Hotel California* (99), yes, the title song is great, but do a band who got massive by smoothing off Neil Young and Gram Parsons's edges and making country rock palatable to the casual listener deserve to be in the top 100? I'm not sure they do.

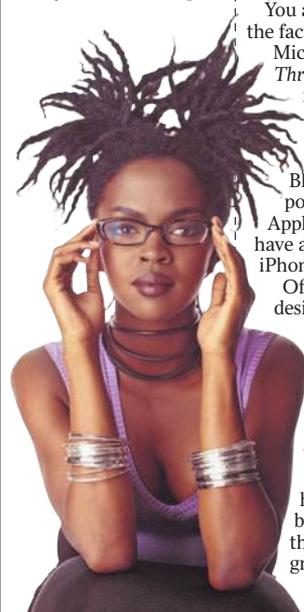
Then I realised. I have fallen into Apple's trap. You are meant to find the list objectionable. You are meant to come across like a gibbering old git, shaking your fist at the youngsters and their love of frothy pop and hippety-hop before being led, kindly but firmly, back to the retirement home, where you are given an extra dose of medication as you doze off to your scratchy copy of Carole King's *Tapestry* (at least that got in, at No 38).

You are meant to hit the roof at the fact that the Eighties boy-king Michael Jackson got in at No 2 with *Thriller* and Television's art-punk masterpiece *Marquee Moon* is nowhere to be seen. It is all a ploy to drive attention towards Apple because, as my colleague Blanca Schofield so poetically pointed out, "Saying you use Apple Music is a bit like saying you have an Android instead of an iPhone."

Of course, lists such as this are designed to spark debate, and it should in no way lessen your conviction that, say, Nickelback's *All the Right Reasons* is a misunderstood classic. But the Apple list has the vibe of being put together by squares posing as cool.

That is the real reason it is hard to take seriously. Not because it fails to subscribe to the established canon of the greatest albums of all time but because of the inescapable whiff of self-conscious posing.

Misplaced masterpiece? The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill came top



intense." She grimaces. "I told everyone I was scared of the open water and they thought I was lying." In the film her character is thrown apples as sustenance. At least Ridley had them? "But I'm allergic to apples," she says. "They make my lips bubbly and I can't breathe."

Worse things happen at sea? "I'm still injured," she continues, having once again put her body on the line, "from a scene when I'm being dragged unconscious. I pulled something, sort of in my chest and armpits. It was two years ago, still not right." She recommends an osteopath.

In the film Ridley plays Trudy Ederle, an American who in 1926 became the first woman to swim the Channel. She was extraordinary — "Her sister also made the first bikini. It's bonkers!" — and on returning to New York she was greeted by more than two million people in what is still one of the largest parades that city has seen.

The film is an anomaly these days — a family-friendly, glossy, feelgood tale. "And it's funny," Ridley says.

THE CRITICS

Purely for the petrolheads

A thundering beginning and a searing sense of place fail to compensate for the wearisome repetition and empty theatrics that slowly swamp this much-awaited blockbuster. It's a prequel to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and an origin tale for a breakout character: Charlize Theron's lethal henchwoman, Imperator Furiosa. It also, alas, falls squarely into the Disney *Cruella* trap by veering away from narrative originality and concerning itself only with superfluous backstory. Yes, it's nice to know how Furiosa acquired her bionic arm, just as it was nice to know why Cruella hated dalmatians. But that's simply not enough to sustain two and a half hours of nihilistic *Wacky Races*.

It starts well, though, with expectations of mythic grandeur as the preteen Furiosa (Aylia Browne, doing sterling work) is kidnapped by grungy bikers from a tiny green oasis in a vast, sand-blown postapocalyptic Australia. Her fearless mother, Mary (Charlee Fraser), launches herself in hot pursuit, sniper rifle in hand, running barefoot, then horse riding, then motorbike riding, ultimately terrifying the captors with her sheer relentlessness and murderous intensity. The veteran director George Miller is at his best here, streamlining all narrative threads to a propulsive charge towards a primal goal.

Then that sequence ends, and another begins, and the film splits off into vaguely interconnected chapters that may seem moody and thoughtful but kill the momentum, as well as betray the "great race" structural concept that made *Fury Road* so appealing. In its place we have Furiosa

Chris Hemsworth wears a latex nose and dentures for no obvious reason as Dementus



Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

15, 148min
★★★★☆

bouncing around the sun-scorched Wasteland between two warlords and surrogate daddies. They are the pustular Immortan Joe (Lachy Hulme) and the scary yet goofy Dementus, played by a self-indulgent, scenery-chewing Chris Hemsworth. The *Thor* actor wears a latex nose and prominent dentures for no discernible reason other than the permission to overplay every scene. Less Peter Sellers, more Les Patterson.

Furiosa eventually emerges into kick-ass womanhood, when she's played by Anya Taylor-Joy. The *Queen's Gambit* star gives fearsome

close-ups but adds little else and never convinces as the character who will become Theron's Amazonian warrior. This Furiosa is also lumbered with a dud man-friend, Jack, played by a catatonically bland Tom Burke. Still, the film looks fabulous, and includes a couple of savvy references to *The Disasters of War* by Francisco Goya. And, yes, the set-piece stunts are done for real. But are we now all cola-slurping petrolheads at a monster truck rally, cheering gormlessly from the stands when the Raminator goes smash? There has to be more. **KM**
In cinemas

Any self-respecting romance is driven by the question, "Will they or won't they?" This Lithuanian melodrama pushes that premise to breaking point until it becomes, "Can they or can't they?" The paramours are Elena (Greta Grineviciute), a dancer teaching deaf teenagers in Vilnius, and Dovydas (Kestutis Cincenas), the sad-eyed sign language interpreter who's been hired for the gig. The pair crackle with chemistry. The eye contact is

Slow
15, 108min
★★★★☆

intimate, the smiles flirty — soon they are in Elena's bedroom, leaning in for a kiss, when Dovydas announces flatly that he is asexual. "Sorry," he says. "I've never been attracted to anybody."

Elena is still attracted despite Dovydas's assurances that they will never achieve physical ecstasy. It's that seemingly hopeless desire that defines the narrative motor. They fall deeply in love and persist, through emotional desperation and Elena's increasing

sexual frustration, in attempting to conjure up Dvoydas's libido.

The aborted sex scenes are the strongest moments. Here the writer-director Marija Kavtaradze examines the performative nature of intimacy. The lack of subplots and supporting characters is limiting but there are great performances, and you'll admire Kavtaradze's easygoing shooting style. **KM**
In cinemas

the classic film

Trainspotting (1996)

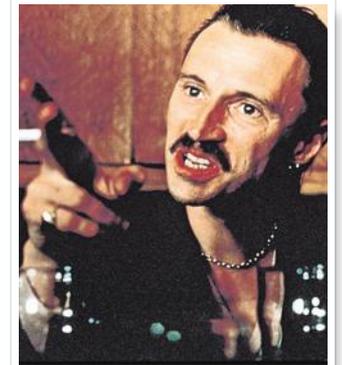
18, 94min
★★★★★

Sometimes you don't know whether to watch *Trainspotting* or just listen to it. Danny Boyle's black comedy groundbreaker about heroin addicts in Leith, starring Ewan McGregor and Robert Carlyle, was the point at which music in cinema reached a maximalist high point. The film is wall-to-wall bangers, slyly stitched together, from Iggy Pop's *Lust for Life* to Lou Reed's *Perfect Day* and right through to the climactic, thumping *Born Slippy Nuxx* by *Underworld*.

This foregrounding of propulsive tracks was Boyle copying Tarantino copying Scorsese, who originally was copying the films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, the latter being the grandfather of the *Trainspotting* producer Andrew Macdonald. It's almost as if the film was destined to happen.

One long rolling megamix of music and image, it was described at the time of its release as something that is "addictive" and, like the subject, injected "right into the vein". It remains so today. Easy to start, all-consuming, impossible to quit. **KM**

Rereleased in cinemas



Robert Carlyle put in a memorable performance as the sadistic Begbie

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Each Wednesday, Times+ members can enjoy a trip to Everyman with a friend. This month, you could watch *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*. Starring Anya Taylor-Joy and Chris Hemsworth. In selected cinemas on May 24.

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EVERYMAN

Glen Powell and Richard Robichaux in *Hit Man*

Finally, a good assassin movie

the big film

Richard Linklater's comedy about an undercover hitman is as thrilling as it is funny, says **Kevin Maher**

Hit Man

15, 115min
★★★★☆

Ron's every utterance. So assured is Ron that he soon arouses the desires of a would-be client called Madison (Adria Arjona), leading to a nascent romance, a conflict of interests and an ingenious final act where the boundaries between Ron and Johnson become inherently, delectably and homicidally blurred.

Linklater has been funny before (see *School of Rock* and *Dazed and Confused*) but rarely this eccentric. *Hit Man* is more akin to Steven

Soderbergh's *The Informant!* than anything in his catalogue, and it's buoyed by a go-for-broke turn from Powell, who is also the film's co-writer — talk about writing yourself a winning role. Johnson is a genius creation for any up-and-coming actor who is, as Powell seems to be, pecking at the heels of the A-list. In teacher mode the 35-year-old Texan gets to do socially awkward, with spectacles and greasy hair, and nights alone with his two cats Id and Ego (there's a joke

there about the dual nature of their owner). The prominent gym-sculpted body, however, slightly punctures the illusion, even if it bolsters a transition into the swoonworthy leading man arena of killer himbo Ron.

There are also immaculate one-liners, delivered with such aplomb that, when the film premiered at Venice Film Festival, the audience erupted into applause at each zinger. As in? Madison is baffled as to why the "ruthless" hitman Ron displays such good manners. "Hey," he says, snarling yet cool. "Chivalry may be dead but I didn't kill it!"

Linklater proves himself to be not just a definitive multitalented auteur who can tackle any genre. He's also saved the hitman genre from itself.

In cinemas

The Garfield Movie

U, 101min
★★★★☆

You'd be forgiven for forgetting what Chris Pratt looked like, given the amount of animation voice acting he does. Not content with *Onward*, two Lego movies and the *Super Mario Bros* movie, the mickey-taking everyman is now the voice of Garfield the cat in his latest, slightly entertaining screen incarnation.

Well, you can see why they wanted Pratt because charm is needed here — Garfield just isn't a particularly likeable hero. Without wanting to get too nanny state about it, do we really want to root for a guy whose only qualities are gluttony and indolence? Given that the rapacious tabby routinely polishes off several large dishes of lasagne in one sitting, why is he not morbidly obese? And while we're at it, why does he hate



Garfield, the antihero saving your half-term

Mondays? He doesn't go to work or school, being a cat.

Odie the dog, meanwhile, has somehow morphed from being a dim-witted stooge to a clone of Gromit from *Wallace and Gromit* — a silent, uber-competent sidekick whose only purpose is to dig Garfield out of scrapes.

Snoop Dogg voicing Snoop Cat is a bit of a non-starter, but there are bright spots in Mark Dindal's film, most of them involving Samuel L. Jackson as Garfield's long-lost father, Vic, Hannah Waddingham as their imperious feline nemesis, Jinx, and her *Ted Lasso* co-star Brett Goldstein as Jinx's meat-head henchman.

"Have you ever jumped a train?" Vic asks. "I've never jumped," Garfield replies. His addition to watching Catflix provides a couple of easy laughs too. Beyond that it's slim pickings. My nine-year-old loved it, for the record, but for parents it is great for a cheeky cinema snooze. **Ed Potton**
In cinemas

The Present

PG, 87min
★★★★☆

The Parent Trap meets *Rashomon* meets *Groundhog Day* in an overly ambitious and muddled premise for this charmless family film. It opens at the loveless LA dinner table of the dysfunctional Diehl family, where the depressed father Eric (Greg Kinnear) and the brittle mother Jen (Isla Fisher) are about to announce their break-up to three disinterested, distracted and self-absorbed kids. Just then youngest moppet Taylor (Easton Rocket Sweda) reaches for a magical grandfather clock and rewinds the hands.

Hey presto, everyone suddenly relives again, in its entirety, what appears to be one of the worst days of their lives as the kids go back with the aim of reuniting their bickering, yet still supposedly compatible parents. It's kooky and fun in theory, and certainly

director Christian Ditter (*Love, Rosie*), working from a script by TV writer Jay Martel, attempts some comedy quirk, with Taylor playing the stock market and her older sister Emma (Shay Rudolph) deliberately triggering a "hilarious" anaphylactic shock in their mother's hunky new suitor.

But there's an odd underlying bleakness here. The Diehls' marriage is doomed, the kids are callous brats (yeah, murder mummy's hunk, why don't you?) and divorce, rather than metaphysical time-jumping, ultimately seems like a preferable outcome.

Plus, Martel's script is structurally confused and tries to simultaneously replay the same day from the perspectives of each protagonist while demonstrating that this day is changing hugely due to their actions.

The film can never fully square that circle and instead targets all narrative lines towards a slushy, improbable ending full of nonsense epiphanies and ersatz emotion. **KM**
In cinemas

music reviews

Kravitz world is a funky place to live

The star's soulful music hints at Prince and James Brown, writes Will Hodgkinson

Lenny Kravitz is rarely taken as seriously as other musical greats of 30 years' standing. Maybe it is because he seems to spend so much time attending fashion shows, going out with beautiful women, designing beautiful hotels, riding beautiful horses and generally being the Zoolander of rock. Yet he has written such indelible classics as *It Ain't Over 'til It's Over* and *Are You Gonna Go My Way*, he plays any number of instruments, and he has a deep musicality to line up alongside Prince, James Brown and George Clinton.

Put away for a moment Kravitz's commitment to being really, really, ridiculously good-looking and there is much to enjoy in his latest funk-laden, soulful record. In an age when so much mainstream music is computer-generated, or at the very least digitally enhanced, Kravitz's old-fashioned commitment to virtuosity — while inhabiting the Sixties/Seventies musical milieu that has always been his spiritual home — proves appealing.

Take *It's Just Another Fine Day (In This Universe of Love)*, which opens the album. A satisfyingly heavy bass holds a funk rhythm over which Kravitz lays down a bit of squealing guitar and a melody recalling Marvin Gaye's *Inner City Blues*. *TK421* harks back to James Brown's funky yelps, choppiness and emphasis on the first beat of the bar, and the reverberating guitars on *Paralyzed* are surely a reference to Led Zeppelin's ominous masterpiece *When the Levee Breaks*.

Meanwhile, *Stuck in the Middle* borrows not only Prince's breathy falsetto but also his mingling of sex



EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES

pop

Lenny Kravitz
Blue Electric Light

Roxie Records/BMG
★★★★☆

T

Jazz album

Fred Hersch reviewed in our best jazz albums of the year round-up at [thetimes.co.uk/arts](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/arts)

and spirituality in a song that equates reincarnation with erotic oneness. Kravitz is so at ease in the music of his influences that he approaches it all with a light touch.

What, then, stops this enjoyably assured album from taking its place among the classics Kravitz has taken inspiration from? The lack of depth at the heart of it. While *Inner City Blues* captures the crushing weight of the dice being stacked against you, *It's Just Another Fine Day* finds Kravitz shouting "lockdown!", which, given he spent said period of enclosure in the Bahamas, doesn't have quite the same sense of pathos. Elsewhere he falls into wellness speak; hearing him promise to shine his light and live his truth

makes you wonder if Gwyneth Paltrow was renting the Bahamian beach villa next to his.

Ultimately, though, his feeling for the music he loves and his straightforward way with a positive message wins out. "There's so much hatred going around today. We stoke the fire with our words and the things we say," he roars over the glam rock boogie of *Love Is My Religion*. It's a simple sentiment, but then so was *Give Peace a Chance*. On that realisation, Kravitz world, where all the beautiful people live together in peace and harmony, ideally in a stylish luxury hotel with some horses nearby, doesn't seem like such a bad place to hang out after all.

Twenty One Pilots
Clancy

Fueled by Ramen/Atlantic
★★★★☆

This Ohio duo are huge in America, combining singalong melodies with a pick'n'mix approach that has anything from rap to punk-pop to rave being poured into their astonishingly successful stew. And there is some pretty good songwriting at the heart of it all. "When darkness rolls on you, push on through," suggests Tyler Joseph on *Oldies Station*, a Billy Joel-like piano ballad, while *Backslide* borrows from British hip-hop for a tale of falling into bad habits. But the constant stylistic jumping around ends up feeling rather soulless, lessening the impact of the lyrical cries of woe and making you wonder if the whole thing isn't some clever trick being played on the listener.

Vince Staples
Dark Times

Def Jam
★★★★☆

Alongside starring as a fictionalised version of himself in *The Vince Staples Show* on Netflix, this Long Beach rapper has gone back to hip-hop traditions — obscure funk and soul samples, a rhythmic flow, a social conscience — for downbeat vignettes that capture a state of mind as much as anything. On *Nothing Matters* he faces up to heartbreak with bleak acceptance while *Government Cheese* finds him suffering survivor's guilt at escaping hard times — a rare thing in the rags-to-riches fantasy world of contemporary rap. He even goes towards new age dreaming in *These Are the Dark Times*, adding to the impression of Staples as a true original who has more in common with Portishead than Puff Daddy.

La Luz
News of the Universe

Sub Pop
★★★★☆

A cursory listen to La Luz, formed by the singer Shana

Cleveland in Seattle in 2012, would suggest a fun band with a Sixties psychedelic/surf rock influence. Within this candy-coloured world, however, are some dark shades. Cleveland wrote La Luz's latest shortly after being diagnosed with breast cancer, two years after the birth of her son. "Change is the only law, don't be afraid," she reasons on the title track. The heavy fuzz guitar of *Strange World* leads to a song of harmony-rich menace, and the baroque, xylophone-laden *Poppies* is so pretty, it would be easy to miss its words about disappearing under the weight of troubles. This is an intriguing album, unsettling in its sweet and surrealistic approach to tackling heavy issues.



Schubert's butterflies and a British violin goddess

The pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard, below, is one of those French intellectual musicians with three brains, fearlessly wading through Boulez and other thickets of the contemporary repertoire. So what is he playing here? A healthy selection of Schubert's Ländler: popular dance pieces written for domestic consumption, so brief and simple that this 68-minute album contains more than 100 of them, mostly in waltz rhythms — all over just after they've begun.

Aimard's approach to these miniature jewels is entirely suitable and rewarding. He shapes and shades



the notes with poise and subtle inflections, yet nothing becomes overdone, precious or brittle.

The 70-year-old Steinway he plays is equally special, with a bright upper register perfect for spotlighting the intimacy and vulnerability of Schubert's melodies, as fragile and beautiful as butterflies. Under the authentic Schubert spell, I would happily have listened on for much longer.

There's a novel feature as well about the latest album by Rachel Podger, the British goddess of the gut-stringed violin, supported by a quartet from her period instrument band, Brecon Baroque. The repertoire remains centred on the 17th and 18th

classical

Pierre-Laurent Aimard
Schubert

Pentatone
★★★★☆

Rachel Podger
The Muses Restor'd

Channel Classics
★★★★☆

century, but after more than 30 releases she has finally put mainland Europe aside and turned to the wonderful instrumental output of the British Isles. A sonata by that famous German visitor Handel may start us off, but the heart of the matter lies in English consort suites by three quirky genre masters (William Lawes, Matthew Locke, John Jenkins), with the adventurous and relatively unknown Richard Jones thrown in for good measure.

Podger's playing lacks nothing in expressivity. The Jenkins and Locke prove wonderfully bouncy, and the album's selection of adapted folk tunes couldn't be more charming if they tried. Above all, Podger and her Brecon colleagues radiate infectious delight in the music they perform.

Geoff Brown

classical

Fatma Said

Milton Court, Barbican EC2

★★★★☆

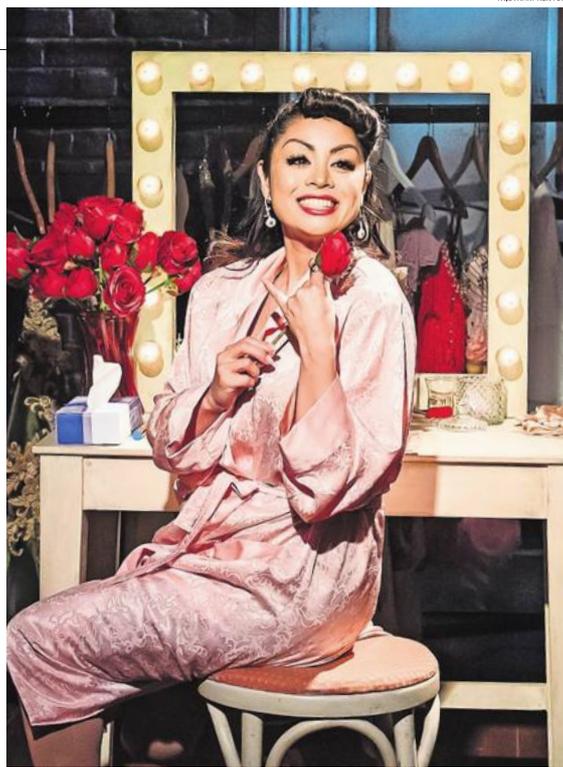
Anything goes with the Egyptian soprano Fatma Said: we know that from her album recitals variously incorporating the music of Egypt, Lebanon, Ravel, Lehár and Whitney Houston. Unfortunately, this live showcase proved that some things go much better than others. On she marched for the very classical first half, eager for business, with Joseph Middleton, the perfect accompanist, two steps behind. But once embarked on her Mozart, Schubert and Schumann, imperfections kept arriving, with German diction askew, glaring top notes leaving lower siblings in a blur and little acoustic nourishment emanating from an auditorium only half full.

The magic came when Said sustained quietness and didn't push, as in Schubert's *Nachtviolen*, parts of Schumann's *Meine Rose*, and every note of Mozart's almost divinely beautiful *Abendempfindung*. But it only took a loud note blazing away like a car's undipped headlights (take the word "klagen" in Schubert's *Ständchen*) for the spell to be cruelly punctured. Audience response to all this was not much above the perfunctory.

Luckily, after the interval we stepped outside the lieder world into music warmed by folk song and the popular traditions of Spain and the Middle East. Said immediately sounded happier. Words, tone and projection were crisper and steadier. The audience cheered up alongside, greeting de Falla's *Seven Popular Songs* (repertoire favourites of the legendary Victoria de los Angeles) with spontaneous applause, and savouring every quietly extended note and trill in the Arab-Latin fusion of Najib Hankash's closing song, translated as *Give Me a Flute and Sing*. Middleton was equally unleashed, tumbling into the Spanish rhythms with loud panache, although still leaving the star room to shine.

The second half's only drawback was the encore, Jerome Kern's *The Way You Look Tonight*, squashed by Said's note-gliding and a sludgy accompaniment.

Geoff Brown



Julie Yammanee delivers funny and endearing solo turns

Old-school showbiz fun

This tribute to Hello, Dolly! creator Jerry Herman is uplifting, says **Donald Hutera**

theatre

Jerry's Girls

Menier Chocolate Factory,

SE1 (120min)

★★★★☆

During his creative heyday from the mid-Sixties to the late Eighties, via hit productions such as *Hello, Dolly!*, *Mame* and *La Cage aux Folles*, the American musicals composer and lyricist Jerry Herman wrote some of the best Broadway earworms.

Originally created in 1981 by the director Larry Alford, the choreographer Wayne Cilento and Herman himself, this cabaret-style compilation show is a tribute to Herman's craft as a popular tunesmith. The result, in Hannah Chissick's peppery

revival at the Menier Chocolate Factory, is undemanding and uplifting, old-school showbiz fun.

The production is modest but still redolent of greasepaint and glamour. We are in a vintage, rather than modern, theatre. The backdrop of Paul Farnsworth's set is a worn brick wall. Each cast member has a dressing table, with bright lightbulbs framing an imaginary mirror and a wheeled costume rack just behind. About half of the show's 30 or so songs are delivered in this backstage area, while the rest — usually the more comic or grandstanding numbers — occur in front of a handy red curtain.

Herman's impressive back catalogue

“ Herman wrote some of the best earworms in Broadway history

veers between catchy numbers such as *Put on Your Sunday Clothes* (memorably featured in the 2008 Pixar film *Wall-E*) and the rousing *The Best of Times*, to melancholically romantic or bluesy ballads such as the great *If He Walked into My Life* and *Time Heals Everything* (the latter from Herman's *Mack and Mabel*, originally a flop but now one of his best-loved scores). The songs are distributed among Cassidy Janson, Jessica Martin and Julie Yammanee to capitalise on their respective personalities: sophisticated, seasoned and perky.

Their harmonising on *Song on the Sand* is soothing and sweet, and they pool their musical comedy resources. The burlesque-house novelty number *Take It All Off* receives the right mix of tongue-in-cheek vulgarity and gusto, while *Hello, Dolly!* is delivered in an irresistibly knowing fashion.

Other highlights: Martin's fiercely dramatic *I Don't Want to Know* (from another now well-regarded Herman failure, *Dear World*), or just about any of the endearing and funny Yammanee's solo turns. Matt Cole's choreography is consistently adept and the sparkling accompaniment of the six-piece, all-female band. And above all, there is the energy and emotional pull of Herman's indelible music.

To June 29, menierchocolatefactory.com

theatre

Passing Strange

Young Vic, SE1 (155min)

★★★★☆

If this show were a rock album it would be a triple-disc set with a psychedelic sleeve depicting hipsters crowned with Afros and Mohicans. And, as with all triple albums, it would contain a few songs you wouldn't want to hear more than once.

In Liesl Tommy's gig theatre production, though, the best of them stay rattling around in your brain, thanks in part to the sheer exuberance of the performances. The last time I saw the ultra-versatile *Hamilton* veteran Giles Terera, just weeks ago, he was dropping bons mots as a careerist academic in *Power of Sail* at the Menier Chocolate Factory. At the Young Vic he is transformed into a strutting, self-aware guitar hero. From the moment he winks at us after firing off his first blues-rock lick we are at his mercy.

He has an offbeat story to tell. Staged on Broadway in 2008 but only

now making its journey across the Atlantic, *Passing Strange* is a power chord coming-of-age memoir by the black singer-songwriter Stew Stewart, who survived the trauma of being brought up with no street cred in a middle-class, churchgoing neighbourhood in Los Angeles. Eager to break loose, he went off to the scuzzier parts of Amsterdam and Berlin in the 1980s to search for his real, bohemian identity.

One reason you warm to Terera's narrator is he understands that his younger self — known as Youth, and played with brio by Keenan Munn-Francis — is playing games with race. When he tries to win over his earnest new Berlin acquaintances by pretending to be a rapper from the lower depths he is trying on one more fashion accessory.

Stewart's cartoonish portrait of Europeans seems designed for New Yorkers whose idea of foreign travel is

taking the tunnel to New Jersey. Still, the evening is infused with burlesque, punkish energy. There's terrific support from Renée Lamb, David Albury, Caleb Roberts and Nadia Violet Johnson as a rambunctious, ever-changing assortment of lovers, pseudos and hangers-on. Rachel Adedeji exudes calm as Stewart's heroically tolerant mother.

Some of the numbers, co-written with Heidi Rodewald, have a genuinely anthemic quality. It helps that the cast are quite capable of crashing through the fourth wall and joshing with the audience. And Stewart's script contains zingers. "I'm a philosophy professor and part-time sex worker," announces one of Youth's new-found friends. It's just a shame that the show runs out of ideas in the second half and turns mawkish at the end. Until then, it's a blast.

Clive Davis
To July 6, youngvic.org

pop

Eric Clapton

Royal Albert Hall

★★★★☆

"Nice to be here again," said Eric Clapton, gazing around the Royal Albert Hall as most ageing rockers might survey their fully operational back garden brewery. To say he's a regular is an understatement: Clapton has played such frequent and lengthy runs here that this four-night stint feels not so much a homecoming as a quick pop-in to collect his post.

His previous residencies have sometimes alternated between hits shows and pure blues nights. This was a one-night amalgam. Over two electric sets and an acoustic interlude, Clapton dotted Cream, Derek and the Dominos, Blind Faith and solo favourites between stretches of blues covers acting as vehicles for his legendary quicksilver solos.

Fans of *Layla*, *Wonderful Tonight* and *Sunshine of Your Love* — an encore at other shows on the tour — might have left disappointed, and no sheriffs were even superficially injured in the making of this show. Lovers of guitars wailing, sighing and gently weeping, though, were lavishly rewarded.

Of late, Clapton has struck his most divisive public poses since Rock Against Racism launched in response to his infamous "keep Britain white" rant on stage in 1976. During the pandemic he released several singles attacking lockdowns, masks and vaccines, and refused to play shows that required audiences to show proof of vaccination.

But here, musically and politically, he let his guitar do most of the talking. For the first electric set he played a guitar painted with the Palestinian flag, its message all the louder on *Prayer of a Child*, the pleading hymnal he released last year. "The world is crying," Clapton sang as footage of bombed Gazan cities played out on the overhead screens.

Otherwise, letting his fingers fly with an expression of ecstatic reverie, Clapton embodied a sheer celebration of sound and virtuosity. The electric blues numbers were masterclasses, particularly a steamy take on Willie Dixon's *I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man*, a bop-along to Bo Diddley's *Before You Accuse Me* and a fire-and-brimstone *Cross Road Blues*, Robert Johnson's soul-selling signature track that would have the Devil dancing to its tune.

And when he took to his acoustic accompanied by a double bassist for *Driftin' Blues*, Jimmy Cox's ragtime *Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out* and a *Happy Birthday* for his auntie Sylvia, his elder statesman standing gave him the authentic air of the Mississippi porch bluesmen he always so revered.

Of the light smattering of hits, a punchy and vital *Badge* exuded a Sixties counterculture haze, his JJ Cale cover *Cocaine* was a pulse-quicken powerhouse and *Tears in Heaven*, though delivered with more swing these days, still jerked a tear or two. But this was not a night for pleasing crowds, it was for reviving and revitalising the masters.

Mark Beaumont
Royal Albert Hall, tonight

first night

games

Senua's Saga: Hellblade II
Xbox Series X/S (via Game Pass) and PC
★★★★☆

Playing *Senua's Saga: Hellblade II* is unlike anything I have experienced this year. Like its 2017 Bafta-winning predecessor from Ninja Theory, a small Cambridge-based developer acquired by Xbox Game Studios in 2018, it is a harrowing ordeal that forces us to confront trauma and mental health. But this time we do it at an even bigger scale.

Our heroine, Senua, returns to hunt the Vikings responsible for destroying her village, only to find they are sacrificing slaves to a colossal giant. Wrestling with the symptoms of psychosis — which include nightmarish hallucinations and troubling voices in her head — she sets about freeing the land of oppression.

Senua's Saga has more in common with a literary epic than a traditional game. Characters have depth and long passages are spent walking through a beautifully detailed 10th-century Iceland as the plot unfolds around us. It is slowly paced, but that intentionally allows us to feel the grind of Senua's journey.

Visually it is astonishing. Realism is the emphasis and that is most notable in character movement during the brutal fighting scenes. Each battle works in a similar way to the previous game, taking place in specific areas where Senua's enemies must be killed in methodical one-on-one duels before she can proceed. And now they are even more cinematic. The combat is sensationally choreographed.

Solving puzzles makes up the other half of the game. You still have to search Senua's surroundings periodically for hidden symbols or manipulate the environment to unlock the path ahead. But this lack of improvement did not concern me as the atmosphere and emotional writing is so evocative.

Senua's periodic detachment from reality conjures terrifying horror tinged with surrealism, not unlike the films of Dario Argento and Robert Eggers. The actress Melina Juergens brings Senua to life with a raw vulnerability that makes everything relatable, regardless of how bizarre the game gets. This is a superbly powerful piece of storytelling.

Joshua Lamb

Prepare to get drunk on Degas

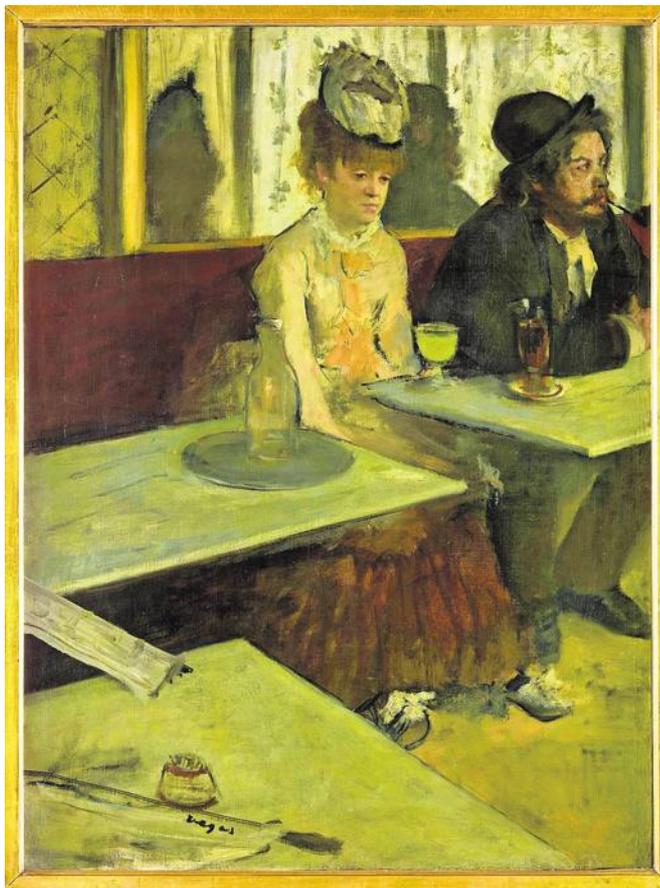
A splendid show brings us classics — and says a lot about Glasgow too, says Joanna Moorhead

visual art

Discovering Degas: Collecting in the Time of William Burrell

The Burrell Collection, Glasgow

★★★★☆



Right: In a Café (L'Absinthe) from 1875-76. Below: Horse Trotting, late 1880s



In February 1892 a painting by Edgar Degas, up for sale in London, was met by a wall of hisses from those present in the auction room. The painting seemed uncontroversial enough: a melancholy woman and a dejected-looking man sitting in a café. The work's most striking feature is the unusual way in which the scene has been framed: the couple are off-centre, and a sizeable portion of the canvas is taken up with an empty banquette and an unoccupied table. But as *Discovering Degas: Collecting in the Time of Sir William Burrell* makes clear, unexpected elements in the crop were a hallmark of the work of

the Parisian impressionist. The oddest example in this exhibition is *Jockeys Before the Race* (c 1878-79), in which a pole dissects the head of the main horse.

But it wasn't the composition that attracted the ire of the auction house crowd; it was the subject matter. The couple portrayed in *In a Café (L'Absinthe)* (1875-76) are a sex worker and an alcoholic; the hisses that greeted the scene signalled that, as far as many "decent" people were concerned, they weren't suitable for art, which should focus on luscious landscapes and shiny, beautiful people.

Degas, though, wasn't so interested in shiny, beautiful folk. He is best known as the chronicler of ballet

dancers, and the curators Frances Fowle and Pippa Stephenson-Sit encourage us to look more closely at the young women in tulle skirts whose pliés grace his canvases. Far from being voyeuristic, they suggest, he was focused on the sheer graft of dancing. And indeed there is more grit than glamour in the ballet paintings here: the girls in *The Red Ballet Skirts* (c 1900) are real-life, stockily built, thick-ankled. The exhausted-looking youngster in *The Green Ballet Skirt* (c 1896) rubs her aching foot.

How did so much work by Degas end up in Scotland? Like many impressionists, the artist had to look beyond a Paris that rejected his talents, and he found it among the Glaswegian *nouveaux riches*. The dealer who fuelled the trade was Alex Reid, a one-time flatmate of Vincent van Gogh. (How ironic it is that this artist, whose works now sell for hundreds of millions and yet who sold no paintings in his lifetime, shared digs with a dealer.)

Van Gogh isn't the subject of this show, yet one can't but be fascinated by his portrait of Reid included here: it turns out he is a doppelgänger for the painter. Reid, though, was far more interested in paintings by Degas — so much so that he became known as "Degas Reid". His championing of the impressionist is almost certainly what encouraged the wealthy Glasgow shipbuilder William Burrell to become the biggest UK collector of his work. This show reunites all 23 of his paintings at the Burrell Collection, which reopened in 2022 after a five-year refurbishment.

As well as Degas, this marvellous exhibition offers many insights into Victorian Glasgow and the role of the collector. It focuses on Degas' use of light and shade, the interesting viewpoints he used (one fascinating painting in this respect is *The Ballet Scene from Meyerbeer's Opera "Robert le Diable"*, 1876) and the role of his sculpture — now something he is famed for, but created by him merely as aids for painting. And last but not least: although it's a ticketed show, Burrell's most famous Degas — *The Rehearsal* (c 1874) — remains upstairs on view for free.

Bravo, Burrell.
To September 30, burrellcollection.com

pop

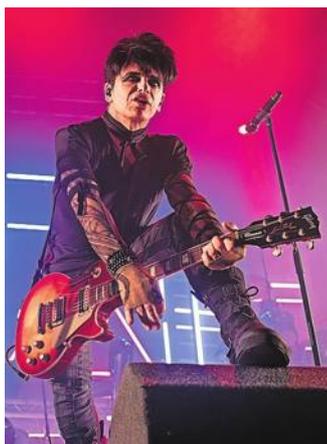
Gary Numan
O2 Academy, Glasgow
★★★★☆

Gary Numan knows how to put on a retro party. On tour to mark 45 years since the release of his seminal albums

Replicas and *The Pleasure Principle*, the synth-pop pioneer was gloriously kitsch yet disturbingly dystopian.

Simple, striking staging set the tone. A glowing triangle inside a square surrounded by cheap strip lighting and an overload of multicoloured lasers harked back to the glory days of *Top of the Pops*. Everyone wore black — and cloaks in the case of the keyboardist and bassist who flanked Numan at the front of the stage.

It helped that the 66-year-old Londoner didn't appear to have aged. The derision that Numan endured for admitting to having hair transplants was worth it. His thick black thatch



An ageless Gary Numan excelled

and still boyish, tattooed body sent the mostly male, middle-aged crowd back in time from the moment moody *Replicas* opened the show.

The set list stuck to the two albums that made Numan — as Tubeway Army — an overnight sensation in 1979, with the chart-topping singles *Are 'Friends' Electric?* and *Cars*. Yet as the concert made clear, little else on those records came close to mainstream pop. For an hour the soundtrack was mostly menacing, industrial synth-rock. A magnificent *ME* had thunderous, military-style drums. *Films* was a furious mix of sinister, cascading synths and sparse, spat-out lyrics. *You Are in My Vision* was grinding metronomic rock. The singer switched between synths, guitar and simply standing, twitching his body as though casting a spell, or

crouching down by the front of the stage. His detached delivery hasn't changed. Between songs he didn't utter a word.

Deep into the set a poppy *Down in the Park* had fans dancing and, for the first time, able to howl along en masse. At its end Numan soaked up the applause by standing legs astride and arms aloft for more than a minute. The band made a mock exit before returning for a two-song encore everyone knew was coming. *Cars* was a soaring singalong. *Are 'Friends' Electric?* was gloriously chaotic. For a moment midway through it looked as though Numan might address the audience. Either he changed his mind or it was only a tease from a man who remains an enigma.

Lisa Verrico
Touring to June 9, garynuman.com

Compelling performances, maddening plot

Carol Midgley TV review



Insomnia
Paramount+

The good news about **Insomnia**, Paramount's six-part adaptation of Sarah Pinborough's novel, is that Vicky McClure is better in it than she was in *Trigger Point*. Actually, it is the most compelling performance I have seen of hers. I include *Line of Duty* in that.

The bad news is that it is spoilt by histrionic background music and too much of TV drama's boring suck-dummy: flashbacks to childhood. Is it just me who hates this? I do appreciate that flashbacks are crucial to telling this story of two sisters who were put into care as children when their

mother had a psychotic breakdown, but they are overused. We are shown these same eerie sequences over and over, which makes things drag.

Oh, and the plot is batshit crazy with a ridiculous denouement. But is it moreish? Definitely. Yes, it ticks every box on the cliché bingo card: protagonist with perfect house, successful career, kitchen island, and it's all about to go tits up. But I found myself bingeing the lot.

McClure plays Emma, the hotshot lawyer who dealt with her trauma by telling everyone that her mother had died at 40, even though this was actually the age at which she had been locked in a secure psychiatric unit. Emma had been warned by her mother that she had inherited her "bad blood", the "curse of the second child". As her 40th birthday approaches, Emma worries that the curse will descend. She stops sleeping and wanders the house lighting candles, reciting numbers, filling the bath then emptying it and standing in the ornamental pond ruining her silk pyjamas. It's pretty much what her mother did before being sectioned.

Her older sister, the free-spirited Phoebe, is played by an equally compelling Leanne Best and it is remarkable how alike she and McClure look. Good casting. You are not sure whether Phoebe, who had a harder time in the foster care system



Vicky McClure shines as a woman living in fear of a curse

than Emma, which has resulted in a testy relationship between them, has the glad eye for Emma's husband, Rob (Tom Cullen) — and thus whether this is going to be about the single Phoebe stealing her sister's perfect life.

The news that their mother is gravely ill further strains things. Phoebe is more sympathetic to the elderly woman; as far as Emma is concerned she is dead to her. But Emma is more worried about getting past her birthday, which is when she fears her mother's prediction will come true. "You are not a f***ing werewolf," Phoebe says scathingly. "There's no such thing as bad blood." What we are really talking about, of course, is severe mental illness.

There is a lot going on, with strands sprouting like tentacles. Emma's daughter Chloe is shagging someone undesirable who is giving her drugs (an underused subplot); Emma's son Will (the second-born) is freaked out; Phoebe is pregnant by a sperm donor; Emma develops a friendship with Caroline (a strong Lyndsey Marshal), who is caring for her disabled mother and wants power of attorney. Watch that last tentacle carefully.

If this all sounds complicated, you haven't seen anything yet. And at the end, just when you think things can't get any madder, there's a final flourish of a twist that is totally off its head. It's a daft ride but a well-acted one.

Radio choice

Ben Dowell



Add to Playlist

Radio 4, 7.15pm

The engaging music show returns for its ninth series, albeit without Cerys Matthews for this run (she returns in November). This means that Jeffrey Boakye is joined by a new co-host, Anna Phoebe, above, the violinist and composer. The series opens with the pair being joined in the studio by Neil Brand, the composer and silent film specialist, and Natalie Duncan, the jazz singer and composer. As fans will know, the plan is to create a playlist of five tracks that are linked in some way. Tonight's choices include Blondie's biggest-selling single and Sergei Prokofiev's symphonic folk masterpiece *Peter and the Wolf*.

OUR TV NEWSLETTER

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Times Radio

Digital, web, smart speaker, app
5.00am Rosie Wright with *Early Breakfast*
6.00 Chloe Tilley and Calum Macdonald with *Times Radio Breakfast 10.00* Matt Chorley. An insider's take on politics **1.00pm** Times Radio Afternoons **4.00** Cathy Newman with *Times Radio Drive*. Friday's headlines and discussions **7.00** Ed Vaizey. The Conservative peer and former MP sits in bringing his take on the day's news **10.00** Henry Bonsu **1.00am** The Story **1.30** Highlights from Matt Chorley **2.00** The Best of Times Radio

Radio 2

FM: 88-90.2 MHz
6.30am The Zoe Ball Breakfast Show **9.30** Vernon Kay. Author Marian Keyes chooses her Tracks of My Years **12.00** Jeremy Vine **2.00pm** Scott Mills **3.30** Scott Mills' Wonder Years **4.00** Sara Cox **7.00** Michelle Visage **8.30** Michelle Visage's Handbag Hits. Feelgood party classics handpicked by Michelle guaranteed to make Friday night seem fabulous **9.00** The Good Groove with DJ Spooky. A mix of soulful house and lyrical garage tunes **11.00** The Rock Show with Johnnie Walker **12.00** Romesh Ranganathan: For the Love of Hip-Hop (r) **1.00am** Mica Meets Gladys Knight (r) **2.00** Mica Meets Gladys Knight (r) **3.00** Eagles at the BBC **4.00** Sophie Ellis-Bextor's Kitchen Disco

Radio 3

FM: 90.2-92.4 MHz
6.30am Breakfast
Petroc Trelawny presents Radio 3's classical breakfast show with the Friday poem and music that captures the mood of the morning **9.30** Essential Classics
Georgia Mann plays the best in classical music, with new discoveries, some musical surprises and plenty of familiar favourites **1.00pm** News
1.02 Classical Live
The Quatuor Van Kuijk play Haydn's "Rider" Quartet alongside Mozart's "Hunt" Quartet, recorded at LSO St Luke's in London. Gershwin (Variations on Summertime, from "Porgy and Bess" — arr. Fazil Say); Rossini (Sonata No. 1 in G major for strings — arr. Friedrich Berr); Koehlin (Les Bandar-log — Symphonic Poem after Kipling Op.176); Berlioz — arr. David Matthews (Les Nuits d'été); Haydn (Quartet in G minor, Op. 74 No.3 "The Rider"); Mozart (Quartet No. 17 in B flat major, K.458 "Hunt"); and Schumann (Symphony No. 2 in C Op. 61)

4.00 Composer of the Week:

Rimsky-Korsakov
Concluding his look at the life and music of Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Donald Macleod reflects on how a life begun under a Tsar ended in the ferment of revolution. Rimsky-Korsakov (Scheherazade, Op 35 — Finale; *Against the Cruel Crag from Sadko*; *The Invisible City of Kitzeh Suite — A Hymn to Nature*; *The Golden Cockerel Suite*; and *Four Songs*, Op 2 — No 2, *The Nightingale and the Rose*)

5.00 In Tune
Live music and interviews from the world's finest classical musicians

7.00 Classical Mixtape
A selection of classical favourites mixed with jazz, folk and music from around the world

7.30 Friday Night Is Music Night
Roderick Dunk conducts the BBC Concert Orchestra and singers Katie Birtill and Emma Kershaw in classic show songs from Broadway, recorded at Chichester Festival Theatre in January. Presented by Katie Derham. Styne (*Overture "Gypsy"*); Kander & Ebb (*All That Jazz*; *Maybe This Time*; *Cabaret*); Gershwin (*Someone to Watch Over Me*); Styne (*The Greatest Star*); Gershwin (*The Man I Love*; *Strike Up the Band*); Sondheim (*The Ballad of Sweeney Todd*); Bernstein (*Overture West Side Story*); *A Boy Like That*; *I Have a Love*); Gershwin (*Embraceable You*); Bart (*Who Will Buy*); Herman (*Mack & Mabel Overture*); Sondheim (*Send in the Clouds*); Cole Porter (*From This Moment On*); Rodgers & Hart (*Johnny One Note*); Styne (*Don't Rain on My Parade*); and Irvin Berlin (*Anything You Can Do*)

9.45 The Essay: Art and Uncertainty
Margaret Heffernan discusses uncertainty as a necessary part of the creative process, a catalyst which can help us find ways of meeting the challenges of the future (r)

10.00 Late Junction
Verity Sharp presents a long-distance collaboration session by American poet-musician JJJJerome and British folk singer and multi-instrumentalist Angeline Morrison. Elsewhere in the show, there is club music from Kampala-based Congolese producer Chrisman, new sounds from Jessika Kenney and Eyvind Kang inspired by interviewees living in the tribal territories on or near the Hanford Nuclear Site in Washington state, and a reissue of Bert Jansch's *Avocet* (r)

11.30 Round Midnight
Presented by British saxophonist Soweto Kinch and reflecting the rich history of jazz

12.30am Through the Night (r)

Radio 4

FM: 92.4-94.6 MHz LW: 198kHz MW: 720 kHz
5.30am News Briefing
5.45 Prayer for the Day
5.45 Farming Today
6.00 Today

With Mishal Husain and Justin Webb

9.00 Desert Island Discs
Athlete Sarah Storey talks to Lauren Laverne and selects eight favourite recordings to take to the BBC's mythical island (2/14) (r)

10.00 Woman's Hour
Magazine exploring issues from a female perspective, presented by Anita Rani

11.00 The Food Programme
11.45 Book of the Week:
A Body Made of Glass (r)

By Caroline Crampton. The author explores how the internet feeds anxiety, and how TikTok videos produced during lockdown sparked an epidemic of symptoms.

Read by Tupence Middleton (5/5)

12.04pm AntiSocial
The issues of the day, presented by Adam Fleming (8/9)

1.00 The World at One
1.45 Shadow War: China and the West
The possibility of war between China and the West. Last in the series

2.15 Drama: Money Gone
By Ed Sellek. Grace gets help from an unexpected source. The Prime Minister and MIS work solve the financial chaos, but there are unintended consequences.

Last in the series

2.45 Child
India Rakusen considers attachment

3.00 Gardeners' Question Time
Experts answer listeners' queries at the Chelsea Flower Show

3.45 Short Works
Dwr, by Catrin Kean

4.00 Last Word
A selection of obituaries

4.30 More or Less
Tim Harford presents the programme that explains the numbers and statistics used in everyday life (1/7) (r)

5.00 PM
6.00 Six O'Clock News
6.30 Dead Ringers
Comedy impressions (5/6)

7.00 The Archers
Fallon reaches the end of her tether

7.15 Add to Playlist
A musical journey of discovery with Jeffrey Boakye and new co-host Anna Phoebe.

See *Radio Choice* (1/6)

8.00 Any Questions?

Topical discussion, chaired by Alex Forsyth

8.50 A Point of View
A reflection on a topical issue

9.00 Free Thinking
Ideas shaping modern life (8/13)

10.00 The World Tonight
10.45 Book at Bedtime:
Making Amends

Bruce, by Nick Walker (5/5) (r)

11.00 Americast
Analysis of cultural and social stories breaking in the US

11.30 Today in Parliament
Political round-up

12.00 News and Weather
12.30am Book of the Week:
A Body Made of Glass (r)

12.48 Shipping Forecast
1.00 As BBC World Service

Radio 4 Extra

Digital only

8.00am Says on the Tin **8.30** Brooklyn **8.45** The Mill on the Floss **9.00** Yesterday in Parliament **9.30** Owning Colour **9.45** Daily Service **10.00** Soul Music **10.30** Bombay's Beatle **11.00** Massachusetts Avenue **11.45** The Resistance of Mrs Brown **12.00** The Older Woman **12.30pm** Albert and Me **1.00** Says on the Tin **1.30** Brooklyn **1.45** The Mill on the Floss **2.00** The 3rd Degree **2.30** Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me **3.00** The Late Mr Shakespeare **4.00** Soul Music **4.30** Bombay's Beatle **5.00** Massachusetts Avenue **5.45** The Resistance of Mrs Brown **6.00** The Older Woman **6.30** Albert and Me **7.00** Says on the Tin. Eliot struggles to promote a new brand of gourmet cat food **7.30** Brooklyn. By Colin Tublin **7.45** The Mill on the Floss. By George Eliot. Last in the series **8.00** The 3rd Degree. Undergraduates from the University of Warwick compete against their professors **8.30** Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me. George meets a Broadway idol. Originally broadcast in 2003. Last in the series **9.00** The Late Mr Shakespeare. By Robert Nye **10.00** Comedy Club: Michael Spicer: No Room. Satirical comedy sketches **10.15** Michael Spicer: No Room. Louis Theroux attempts to win another BAFTA **10.30** The Malby Collection. Comedy, by David Nobbs. Last in the series **11.00** Absolute Power. An old flame pits spinmeisters Charles and Martin against each other **11.30** Tez Talks. Satire based on society's attitudes to Islam **11.45** Irish Micks and Legends. The Salmon of Knowledge

Radio 5 Live

MW: 693, 909

5.00am Wake Up to Money **6.00** 5 Live Breakfast **9.00** Nicky Campbell **11.00** Chiles on Friday **1.00pm** Elis James and John Robins **2.00** Holly Hamilton **4.00** 5 Live Drive **7.00** 5 Live Sport: The Friday Football Social **10.00** Stephen Nolan **1.00am** Lisa McCormick

talkSPORT

MW: 1053, 1089 kHz

5.00am Early Breakfast **6.00** talkSPORT Breakfast with Alan Brazil **10.00** Jim White and Simon Jordan **1.00pm** Hawksbee and Jacobs **4.00** talkSPORT Drive with Andy Goldstein and Darren Bent **7.00** Thank Friday! It's Football **10.00** Sports Bar **1.00am** Extra Time with Martin Kelner

Talk

Digital only

5.00am James Max **6.30** Mike Graham **10.00** Alex Phillips **1.00pm** Ian Collins **4.00** Peter Cardwell **7.00** Kevin O'Sullivan **10.00** Andre Walker **1.00am** Martin Kelner

6 Music

Digital only

5.00am The Remix with Chris Hawkins **5.30** Chris Hawkins **7.30** Lauren Laverne **10.30** Nemone **1.00pm** Craig Charles **4.00** Huw Stephens **9.00** 6 Music's Indie Forever **11.00** The Ravers Hour **12.00** 6 Music's Rave Forever **1.00am** 6 Music's Emo Forever **2.00** Focus Beats **4.00** Ambient Focus

Virgin Radio

Digital only

6.30am The Chris Evans Breakfast Show with *webuyanycar* **10.00** The Ryan Tubridy Show **1.00pm** Jayne Middlemiss **4.00** Ricky Wilson **7.00** Ben Jones **10.00** Stu Elmore **1.00am** Harpz Kaur **4.00** Rich Williams

Classic FM

FM: 100-102 MHz

6.30am Classic FM Breakfast with Dan Walker **9.00** The Classic FM Hall of Fame Hour with Dan Walker **10.00** Alexander Armstrong **1.00pm** Tim Lihoreau **4.00** Margherita Taylor **7.00** Classic FM at the Movies with Jonathan Ross **9.00** Young Classical Stars **10.00** Calm Classics **1.00am** Katie Breathwick **4.00** Sam Pitts

television & radio

Viewing Guide James Jackson

The Beach Boys Disney+

Top pick The Beach Boys have been touring this year, or at least a couple of them have (Mike Love and Bruce Johnston still keeping the flame alive), but Brian Wilson

has dementia and his brothers Dennis and Carl are long gone, and summer dreams of surfing and California girls feel a relic of 60 years ago. But the joyous music never fades, nor does the fascinating story of the band — one of sibling success, harmonies blessed with the divine, troubled genius Brian, lawsuits, tragedy and

the rest. It's a well-told tale, but bears repeating and this rock doc is a polished canter through the history that does not get bogged down in the bad vibrations (Love wells up as he admits that, while he doesn't talk to Brian much, he loves him). Full of great clips, it presents a balanced view — Brian is feted as the visionary, but as

Johnston says with pride: "If we didn't have the ability, we wouldn't have been able to sing these parts. Brian was lucky to have these voices to sing his dreams." There are recollections of humble beginnings, early success, then the more ambitious endeavours. We hear briefly about how Keith Moon was the band's tour guide in

London, how Lennon and McCartney showed up for a first listen to *Pet Sounds*. It doesn't go in depth into Brian's breakdowns, but Al Jardine does recollect that "I started getting indications that Brian was taking LSD ... he drove me around the parking lot about 20 times explaining about this great trip he'd just taken".

Hidden Treasures of the National Trust BBC2, 9pm

The 18th-century Stourhead House in Wiltshire is like a living work of art, surrounded by woods, temples and a lake. How to maintain the 2,500 acres of heavenly bliss? More urgently, an artwork — *Penelope and Euryclea*

by Angelica Kauffman — is making a return but needs to be given a clean bill of health by the conservator before it can be put on display. Also tonight, *Scotney Old Castle in Kent*, once owned by Christopher Hussey, a historian who made it his mission to preserve our estates at a time when they were being demolished.

BBC1

Early

6.00am Breakfast **9.30** Rip Off Britain. Consumer show **10.15** The Moment of Proof. Evidence is gathered following the murder of the flat owner (r) **10.45** Defenders: Busting the Bad Guys. The investigators take on a shameless travel agent. Last in the series (r) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer. The team check auction buys in south London, Kent and Stoke-on-Trent (r) **12.15pm** Bargain Hunt. Roo Irvine celebrates quirky antiques and collectibles in Glasgow (AD) **1.00** BBC News at One; Weather **1.30** BBC Regional News; Weather **1.45** Hope Street. Marlene has to crack a case on her wedding day (AD) **2.30** Money for Nothing. Furniture restorer Chloe Kempster tries to give an old talbany a new lease of life **3.00** Escape to the Country. Nicki Chapman helps a couple find their dream home in Wiltshire (r) **3.45** RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Angellica Bell and Nicki Chapman bring the last instalment of their Chelsea dream spaces and Rachel De Thame revels in the beauty of must-have wildflowers **4.30** The Finish Line. Roman Kemp and Sarah Greene host the quiz **5.15** Pointless. Quiz hosted by Alexander Armstrong and Josh Widdicombe **6.00** BBC News at Six; Weather **6.30** BBC Regional News; Weather

BBC2

6.30am Homes Under the Hammer (r) **7.30** Marcus Wareing Simply Provence (r) **8.00** Sign Zone: Antiques Roadshow (r) (SL) **9.00** BBC News **1.00pm** Impossible (r) **1.45** Mastermind (r) **2.15** Great Coastal Railway Journeys. Michael Portillo heads towards the Farne Islands (r) (AD) **2.45** The Farmers' Country Showdown. A pair of cider-makers visit the South of England Agricultural Show (r) **3.15** Yellowstone. Summer returns, transforming the park from an icy wilderness into the ideal environment for newborn animals (r) (AD) **4.15** Who Do You Think You Are? Actor Ralf Little investigates his grandfather Arthur's experience during the Second World War and learns one of his great grandfathers was a Welsh international footballer (r) (AD) **5.15** Flog It! The team heads to Sandon Hall in Staffordshire, where Christina Trevanion and David Fletcher assess items including a large collection of boxed Corgi toys and some rare watches (r) **6.00** Richard Osman's House of Games. Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock, Cariad Lloyd, Gareth Malone and Mike Wozniak take part (r) **6.30** Marcus Wareing Simply Provence. The chef learns how to make a popular local artichoke dish. Last in the series

ITV1

6.00am Good Morning Britain **9.00** Lorraine. Entertainment, current affairs and fashion news, as well as showbiz stories and celebrity gossip. Presented by Lorraine Kelly **10.00** This Morning. Daily magazine, featuring a mix of celebrity chat, showbusiness news, lifestyle features, topical discussion, health and beauty advice and more. Including Local Weather **12.30pm** Loose Women. Celebrity interviews and topical debate from a female perspective **1.30** ITV News; Weather **1.55** Regional News; Weather **2.00** Dickinson's Real Deal. David Dickinson and his team of experts assess items at the Tropicana in Weston-super-Mare (r) (AD) **3.00** Lingo. A pair of Liverpool sisters, a Derbyshire couple, and a mother and daughter from Leeds take part in Adil Ray's quiz (r) **4.00** Tipping Point. Ben Shephard hosts the arcade-themed quiz in which contestants drop tokens down a choice of four chutes in the hope of winning a £10,000 jackpot (r) **5.00** The Chase. Bradley Walsh presents as four contestants answer general knowledge questions and work as a team to take on one of the Chasers and secure a cash prize (r) **6.00** Regional News; Weather **6.30** ITV News; Weather

Channel 4

6.30am 3rd Rock from the Sun (r) (AD) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (r) (AD) **9.40** Frasier (r) (AD) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. Luigi's in Orange County, California (r) **12.05pm** Channel 4 News Summary **12.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. Park's Edge restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia (r) **1.05** Find It, Fix It, Flog It. Simon O'Brien and Henry Cole head to Surrey and Hampshire (r) **2.10** Countdown. Pat Nevin is in Dictionary Corner **3.00** A Place in the Sun. Leah Charles-King joins a woman from Birmingham in Spain's Mar Menor to help her find a holiday home with her budget of £43,500 (r) **4.00** Narrow Escapes. Jack and Gabby take their new boat for its first cruise and make a surprise announcement. Last in the series (AD) **5.00** Come Dine with Me: The Professionals. Chefs in Northern Ireland battle it out in the kitchen with Ian and Eva from Mourne Seafood Bar, James and David from Top of the Town and Emma and Paul from Gnostic competing **6.00** Four in a Bed. Payment Day promises to be a fiery affair after two sets of B&Bs in particular participated in tit-for-tat marking throughout the week **6.30** The Simpsons. Homer becomes the Springfield Shopper's new food critic (Up) (r) (AD)

Channel 5

6.00am Milkshake! **9.15** Jeremy Vine. The broadcaster and Storm Huntley discuss the latest news and get views and opinions of the day **11.15** Storm Huntley. The presenter carries on the discussion and takes calls to discuss the biggest stories of the day **12.45pm** Friends (r) (AD) **1.40** 5 News at Lunchtime **1.45** Home and Away. Justin is in disbelief when Kirby tells him the truth about Theo, John is in a panic over finalising his celebrant course and Rose calls Tane and Roo to a meeting (r) **2.15** FILM: Lies Between Friends (PG, TVM, 2022) A wealthy family's life is upended when the 18-year-old daughter of a family friend comes to live with them for a few months. Thriller starring Zibby Allen, Matreya Scarrwener and Peter Benson **4.00** Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun. Cameras follow a couple on a big day as the newest member of their family is coming home after weeks in the hospital (r) **5.00** 5 News at 5 **6.00** Police Interceptors. Two officers are in hot pursuit of a van, but the driver crashes and runs away, while colleagues use a track to help hunt down a 17-year-old suspected of a serious robbery (r) **6.55** 5 News Update



The new podcast about the

Roya Nikkhah, royal editor at The Sunday Times, and Kate Mansey, royal editor at The Times, present a new podcast examining the royals and everything they do. With their unique insight and wit, prepare to be both informed and entertained.

7PM	7.00 The One Show Live magazine show hosted by Alex Jones and Roman Kemp	7.00 Beechgrove Garden Kirsty Wilson and Lizzie Schofield look at plants suited to wet conditions	7.00 Channel 4 News	7.00 Jane McDonald: Lost in Japan In Osaka, the singer takes a food tour that includes the best katsu that the region has to offer. She also visits the downtown Dotonbori district (4/4) (r)	
	7.30 RHS Chelsea Flower Show The winner of this year's BBC RHS People's Choice Award is announced	7.30 Grand Tours of Scotland's Rivers Paul Murton explores the River Oykel in Sutherland. Last in the series (AD)	7.30 Emmerdale Caleb is delighted to see Chas back from Scotland (AD)	7.30 Unreported World Krishnan Guru-Murthy explores South Korea's K-pop dance schools (AD)	7.55 5 News Update
8PM	8.00 Would I Lie to You? With Claudia Winkleman, the Rev Kate Bottley, Sara Barron and Ed Gamble (5/11) (r)	8.00 RHS Chelsea Flower Show It is the end of the week at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024. Monty Don and Joe Swift provide their expert analysis of the winning garden in the BBC RHS People's Choice Award	8.00 Coronation Street Abi accuses Dean of distributing videos of her, Evelyn and Roy start a book club and Simon shows Carla a photo of Peter with his arms around a woman (AD)	8.00 Double the Money The remaining eight teams are given two weeks to double their £2,000 stake. Half of the teams decide to host events and most of the rest attempt food-based ideas (4/6) (AD)	8.00 The Big Steam Adventure: Here We Go Again! John Sergeant, Peter Davison and Paul "Piglet" Middleton explore the Scottish Highlands, visiting the Cairngorms Mountain range, Aviemore and Loch Ness (4/4)
	8.30 Outnumbered Ben auditions for the school musical (1/7) (r) (AD)	9.00 Hidden Treasures of the National Trust A missing masterpiece returns to its stately home after two centuries and a treasured table from Scotney Old Castle in Kent undergoes renovation. See <i>Viewing Guide</i> (3/6) (AD)	9.00 Beat the Chasers Bradley Walsh hosts as contestants take on a team consisting of Issa Schultz, Mark Labbett, Shaun Wallace, Jenny Ryan and Darragh Ennis, hoping to win big money (1/5) (r)	9.00 Gogglebox The armchair critics share their opinions on what they have been watching during the week, with cameras capturing their instant reactions and the lively discussions that are prompted by the week's biggest and best shows (AD)	9.00 Sue Perkins: Lost in Thailand Sue visits the country's heady capital, Bangkok, looking at one of the ways its pollution problem is being addressed. She also examines tiger exploitation. Last in the series
10PM	10.00 BBC News at Ten	10.00 QI With Tom Allen, Cariad Lloyd and Jamie MacDonald (r)	10.00 ITV News at Ten	10.00 The Nevermets New series. Documentary meeting Brits who have all fallen madly in love online as they meet their long-distance lovers in person for the first time. See <i>Viewing Guide</i> (1/6) (AD)	10.00 The Cancellation of Jim Davidson The comedian and presenter offers an in-depth exploration of his life, unique career, and the controversies that have surrounded him. See <i>Viewing Guide</i>
	10.30 BBC Regional News and Weather 10.40 Spider-Man: Far from Home (12, 2019) The webslinger's European vacation leads to a battle with elemental monsters from another dimension. Superhero adventure sequel starring Tom Holland and Jake Gyllenhaal (AD)	10.30 Newsnight Headline analysis presented by Faisal Islam	10.30 Regional News 10.45 ITV Studio Sessions Clara Amfo is joined by Sekou, one of the UK's biggest new talents (4/6)	11.05 Joe & Katherine's Bargain Holidays On a budget break in Montenegro, Joe Wilkinson and Katherine Ryan seek the healing benefits of art over the beautiful bay of Kotor. Last in the series (AD)	11.30 When 80s TV Goes Horribly Wrong Anita Dobson narrates this look back at some disastrous 1980s television moments (r)
11PM	12.40am Rebus Crime drama based on the novels by Ian Rankin, reimagining the character John Rebus as a younger detective sergeant drawn into a violent criminal conflict. Rebus finds himself torn between protecting his brother and enforcing the law to bring Michael to justice (r) (AD) 1.35-6.00 BBC News	12.05am Secrets and Spies: A Nuclear Game In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev is instated as the new leader of the Soviet Union (r) (AD) 1.05 Sign Zone: Andi Oliver's Fabulous Feasts (r) (AD, SL) 2.05 Great British Railway Journeys (r) (AD, SL) 2.35-3.05 David & Jay's Touring Toolshed (r) (AD, SL)	1.05am Shop on TV 3.00 The Larkins. The family hosts a barbecue and everyone is welcome, including the dubious Jerobohms, but a trap is set to bring Pop down (r) (AD, SL) 3.50 Unwind with ITV 5.05-6.00 Katie Piper's Breakfast Show. With the actress Nina Wadia and the author and podcaster Giovanna Fletcher (r) (SL)	12.10am Micky Flanagan: Back in the Game The comedian performs to his home crowd at London's Hackney Empire (r) 1.35 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (r) 2.20 Come Dine with Me (r) 4.30 Location, Location, Location (r) (SL) 5.20 Sunday Brunch Best Bits (r) 5.40-6.05 Beat the Chef (r)	1.25am PlayOJO Live Casino Show 3.25 10 Years Younger in 10 Days. A woman gets help erasing the scars left by skin cancer (r) 4.10 Our Yorkshire Farm (r) 5.00 House Doctor (r) (SL) 5.25 Entertainment News on 5 5.30 Peppa Pig (r) (SL) 5.35 Thomas: Big World! Big Adventures! (r) (SL) 5.45-6.00 Paw Patrol (r) (SL)

television & radio

The Nevermets
Channel 4, 10pm

Not quite a new dating show, this follows people who have fallen in love online but haven't actually met in person. Now, with help from Channel 4, they fly across borders to meet their long-distance partner for the first time. Will reality live up to virtual

reality? It's all very touchy-feely as 38-year-old Sarah travels to the Philippines to meet 27-year-old Jgoy, and 17-year-old Jay goes to India to meet 26-year-old Veena, whom he met on a *Game of Thrones* roleplay server. Clearly, when it comes to finding romance in today's world, we're a long way from *Brief Encounter*.

The Cancellation of Jim Davidson
Channel 5, 10pm

Within 15 minutes we hear the phrase "those were different times", because this is about the old days and a comedian decided out of fashion. Once upon a time — the 1990s — Jim Davidson was king of BBC1 entertainment; now he's nowhere to be

seen in the mainstream except on a Channel 5 profile, which questions but doesn't judge Davidson's "blue" humour by today's standards, and looks at how he was found funny by millions, capped by an OBE for his work for the armed forces. Davidson himself offers reflections, including on how it went wrong.

Tina Turner night
BBC4, from 10.10pm

A night of Tina Turner at her best kicks off with *Tina Turner at the BBC*. Then there's a repeat of *When Tina Turner Came to Britain* (11.10pm), a 2022 documentary taking us from her 1966 support slot with the Rolling Stones to her solo reinvention

in the 1980s. "There was an energy here that brought something out of me," she says. At 12.10am, *Tina Turner: Simply the Best* is her interview with Will Gompertz, talking about Ike, the tragedy of her eldest son's suicide and how her life was saved when her husband became her kidney donor.

Film Three Thousand Years of Longing
Film4, 9pm

In this bonkers and lavish romantic fantasy, Idris Elba plays a 10ft djinn freed from a three-millennia stretch in a bottle by Tilda Swinton's solitary academic, Althea. It's destined to be a kitsch cult favourite. (15, 2022)

Sky Max

6.00am NCIS: Los Angeles (r) **7.00** DC's Legends of Tomorrow (r) (AD) **8.00** The Flash (r) **9.00** Stargate SG-1 (r) **11.00** NCIS: Los Angeles (r) **12.00** The Flash (r) **1.00pm** MacGyver (r) **3.00** Hawaii Five-0 (r) **4.00** S.W.A.T. Street puts his life on the line (r) (AD) **5.00** DC's Legends of Tomorrow (r) (AD) **6.00** Stargate SG-1 (r) **7.00** Stargate SG-1. Teal'c stands trial (r) **8.00** Rob & Roshes vs Cricket: South Africa. The duo go to Cape Town (r) (AD) **9.00** A League of Their Own: Mexican Road Trip. An adventure around Mexico (r) (AD) **10.00** The Walking Dead. Rick and his friends find their way into the CDC (r) **11.00** Never Mind the Buzzcocks (r) (AD) **11.50** Hold the Front Page. Nish Kumar and Josh Widdicombe work for Bradford's *Telegraph & Argus* (r) (AD) **12.55am** Resident Alien (r) **2.00** Peacemaker (r) (AD) **3.00** Hawaii Five-0 (r) **4.00** S.W.A.T. (r) (AD) **5.00** Highway Patrol (r) (AD)

Sky Atlantic

6.00am Fish Town (r) **7.00** The Guest Wing (r) (AD) **7.55** True Blood (r) **10.05** Billions (r) (AD) **12.15pm** Game of Thrones (r) (AD) **1.20** Ray Donovan (r) (AD) **3.30** True Blood. Double bill (r) **5.40** Billions (r) (AD) **7.55** Game of Thrones. The fate of Jon Snow is revealed, Ramsay sends his dogs after Theon and Sansa, while Ellaria and the Sand Snakes make their move (r) (AD) **9.00** The Pacific. Leckie and his comrades arrive on the island of New Britain, where they try to repel an attack — but illness and the jungle terrain become their worst enemies (r) **10.00** The Tattooist of Auschwitz. Gita grows worried over the whereabouts of Lali (r) **11.05** The White Lotus. Albie asks Dominic for a karmic payment to help Lucia, Tanya grows wary of Quentin's motives, Ethan confronts Cam, and Valentina gives Mia a chance (7/7) (r) (AD) **12.35am** House of the Dragon (r) (AD) **1.45** Euphoria (r) (AD) **2.50** Game of Thrones (r) (AD) **4.00** The Guest Wing (r) (AD)

Sky Documentaries

6.00am The Guest Wing (r) (AD) **7.00** Discovering: Jon Voight (r) (AD) **8.00** The Directors (r) **9.00** JFK: Destiny Betrayed (r) **10.05** Urban Secrets (r) **11.00** The Sixties (r) (AD) **12.00** Barbie Uncovered: A Dreamhouse Divided (r) (AD) **1.50pm** My Icon: Casey Stoner (r) (AD) **2.00** FILM: **GoldenEra (12, 2022)** Documentary about video game GoldenEye 007 (AD) **4.00** The Directors (r) **5.00** Discovering: Jon Voight (r) (AD) **6.00** JFK: Destiny Betrayed (r) **7.05** The Invisible Pilot (2/3) (r) (AD) **8.00** The Sixties (5/10) (r) (AD) **9.00** I Am Paul Walker (r) **10.50** An American Bombing: The Road to April 19th. A look at the surge in homegrown political violence through the story of the 1995 Oklahoma city bombing (r) **12.50am** FILM: **Assassins (12, 2020)** Documentary **2.50** QPR: The Four Year Plan (r) (AD) **4.40** My Icon: Rachel Yankey (r) (AD) **5.00** Discovering: Jon Voight (r) (AD)

Sky Arts

6.00am Darbar Festival 2022 **7.15** Gilbert and Sullivan: A Motley Pair **7.50** The Joy of Painting (AD) **9.00** Tales of the Unexpected (AD) **10.00** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.00** Discovering: Diane Keaton **12.00** The Joy of Painting (AD) **1.00pm** Tales of the Unexpected (AD) **2.00** Julie Andrews Forever (AD) **3.00** The Big Design Challenge (AD) **5.00** Discovering: Morgan Freeman **5.40** The Joy of Painting **6.00** Australian Ballet: Cinderella **7.35** Eric Clapton: Concert by the Lake — Band du Lac. A 2005 concert by the guitarist **10.00** Grand Ole Opry. With Brad Paisley, Dustin Lynch, Parmalee and Kevin Nealon **11.00** Guy Garvey: From the Vaults. Music from the 1980s and 1990s, with Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Tom Robinson and the Pogues **12.00** Billy Joel Live at Yankee Stadium. Concert filmed at the Yankee Stadium in New York **1.45am** Live from the Artists Den. With the National **3.00** Classic Albums **4.00** Cheltenham Literature Festival **5.00** Auction

Sky Main Event

6.00am Sky Sports News **7.00** Good Morning Sports Fans **10.00** Sky Sports News **12.00** Live Formula 1. The Monaco Grand Prix first practice session **2.00pm** Live Formula 2 Championship. The Monaco Grand Prix qualifying session (Start-time **2.10**) **3.00** Sports Desk **3.45** Live Formula 1. Coverage of the Monaco Grand Prix second practice session **5.15** Live Women's Super League: St Helens v Leeds Rhinos (Kick-off **5.30**). From Totally Wicked Stadium **7.30** Live Betfred Super League: St Helens v Leeds Rhinos (Kick-off **8.00**). Coverage of the match from Totally Wicked Stadium **10.00** Live Fight Night: Lukasz Rozanski v Lawrence Okolie. Coverage of the bout for the WBC World Bridgeweight title at Podpromie Arena in Rzeszow, Poland **11.30** Sky Sports News **12.00** Sky Sports News. Round-up of the sports news **1.00am** Sky Sports News **2.00** Sky Sports News **3.00** Sky Sports News **4.00** Sky Sports News **5.00** Sky Sports News

Variations

BBC1 N Ireland
As BBC1 except: **8.00pm** Suzie Lee: Home Cook Hero **8.30-9.00** Restoration Rescue. Transforming a derelict cottage and barn (r)

BBC1 Wales
As BBC1 except: **7.00pm-7.30** Iolo's Valleys. Iolo Williams explores the valleys inland from Port Talbot in south Wales **8.00** Our Food, Our Family with Michela Chiappa. The Welsh-Italian cook helps a woman reconnect with the cuisine of her Nigerian roots (r) **8.30-9.00** Kirri's TV Flashback. A delve into the television archives in search of clips on the theme of inventions (r) **10.40** Rewind: 60 Years of Welsh Pop. Performances by Manic Street Preachers, Tigertailz and Charlotte Church (r) **11.10** FILM: Spider-Man: Far from Home (2019). Superhero adventure sequel starring Tom Holland (AD) **1.10am** Rebus (r) (AD) **2.00-6.00** BBC News

BBC2 Wales
As BBC2 except: **7.00pm-7.30** The One Show. Live magazine show hosted by Alex Jones and Roman Kemp

STV
As ITV1 except: **7.00pm-7.30** What's on Scotland. Movie news and chat about TV shows **10.30-10.45** STV News **11.15** Mr Bates vs the Post Office: The Real Story. Documentary exploring one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in history (r) (AD) **12.10am-3.00** Shop on TV **3.50-5.05** Night Vision

UTV
As ITV1 except: **7.00pm-7.30** UTV Life. With Pamela Ballantine **9.00-10.00** UTV at the Show. Sarah Clarke and Paul Reilly present highlights of the 2024 Balmoral Show

royal family

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THE TIMES THE SUNDAY TIMES

BBC3

7.00pm My Mate's a Bad Date. Oloni helps a 24-year-old with a history of dating failures **7.25** FILM: **The Witches (PG, 2020)** A young orphan goes to live with his grandmother, only to find himself the prey of witches disguised as glamorous women. Fantasy starring Anne Hathaway and Octavia Spencer (AD) **9.00** Paranormal: The Girl, the Ghost and the Gravestone. Multiple witnesses claim to see a hooded figure (AD) **9.30** Paranormal: The Girl, the Ghost and the Gravestone. Sian Elser interviews the daughters of the couple that owned the house (AD) **10.00** FILM: **Late Night (15, 2019)** A talk show host fears she is set to lose her long-running series, so takes steps to freshen up her programme. Comedy drama with Emma Thompson and John Lithgow **11.35** Dinosaur. Evie's family try to impress Raneesh's father Sachin (AD) **12.05am** Dinosaur. Nina is looking forward to her date with Lee (AD) **12.30** Paranormal: The Girl, the Ghost and the Gravestone. Witnesses claim to see a hooded figure (AD) **1.30** I Kissed a Girl (AD) **3.00-4.00** Dinosaur (AD)

BBC4

7.00pm TOTP: 1996. Justine Frischmann presents the pop chart programme **7.30** TOTP: 1996. Featuring Technohead, Robert Miles, Björk, Lighthouse Family and more **8.00** TOTP: 1988. Steve Wright and Mark Goodier introduce the edition first aired on 26 May 1988. Featuring Debbie Gibson and LA Mix **8.30** TOTP: 1978. Tony Blackburn presents the edition from 25 May 1978 **9.00** TOTP: 1984. John Peel and Tommy Vance present the pop chart programme **9.30** TOTP: 1984. Peter Powell and Janice Long present the pop chart programme **10.10** Tina Turner at the BBC. Footage of the singer's performances on BBC programmes, featuring some of her biggest hits from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. See *Viewing Guide* **11.10** When Tina Turner Came to Britain. The story of the singer's 50-year relationship with the UK. See *Viewing Guide* **12.10am** Tina Turner: Simply the Best. Interview with the singer. See *Viewing Guide* **12.55** The 80s: Music's Greatest Debate? With Dylan Jones. The author celebrates alternative music **1.55** TOTP: 1988 **2.25-3.35** TOTP: 1984

Talking Pictures

6.00am FILM: **The Strange Woman (PG, 1946)** (b/w) **8.00** FILM: **Park Plaza 605 (U, 1953)** (b/w) **9.35** FILM: **Nurse on Wheels (U, 1963)** (b/w) **11.20** FILM: **Bullet Scars (PG, 1942)** (b/w) **12.30pm** The Four Just Men (b/w) **1.00** Mervyn's Talking Pictures **1.10** FILM: **Rich and Strange (U, 1931)** (b/w) **2.50** Mervyn's Talking Pictures **3.00** Automatic Fare Collection and You in 1969 **3.05** FILM: **The Gallant Hours (U, 1960)** Second World War drama (b/w) **5.25** One Mile Square **6.00** Worzel Gummidge **6.30** Fireball XL5 (b/w) **7.05** Look at Life **7.20** FILM: **Waterfront (PG, 1950)** (b/w) **9.00** Cellar Club with Caroline Munro **9.05** FILM: **The Fly (PG, 1958)** Horror starring David Hedison and Vincent Price **10.55** Cellar Club with Caroline Munro **11.00** FILM: **Deadly Instincts (18, 1997)** Sci-fi horror starring Samantha Womack **12.50am** Cellar Club with Caroline Munro **12.55** FILM: **Timeslip (12, 1955)** Sci-fi thriller (b/w) **2.45** FILM: **Blonde Fist (15, 1991)** **4.50** Look at Life **5.00** Bonanza

Film4

11.00am Two Way Stretch (U, 1960) Comedy (b/w) **12.45pm** Payroll (PG, 1961) Crime drama (b/w) **2.55** The Nevada (U, 1950) Western starring Randolph Scott **4.35** The Golden Voyage of Sinbad (U, 1974) Fantasy adventure with John Phillip Law (b/w) **6.50** The Italian Job (12, 2003) A crook double-crosses his partners, who devise a daring plan to exact revenge and reclaim their ill-gotten gains. Crime thriller remake starring Michael Wahlberg and Charlize Theron (AD) **9.00** Three Thousand Years of Longing (15, 2022) A lonely scholar on a trip to Istanbul discovers a djinn who offers her three wishes in exchange for his freedom. Fantasy drama with Tilda Swinton and Idris Elba. See *Viewing Guide* **11.10** A Banquet (15, 2021) A widowed mother is tested when her teenage daughter insists her body is now serving a higher power. Thriller starring Sienna Guillory **1.05am-4.00** The Handmaidens (18, 2016) A Korean woman is hired as a servant to a Japanese heiress, but secretly she is involved in a plot to defraud her. Psychological thriller starring Kim Min-hee and Kim Tae-ri

More4

8.55am A Place in the Sun **10.25** A New Life in the Sun **11.25** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (AD) **12.30pm** Come Dine with Me (AD) **3.10** Four in a Bed **5.50** Château DIY (AD) **6.55** PopMaster TV **7.55** PopMaster TV. In the second heat, music enthusiasts from Winchester, Seaham, Salford, Stoke-on-Trent and Reigate are put to the test, to see who can secure a place in the Grand Final **9.00** The Twelve: Cinderella Murder. Dennis Pycke's recollection of events is filled with pain, and it seems that his relationship with both Marianne and Anton was fraught with complications (3/8) **10.05** 24 Hours in A&E. A 20-year-old is rushed in after a motorcycle accident (AD) **11.05** 24 Hours in A&E. An 80-year-old patient is admitted suffering from pain in her chest, arm and jaw, while a 26-year-old woman who fell and hit her head during a hen party complains about headaches (8/12) (AD) **12.10am** 8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown. With Jonathan Ross, Lee Mack and Victoria Coren Mitchell **1.15** 24 Hours in A&E (AD) **3.25-3.55** A Place in the Sun

ITV2

6.00am CITV **9.00** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **9.10** Catchphrase Celebrity Special (AD) **10.00** Veronica Mars **11.00** Dawson's Creek **12.00** Secret Crush (SL) **1.00pm** Dress to Impress **2.00** Family Fortunes **3.00** Veronica Mars **4.00** Dawson's Creek. Dawson films a documentary about gay footballer Jack **5.00** Dress to Impress **6.00** Celebrity Catchphrase (AD) **7.00** Family Fortunes. The Ecclestons go up against the Burns family **8.00** Bob's Burgers. The Thanksgiving turkey ends up in the toilet (AD) **8.30** Bob's Burgers. Linda performs with her old band at their high-school reunion (AD) **9.00** FILM: **Horrible Bosses 2 (15, 2014)** Comedy starring Jason Bateman **11.15** Family Guy. Brian tries to get his friends to care more about the lives of dogs (AD) **11.45** Family Guy. Peter is inspired by the writing of Stephen King (AD) **12.15am** American Dad! (AD) **1.15** Bob's Burgers (AD) **2.10** Don't Hate the Playaz **2.50** Unwind with ITV **3.00** Teleshopping

ITV3

6.00am Classic Emmerdale **7.00** Classic Coronation Street (AD) **8.05** Endeavour (AD) **10.15** The Royal **11.20** Heartbeat (AD) **1.30pm** Classic Emmerdale **2.35** Classic Coronation Street (AD) **3.45** Agatha Christie's Marple (AD) **5.55** Heartbeat. Steve helps an amnesiac (AD) **6.00** Doc Martin. A wood thief strikes (AD) **6.50** Doc Martin. Louisa applies for a job at the school — where she notices something strange about the headmaster's behaviour (2/8) (AD) **9.00** Shetland. Perez questions Donna about the shocking DNA results, and Tosh arrives in Norway in search of Andreas Hagan. Drama starring Douglas Henshall and Alison O'Donnell **10.20** Shetland. Perez and Tosh are warned to stay away from Mathias Soderland by the Norwegian Secret Service, who say they are meddling in an operation they do not understand **11.35** Lewis. The detective investigates a possible link between the disappearance of a senior police officer and the discovery of a recently embalmed body (AD) **1.15am** Unwind, Downstairs **2.10** Unwind with ITV **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV4

6.00am The Derby Through the Years **6.15** Minder (AD, SL) **7.15** The Sweeney (SL) **8.15** The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (AD) **9.25** Magnum, PI (AD, SL) **10.25** Kojak **11.30** BattleBots **12.30pm** Magnum, PI (AD) **2.40** Kojak **3.45** Minder (AD) **4.50** The Sweeney **6.00** BattleBots. US robot combat show **7.00** The Grand Fishing Adventure. The second leg sees Ali Hamidi and Bobby Zamora venture to Lake Orellana in Spain **8.00** The Motorbike Show. Henry Cole brings his latest restoration to a stunning conclusion **9.00** FILM: **Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (15, 1985)** The nomadic warrior makes a bad deal with a desert dictator and ends up an unlikely protector of a band of feral children. Sci-fi adventure sequel starring Mel Gibson, Tina Turner and Bruce Spence (AD) **11.15** All Elite Wrestling: Dynamite. Action from the world of All Elite Wrestling **1.25am** The Championship: Christos Special. With Kate Thornton, James Argent, Lucy Porter and Nik Speakman **2.20** The Protectors (SL) **2.45** Unwind with ITV **3.00** Teleshopping

Drama

6.00am Teleshopping **7.10** All Creatures Great and Small **8.00** Doctors **9.20** Classic Holly City **10.00** Casualty **11.40** The Bill **12.45pm** Classic EastEnders **2.00** Pie in the Sky **3.00** Lovejoy **4.15** All Creatures Great and Small **5.20** Birds of a Feather. Dorian ends up in hospital **6.00** Keeping Up Appearances (AD) **6.40** Last of the Summer Wine **7.20** Last of the Summer Wine. Smiler decides to become a lollipop man **8.00** Father Brown. The priest investigates a murder at the Kemberford charity treasure hunt, where general suspicion falls on a bereaved man who wants revenge (AD) **9.00** Sister Boniface Mylerites. Sam's career is in jeopardy when serial killer "The Good Samaritan" resurfaces in Great Slaughter (AD) **10.00** New Tricks. The murder of a fashion designer is reinvestigated (6/10) (AD) **11.10** Soldier, Soldier. Paddy has to adjust to life on his own when Flynn refuses to join him in Germany. Jerome Flynn stars **12.30am** Lovejoy **1.40** When the Boat Comes In **2.50** Classic Holly City (SL) **4.00** Teleshopping

Yesterday

6.10am The Architecture the Railways Built (AD) **7.10** Hornby: A Model World (AD) **8.00** Abandoned Engineering (AD) **10.00** Narrow Escapes of World War II (AD) **11.00** War Factories **12.00** Great British Railway Journeys **1.00pm** Antiques Roadshow **2.00** Bangers & Cash **4.00** Narrow Escapes of World War II (AD) **5.00** War Factories **6.00** Antiques Roadshow **7.00** Canal Boat Diaries (2/5) **7.30** Canal Boat Diaries (3/5) **8.00** Secrets of the London Underground. Tim Dunn and Siddi Holloway explore Clapham South deep level shelter (6/6) (AD) **9.00** Abandoned Engineering. Exploring Haludovo Palace Hotel in Croatia (2/8) (AD) **10.00** Bangers & Cash. A MG Midget, an Austin-Healey "froggie" (5/10) and an RS2000 designer is made for auction (9/10) (AD) **11.00** Abandoned Engineering. A British fort that became a bizarre zoo (6/12) (AD) **12.00** Great British Railway Journeys **1.00am** British Railways **2.00** Scouting for Toys (AD) **3.00** Teleshopping

S4C

6.00am Cymru: Olobods (r) **6.05** Digbi Draig (r) **6.20** Cymyluachain (r) **6.30** Patrol Pannwennau (r) **6.45** Y Diwrnod Mawr (r) **7.00** Brethyn a Ffwrff **7.05** Pablo (r) **7.20** Da 'Di Dona (r) **7.30** Cwac a' Ffrindiau (r) **7.45** Kim a Ceth a Twrch (r) **8.00** Timpo (r) **8.10** Ysbyty Cyw Bach (r) **8.25** Jamori (r) **8.35** Octonots (r) **8.45** Ahoi! (r) **9.05** Odo (r) **9.10** Anifellidh Bach y Byd (r) **9.20** Dreigiau Gadi (r) **9.30** Penre Papur Pop (r) **9.45** Awyr Iach (r) **10.00** Olobods (r) **10.05** Digbi Draig (r) **10.20** Cymyluachain (r) **10.30** Patrol Pannwennau (r) **10.45** Y Diwrnod Mawr (r) **11.00** Brethyn a Ffwrff (r) **11.05** Pablo (r) **11.20** Da 'Di Dona (r) **11.30** Cwac a' Ffrindiau (r) **11.45** Kim a Ceth a Twrch (r) **12.00** News; Weather **12.05am** Ceta Doc (r) **12.30** Heno (r) **1.00** Y Sin (r) **1.30** Cais Quinnell (r) **2.00** News; Weather **2.05** Prynhadu Da **3.00** News; Weather **3.05** Y Fets (r) (AD) **4.00** Awr Fawr: Olobods (r) **4.05** Digbi Draig (r) **4.20** Bendibwmbls (r) **4.30** Penre Papur Pop (r) **4.45** Awyr Iach (r) **5.00** Stwnsh: Dennis a Dannedd (r) **5.15** Byd Rwtsh Ddi Potsh (r) **5.25** Siwrne Ni (r) **5.30** Un Cwestiwn (r) **5.50** News Ni **6.00** Garddio a Mwy (r) **6.57** News **7.00** Heno **7.30** News; Weather **8.00** Cymru, Alabama a'r Urd (r) **8.55** News; Weather **9.00** Rybsh (r) (AD) **10.00** Welsh Whisperer — Nŷn Teithio Nawr (r) (AD) **10.35-11.40** Ni Yw'r Cymry (r)

MindGames

Backgammon Chris Bray

Communication channel

It is always worth remembering that backgammon, like many ancient board games, had its origin as a representation of war. The board is the field of battle, and the checkers represent the two armies. Each army has just 15 soldiers at its disposal.

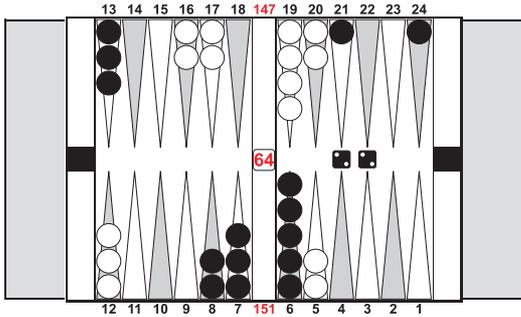
In war, it is important to keep open good lines of communication between soldiers at the front and the backroom staff. That is why at the start of the game it is normal to start to advance the back checkers, which have the furthest distance to travel to safety, as soon as possible. This enables them to get in better communication with their fellows on the mid-point.

The key communication channel is the mid-point, which is in touch with both the rear checkers and those in the home board. There are two key things to remember about the mid-point: first, to take care before using the last spare checker on the mid-point; second, to think very long and hard before giving up the mid-point completely while you still have checkers in your opponent's home board.

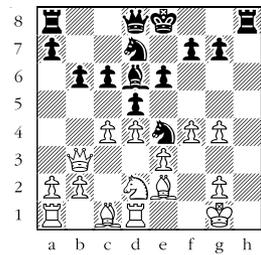
This week's position demonstrates the second point quite vividly. In the game from which it was taken, Black played his double two by moving 13/11(3), 6/4. This a bad blunder because it severs the communication with the rear checkers. Black thought that blocking White's sixes from Black's 5-pt was the priority but, with a close-fought race, keeping a safety point for the rear checkers to run to was much more important.

Virtually any move that keeps the mid-point intact is OK, and the simple 24/22, 6/4(3) is the best play. That move builds a home board point, and the checker advanced to the 22-pt puts additional pressure on White's outer board checkers. White is clearly the favourite in this position, but 24/22, 6/4(3) gives Black reasonable chances.

It is only in the last 30 years or so that the importance of keeping the mid-point as a communication channel has become really well understood. Therefore, my advice is to consider it as one of the key strategic points on the board and to be loath to give it up without good reason while you still have rear checkers.



Winning Move

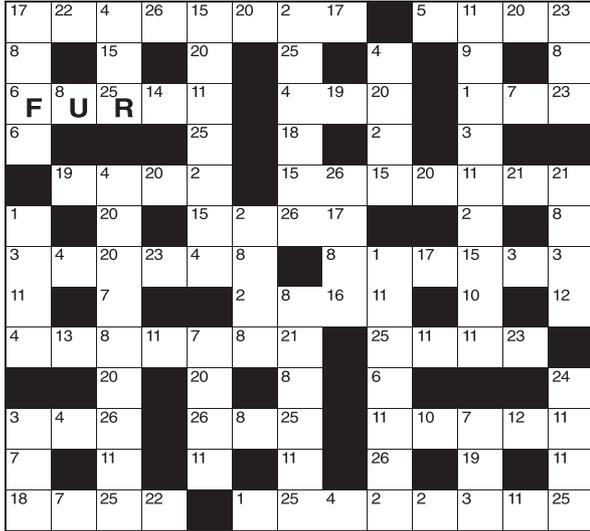


Black to play.

This position is from Henriquez Villagra-Danielyan, Titled Tuesday, chess.com 2024.

White has badly misplayed the opening in this game. The open h-file gives Black a ready-made attack against the vulnerable white king on g1 and White is already in dire straits. The natural 1... Qh4 is not bad but White can struggle on with 2 Nxe4 dxe4 3 Qc2. What did Black play instead?

Codeword No 5223



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

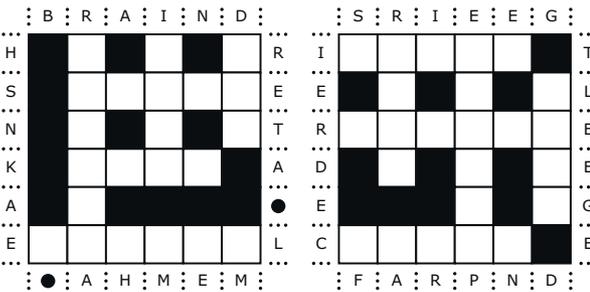


Every letter in this crossword-style grid is represented by a number from 1 to 26. Each letter of the alphabet appears in the grid at least once. Use the letters already provided to work out the identity of further letters. Enter letters in the main grid and the smaller reference grid until all 26 letters of the alphabet have been accounted for. Proper nouns are excluded. *Yesterday's solution, right*

Cueclines Stuck on Codeword? To receive 4 random clues call 0901 293 6262 or text TIMECODE to 64343. Calls cost £1 plus your telephone company's network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. For the full solution call 0905 757 0142. Calls cost £1 per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm).

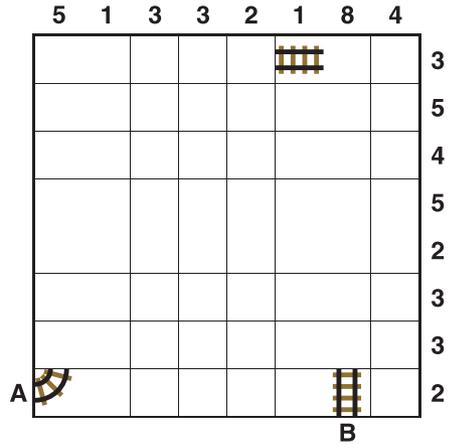
Lexica Easy No 7429

Hard No 7430



Slide the letters either horizontally or vertically back into the grid to produce a completed crossword. Letters are allowed to slide over other letters

Train Tracks No 2252

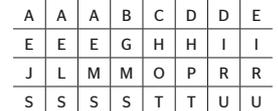


Lay tracks to enable the train to travel from village A to village B. The numbers indicate how many sections of track go in each row and column. There are only straight sections and curved sections. The track cannot cross itself.

Quintagram®

Solve all five cryptic clues using each letter underneath once only

- 1 Black aeroplane (3)
- 2 Briefly debate flying saucer? (6)
- 3 Gasp! Bus nobbled Emily's cat! (7)
- 4 Drink: rest guzzling another one? (7)
- 5 Town's corrupt female actor (9)



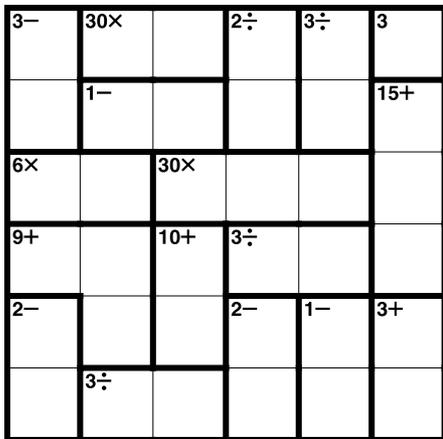
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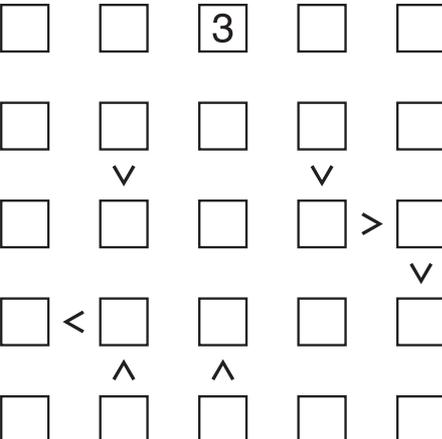
What are your favourite puzzles in MindGames?
Email: puzzles@thetimes.co.uk

KenKen Difficult No 6215



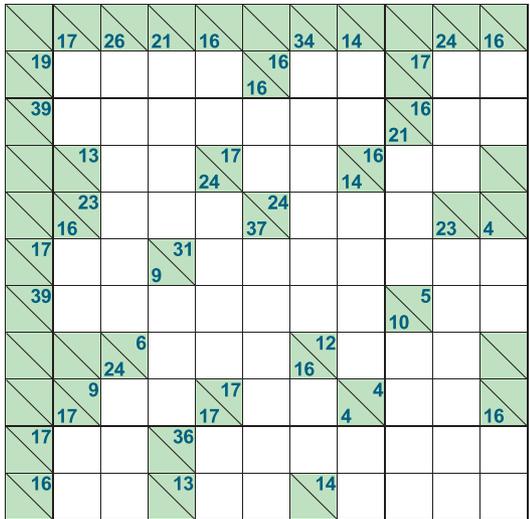
All the digits 1 to 6 must appear in every row and column. In each thick-line "block", the target number in the top left-hand corner is calculated from the digits in all the cells in the block, using the operation indicated by the symbol.

Futoshiki No 4763



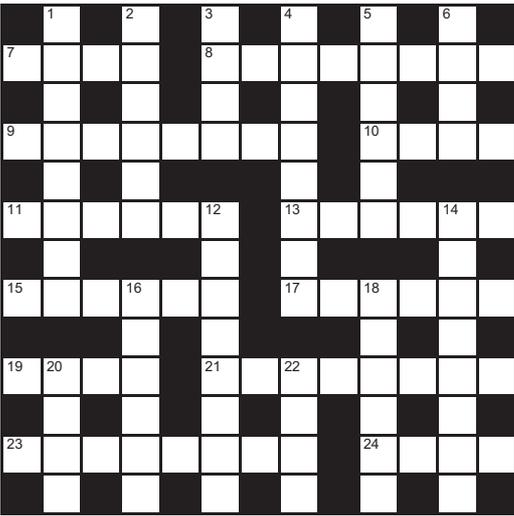
Fill the blank squares so that every row and column contains each of the numbers 1 to 5 once only. The symbols between the squares indicate whether a number is larger (>) or smaller (<) than the number next to it.

Kakuro No 3722



Fill the grid using the numbers 1 to 9 only. The numbers in each horizontal or vertical run of white squares add up to the total in the triangle to its left or above it. The same number may occur more than once in a row or column, but not within the same run of white squares.

times2 Crossword No 9539



- Across**
 7 Wander freely (4)
 8 Large fish tank (8)
 9 Together (2,6)
 10 Abound or swarm (with) (4)
 11 Regular recurrent pattern or beat (6)
 13 City of NE England (6)
 15 Chamber of the heart (6)

- 17 Internet business (6)
 19 Measure of whisky (4)
 21 Amateur telecommunications enthusiast (5,3)
 23 British hardwood tree (8)
 24 Flat of the hand (4)

Solution to Crossword 9538



Need help with today's puzzle? Call 0905 757 0143 to check the answers. Calls cost £1 per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm).

Bridge Andrew Robson

Twenty Bidding Maxims
 8. You can't fight the spade suit

There's a big difference between a (One-level) overall over a 1♠ opener and a (Two-level) overall over a 1♣ opening bid. Using similar logic, there's quite a big difference between the take-out double of a 1♣ opener and the take-out double of a 1♠ opener — where you're forcing partner to the Two-level (or INT, an unusual response to a take-out double).

Double a 1♣ opener with all these:
 ♠AQ72 ♠QJ62 ♠KQ4
 ♥Q73 ♥A862 ♥K94
 ♦K872 ♦K842 ♦A9732
 ♣J2 ♣2 ♣32

Now swap the black suits.
 ♠J2 ♠2 ♠32
 ♥Q73 ♥A862 ♥K94
 ♦K872 ♦K842 ♦A9732
 ♣AQ72 ♣QJ62 ♣K94

If right-hand opponent opens 1♠, you should pass with all three. Don't fight the spade suit.

Now turning the point on its head, if you are lucky enough to hold the spades, don't keep it a secret. Bid them — you'll probably win the auction.

Right-hand opponent opens 1♣ and the bidding goes pass, pass to you. Would you protect with these?

- ♠42 ♠KJ873 ♠42
 ♥K1873 ♥42 ♥AK4
 ♦K82 ♦K82 ♦AJ732
 ♣Q72 ♣Q72 ♣J72

With the first, no. Let them play in 1♠. The danger of bidding 1♥ is the opponents will find spades.

With the second, however (identical to the first but with the majors swapped), bid 1♠.

Although part of me wants to pass on the third — because of my lack of spades — I think I'm too strong to let it go. However, make your protective bid INT (yes, in spite of the lack of a club stopper), not 1♦, to pre-empt out a 1♠ bid.

Dealer W

♠AQ1053	♠J2	♠K7
♥KQ94	♥J73	♥A10
♦105	♦AQ72	♦KJ93
♠A10	♠KQ72	♠98653

♠9864
 ♥8652
 ♦864
 ♣J4

S	W	N	E
	1♠	Dbl(1)	Redb(2)
	2♥	Dbl	End

(1) VERY unwise. You can't fight the spade suit — the lack of a fourth heart is a further reason to stay schtum.

(2) Showing ten or more points with no great spade fit nor suit of her own — mainly looking for a penalty.

West led ♦10, declarer trying dummy's ♦Q, losing to East's ♦K. At trick two, East continued with ♦J. Winning dummy's ♦A, declarer led ♠2. West beat declarer's ♠1 with ♠A and switched to ♥4. East won ♥A, cashed ♦9, on which West discarded ♠10, and helpfully cashed ♠K (to let West know she held it). She then reverted to ♥10, enabling West to win ♥Q, cash ♥9, and follow with ♠AQ105. Declarer made only one trick.

I imagine that while have taught North a good lesson — in spades, so to speak.

andrew.robson@thetimes.co.uk

Brain Trainer

EASY	46	-7	x2	÷3	+7	x2	-14	75% OF IT	-6	x2	ANSWER
MEDIUM	123	+41	x2	+66	1/2 OF IT	x3	+57	2/3 OF IT	+74	+1/2 OF IT	ANSWER
HARDER	109	x8	50% OF IT	x3	+612	90% OF IT	+558	x2	+786	50% OF IT	ANSWER

Polygon

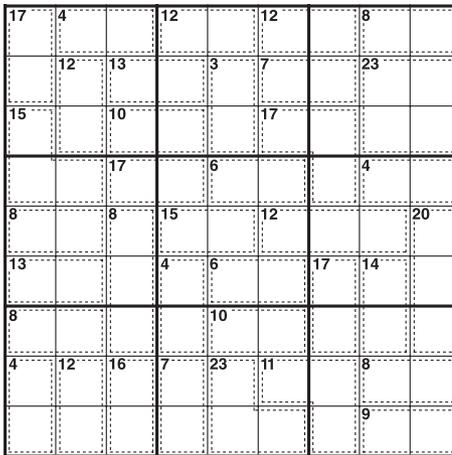


From these letters, make words of four or more letters, always including the central letter. Answers must be in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, excluding capitalised words, plurals, conjugated verbs (past tense etc), adverbs ending in LY, comparatives and superlatives. How you rate 12 words, average; 17, good; 24, very good; 31, excellent

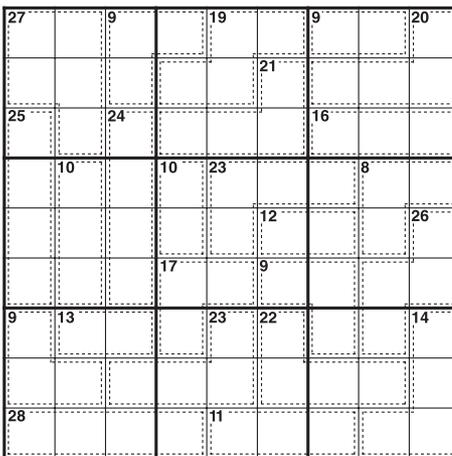
Yesterday's answers

erhu, herl, hers, hest, hurl, hurst, hurt, hurtle, huss, hustle, hustier, lush, rush, ruth, ruthless, sesh, shul, shut, sleuth, slush, thru, thus, tush, usher

Killer Moderate No 9484



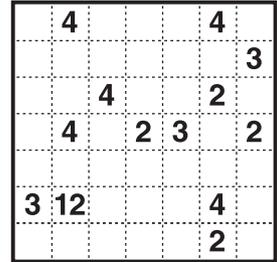
Killer Deadly No 9485



As with standard Sudoku, fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9. Each set of cells joined by dotted lines must add up to the target number in its top-left corner. Within each set of cells joined by dotted lines, a digit cannot be repeated.

Cluelines Stuck on Sudoku, Killer or KenKen? Call 0901 293 6263 before midnight to receive four clues for any of today's puzzles. Calls cost £1 plus your telephone company's network access charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm).

Cell Blocks No 5105



Divide the grid into square or rectangular blocks, each containing one digit only. Every block must contain the number of cells indicated by the digit inside it.

Set Square No 3725

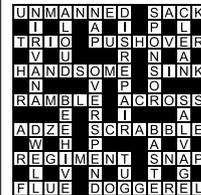
+	+	-	1	=	9
+	+	+	+	=	16
÷	+	×	×	=	2
=	=	=			
5	42	40			

Enter each of the numbers from 1 to 9 in the grid, so that the six sums work. We've placed two numbers to get you started. Each sum should be calculated left to right or top to bottom.

Please note, BODMAS does not apply

Solutions

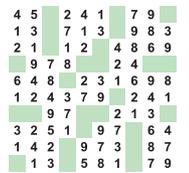
Quick Cryptic 2683



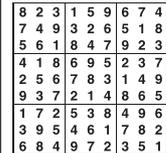
Codeword 5222



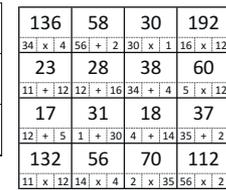
Kakuro 3721



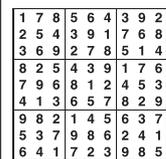
Sudoku 14,934



Tetonor 468



Sudoku 14,935



Cell Blocks 5105



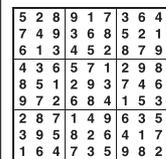
Set Square 3724

5	×	×	×	+	1	=	7
×	×	×	×	×	×	=	8
8	÷	4	+	9			
×	×	×	×	×	×	=	7
2	×	6	×	7			

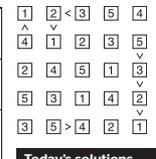
Lexica 7427



Sudoku 14,936



Futoshiki 4762



KenKen 6214



Lexica 7428



Today's solutions

Concise Quintagram

- Axis
- Stevens
- Nightie
- Phone-in
- Pungent

Cryptic Quintagram

- Jet
- Discuss
- Bagpuss
- Limeade
- Rotherham

Suko 4124



Brain Trainer

- Easy 66
- Medium 759
- Harder 2,679

Word watch

Alexithymia (a) An inability to describe one's emotions (Collins)
 Postil (a) A marginal note in a Bible (Chambers)
 Courge (b) A basket for holding fishing bait (OED)

Chess - Winning Move

1... Rh4! is a familiar attacking theme. After 2 Kxh1 Qh4+ 3 Kg1 Qf2+ 4 Kh2 Ke7 (or 4... 0-0-0) the other rook will finish off the job by coming to h8

Quiz

- Dundee
- Bovril
- New York City
- Rebecca
- India
- Philip Larkin
- 7 Benjamin Disraeli
- Harold Pinter
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- 10 Louis XV II
- Merrivether Post Pavilion
- 12 Plasmidis
- 13 Corinne Marchand
- 14 Squash
- 15 John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough

Bricks & Mortar



Property promises

WHAT THE ELECTION COULD MEAN FOR HOUSING
pages 6-7

Home of the week

Once owned by a star golfer, Queen Anne House has a cinema, pool and party room

Footballers, rejoice — particularly if you're planning on joining Chelsea this summer. A pad that is just perfect for you has come on to the market, a stone's throw from the west London club's Cobham training ground.

Queen Anne House, once owned by the champion golfer Colin Montgomerie, is a 16,500 sq ft home in the Crown Estate near the Surrey village of Oxshott.

Flourishes include a 1,500 sq ft master suite bedroom — the same size as the average UK semi-detached house. There's a cinema, a party room with a dancefloor and bar as well as a double-height indoor swimming pool complex, an outdoor hot tub on one of the terraces and a tennis court.

Of course there's a separate two-bedroom staff apartment with its own private entrance, just in case you want someone else to do all the hard work or look after your children while you're at training.

The mansion, which has a walnut-wood finished formal kitchen and light-filled hallway with spiral staircase, was a labour of love for the businessman Jeremy Male and his wife, Jane, who bought the property that used to stand there from Montgomerie — the Scottish golfer who won a record eight European Tour Order of Merit titles — in 2005 but decided to change its name, knock it all down and start again.

"He [Montgomerie] had changed the name of the property from Queen Anne House to Nairn, which is his home town. So we changed the name back to Queen Anne House and lived in it very happily for around six years. And then, because it had a lot of square feet and needed a

lot of refurbishment, we knocked it down and we designed a new Queen Anne House and had it built between 2011 and the end of 2013," Male, 62, explains.

The interior architecture was done by the award-winning design firm Wowhaus, and the 1.5 acres of grounds were landscaped and designed by One Abode — a gold winner at the 2012 Hampton Court flower show.

At this stage, their aim was to settle down permanently in Queen Anne House with their two children. In 2013 Male was asked to become chief executive of Outfront Media. At that point, the couple realised they'd have to move to New York.

They used the house as their occasional UK base, spending many happy holidays there and entertaining friends with lavish parties.

"We spent three years building it and designing every nook and cranny of that house — everything in it was bespoke," Jane says. "There were never meant to be any square rooms — the shapes are spectacular, and we worked with a wonderful architect called Andrew Long."

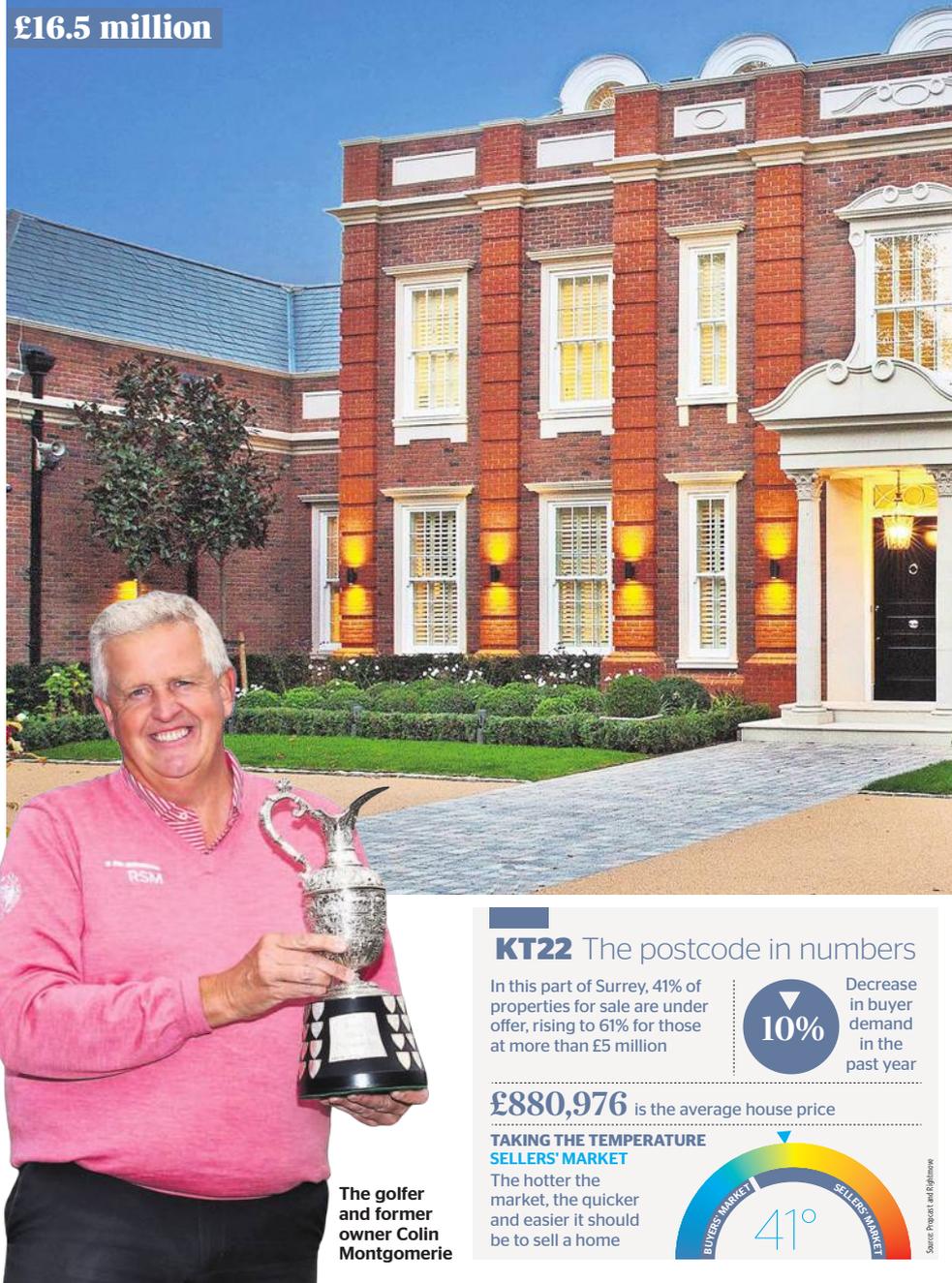
Renting the house out, the couple earned an income of £90,000 a month, or £2.16 million over two years. Now, with their children having grown up — and with them in the US — they have decided to sell Queen Anne House.

"It's a home that was built with love, that's full of joy," Jane says, adding, "I had imagined our kids would have their weddings there, that there would be christenings held there. It was built with all of that in mind ... But plans change."

David Byers

£16.5 million, johndwood.co.uk

£16.5 million



The golfer and former owner Colin Montgomerie

Sign up to our property newsletter for the latest analysis, gossip, tips and tricks every Monday at [thetimes.co.uk/newsletters](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/newsletters)

KT22 The postcode in numbers

In this part of Surrey, 41% of properties for sale are under offer, rising to 61% for those at more than £5 million

Decrease in buyer demand in the past year

10%

£880,976 is the average house price

TAKING THE TEMPERATURE SELLERS' MARKET

The hotter the market, the quicker and easier it should be to sell a home



Source: Zoopla and Rightmove

What £650,000 buys you in...

Cornwall

Tintagel is famous for its 12th-century castle ruins, its mythical connection to King Arthur and its striking cliffs and caves. This location makes Cornerstone, a four-bedroom new-build, the perfect place for history buffs, nature lovers and those who don't like to stray too far from the sea. The bungalow has an open-plan living area, a generous back garden and a garage with an attached utility room, and the main bedroom has an en suite bathroom and a walk-in dressing room. Underfloor heating is powered by a heat pump, and there are solar panels and provision to fit a vehicle charging point.

EPC A — on scale of A (best) to G (worst)

Upside Off-road parking.

Downside Boring garden design.

Contact johnbrayestates.co.uk



£650,000

Gwynedd

Located on the west coast of north Wales, Swn Y Gwynt has gorgeous mountain, coastal and countryside views. The 1,367 sq ft property, built in the 1960s by the seller's father, has three bedrooms, one bathroom and storage space on the ground floor, and a kitchen, a living room/dining room and a lavatory on the first floor. A large balcony, accessed through the living room, faces the sea and has plenty of dining and entertaining space. The large gardens are tiered to the side and the rear, and include a built-in barbecue. Nearby is Criccieth, a town with shops, cafés and schools.

EPC E (potential D)

Upside A generous garden with glorious views.

Downside The place is in need of modernising.

Contact fineandcountry.co.uk



£650,000



Brief encounter

Ask the expert

Q My student daughter shares a flat. Her flatmate wants to be replaced with another student, but the landlord wants to charge £200 for the change. Can he do this?

A Extra charges for private rental tenants are governed by the Tenant Fees Act 2019. This completely bans signing-on fees for tenants by letting agents and caps deposits and holding deposits paid to landlords. Other charges are strictly regulated. For example, the act allows landlords to demand extra fees if tenants breach their letting agreements or ask to vary or terminate them. But it limits the amount that can be charged and allows tenants to apply to the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) to decide an appropriate fee.

In this case, the relevant statutory provision is found at paragraph 6 of schedule 1 to the act. Landlords and letting agents may charge for any “variation” or “assignment” of a tenancy requested by tenants up to maximum of £50, or the “reasonable costs of the person to whom the payment is made”. There is also official guidance for both landlords and tenants accompanying the legislation which explains the limitations. For example, the *Tenant Fees Act 2019: Guidance for Landlords and Agents* suggests that if tenants have found a suitable replacement, it is unlikely landlords or agents could charge above £50 because the costs involved in referencing the replacement tenant, re-issuing the tenancy agreement and protecting the tenancy deposit will usually be small.

Tribunals routinely apply the statutory limits and the official guidance to cut fees. For example, a 2022 tribunal disallowed a charge of £170 for changing the name of tenants of a flat in Oxford. It ruled that the “reasonable costs” should be £58.40, based on one hour of work at £35 per hour and credit check fees of £23.40.

It is therefore unlikely your daughter’s landlord can charge anything like £200 for changing the names on the tenancy agreement. **Mark Loveday is a barrister with Tanfield Chambers. Email questions to brief.encounter@thetimes.co.uk**

Kent

An impressive barn conversion with a balanced mix of modern and classic features, this three-bedroom, two-bathroom house sits outside the village of Charing in the Ashford district of Kent, and within the Kent Downs National Landscape. Newly converted, the property is on the edge of protected woodland, and has exposed original ragstone and modern steel beams. Bright, with open-plan spaces and high ceilings, it has a fitted kitchen with a Belling induction range cooker and a walk-in pantry, a main bedroom with an en suite bathroom, and French doors leading out to a private garden.

EPC D (potential B)

Upside Comes with about an acre of land.

Downside The design may not be to everyone’s taste.

Contact sandersonsuk.com



£650,000

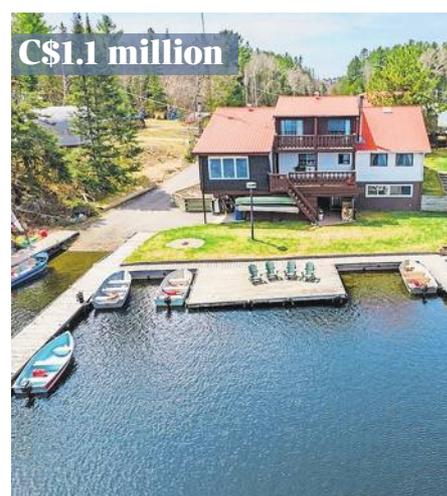
Canada

Northland Paradise Lodge sits in 2.5 acres on Lake Temagami, a relatively unspoilt wilderness six hours north of Toronto. It has been run as a holiday business for 38 years, so there are seven guest suites with kitchens, a dock for 12 boats, a dining room that seats 18 and a games room with a pool table and shuffleboard. A separate dwelling for the owners has three bedrooms, a kitchen, living room and dining room, and waterfront views. There’s an additional two-bedroom cottage. The property faces the White Bear Forest Conservation Reserve, with a 400-year-old pine forest and hiking trails. The holiday let operates all year, and the sale includes the client list, 2024 bookings, boats, motors and canoes.

Upside Sublime Canadian wilderness.

Downside A long drive from Toronto.

Contact christiesrealestate.com



C\$1.1 million

Moving stories

Your tales from up and down the property ladder

'We moved to the US with our young family — here's what we learnt'

In March 2023 I received a call from my husband. He works for an American bank and a relocation to Manhattan was on the table.

It would be a big career move for him and I agreed without hesitation. It seemed an exciting adventure to drop into our laps, and our children — aged five and eight — were young enough to up sticks without too much disruption to their education. He signed a two-year contract, with the potential for extending.

It would not be our first stint as expats. We lived in Hong Kong for nine years and both kids were born there. The pandemic brought us back to Dorset but we always hoped for another overseas foray before we settled into a routine.

The planning and obtaining of visas took a good nine months, so it was late December when we opened the door of our new home — a riverfront apartment in Hoboken, New Jersey.

Hoboken is a low-rise, brown-brick, charming town separated from

Manhattan by the Hudson River, with views of the New York skyline. It is a popular commuter base to New York as you can get to mid or downtown Manhattan in 20 minutes by bus, train or ferry. Why did we choose Hoboken? Back in August 2023 we did a few days' recce, starting in Westchester, the suburbs above New York. They were lovely but too similar to what we were used to in Dorset — houses with gardens and close-knit communities.

Next, we surveyed Manhattan — Upper East and West Side — as well as the lower parts such as Greenwich Village and Battery Park. We liked these for their sassy urban vibe but we felt they were not nest-like enough. Hoboken is a happy medium — close enough to the action but it is small and feels safe; they call it Mile Square City.

Three months in, what have we learnt? The cost of living here is something else. Life is expensive when you look at anything extracurricular or entertainment-orientated. While the



Tara Loader Wilkinson and her family in New York

Have your say
Would you like to share your moving story?
Email carol.lewis@thetimes.co.uk

public library offers free tickets to certain museums and galleries, those that are really dopamine-inducing set you back at least \$200 for entry for four. A family trip to the theatre? Don't expect much change from \$600. Then there is how to navigate working during the 10 or 11-week summer holidays. A week of camp for my two kids is about \$1,300. By comparison, in the UK a week for the two kids is £275 (\$345). That said, the experiences we've had

have been amazing, such as the Central Park Zoo, sports games, the Children's Museum of Manhattan, the Liberty Science Center and Ellen's Stardust Diner, home of the singing waiters.

Fuel and car rental is affordable so we often hire a car and take picnics into the countryside of New Jersey or Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains. You can stay in some charming Airbnbs and the food at the traditional diners here is delicious and generously portioned.

One can't mention moving to the US without referencing gun control. This was my greatest concern prior to moving. Actually, New York and New Jersey are two of the safest states when it comes to gun crime, as they have relatively low rates of gun violence.

Just weeks after signing my son up for school in Hoboken, I received an email alerting families to a "shelter in place" situation. There had been "a threat" against the school — the police had been called and the children had to stay in their building for 40 minutes until given the all-clear. I freaked out, but the school reassured me it was fairly routine.

Hoboken did turn out to be a good choice as an expat. Green spaces and parks are plentiful and Hudson County has an 18-mile-long river promenade, great for scooting or jogging with a view. My husband's commute is short and it's easy to slip into the city for a glamorous New York date night.

So far so good: the kids have both made plenty of friends and are happy in their new schools. Life across the Pond has so far been all the adventure — and more — that we hoped for.

Tara Loader Wilkinson



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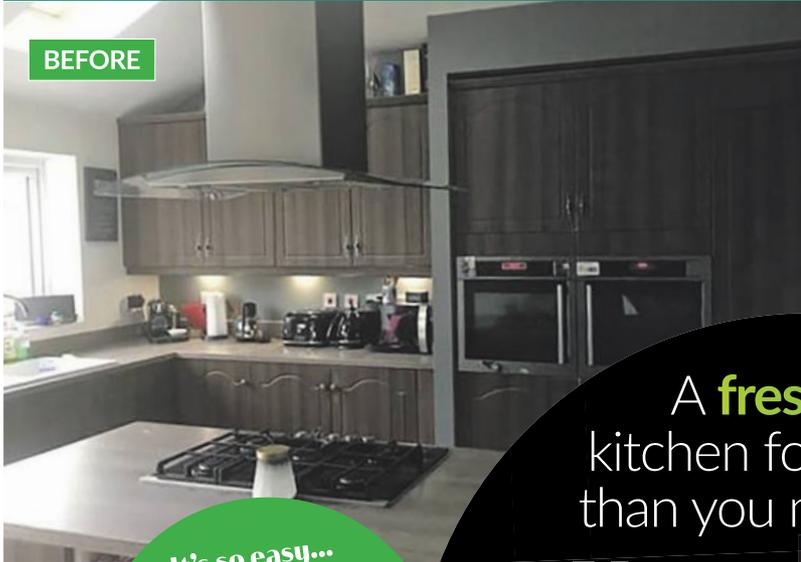
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The housing crisis is one of the most crucial political issues in the UK, with all parties aware that it is at the forefront of voters' minds.

Housing affordability — particularly for the young — is a key issue, as well as tenants struggling to pay spiralling rents, and aspiring buyers, movers and remortgagers grappling with high mortgage rates. For older voters, the lack of suitable properties for downsizers is gumming up the market. Meanwhile, for landlords, higher taxes are causing a slowdown in investment.

As polling day approaches, we take a look at the parties' positions on property.

Building and planning

On Wednesday, when the prime minister listed his government's achievements while calling the election, there was one notable absence: housebuilding. Many in the industry believe that the pendulum has swung against development. The Conservatives placated rebel MPs by watering down housing targets — the big stick for forcing councils to permit the building of enough homes — making it impossible to hit the government's target of "300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s", although Sunak claims that another manifesto pledge, for one million homes to be built over this parliament, has been met. Net additional homes totalled 935,204 over four years to March 2023, with data for the past year (not yet published) expected to push it past the one million mark.

In a dividing line, the Labour leader Keir Starmer has painted his as the party of the "builders, not the blockers". It promises to build 1.5 million homes over five years, which would require hitting 300,000 every year until 2029. To do so, Labour will loosen planning laws to build on "grey belt" land — low-quality areas of green belt, the urban collars where building is otherwise banned to limit sprawl — while ruling out development on "genuine nature spots". Sites for a series of New Towns, echoing the 32 built after the Second World War, would be decided within a year of taking power, Labour has said.

The Conservatives claim Labour's policies "ignore the concerns" of residents. The Tories have brought in design codes to give locals a say in rules for "building beautifully". The party's proposed "brownfield presumption" will mean that if housebuilding drops below expected levels in Britain's 20 largest cities and towns, it will be easier to get permission to build on previously developed brownfield sites.

Rental market reform, landlords and energy performance

The election announcement has created further uncertainty for landlords and tenants at a time when both are demoralised, with high running costs and increased regulation on one side, and rising rents and insecurity on the other.

The Renters Reform Bill, the Conservatives' flagship legislation to modernise the private rented sector, has passed through the House of Commons and had its first reading in the Lords. It was due to enter the committee stage in the Lords, a process that usually takes several weeks, so it is unlikely to complete this or get royal assent before

the dissolution of parliament, which is expected within days. The government could force a rush vote on the bill in the "wash up" period, as these in-between days are known.

It's likely the Conservatives will pick the bill up again if re-elected; private tenants are crucial voters in marginal seats. But many renters feel betrayed by the government who promised to abolish Section 21 "no fault" evictions in its 2019 manifesto, but have postponed this until the courts are ready to deal with the increase in grounds-based evictions which will inevitably follow such a ban.

The Renters' Reform Coalition, a campaign group for private renters, says without the "no fault" eviction ban the bill "is hardly worth the paper it is written on" and it hopes the next government will start again.

If a Labour government is elected, it is likely it will ban these evictions as it will face less opposition from its backbenches than the Conservatives had. It supports most of the bill as it stands, including making it easier to rent with pets, abolishing fixed-term tenancies, creating a National Landlord Register and a Decent Homes Standard for private rentals.

While Labour appears undecided on whether to meddle with the rate of capital gains tax, they have signalled tighter regulations for private landlords. These include measures to stop them switching to holiday or short-term lets, and an extension of Awaab's Law, which is currently used in social housing to force landlords to investigate reported hazards in the home within 14 days.

Labour has also ruled out rent controls, but it does seem to be open to inflation and wage-linked limits to rent increases.

Landlords were also dreading the arrival of mandatory energy performance certificate (EPC) ratings of C or above for all private rentals, but the Conservatives scrapped the 2028 deadline last September.

Most of the industry expects this is a temporary reprieve, regardless of who is elected in July. David Cox, general counsel for the property portal Rightmove and once prominent in the lettings agency body Arla Propertymark, says: "It's likely that EPC requirements in some form will reappear in the near future, so landlords with lower EPC-rated homes should still keep this in mind and consider the improvements they might make."

Leasehold reform

The housing secretary Michael Gove has called the leasehold system of ownership, which accounts for 20 per cent of all housing in England and Wales, "unfair" and pushed for a move towards commonhold, while making it cheaper and easier for existing leaseholders to buy the freehold of their properties.

These reforms were to be split into three bills. The first, the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act 2022, reduced ground rent to a "peppercorn" amount for new flats and stipulated that they be sold with a 990-year lease so there would never be a need to pay for a lease extension.

The second, the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill, is intended to help leaseholders by giving them greater rights to buy their freehold, make it cheaper to extend their lease for a longer term, make more leaseholders eligible to



Who gets your vote this time?

As the election date has been fixed, we look at the housing promises each party has made. By [Melissa York](#), [Martina Lees](#), [David Byers](#) and [Carol Lewis](#)

COVER STORY

manage their buildings, and make service charges and insurance costs more transparent.

This bill has been thrown into limbo with the general election announcement, and it also means that the government will not draw up the third bill that was meant to pave the way to a commonhold system, so that flat-owners would collectively own the building they live in.

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill is at the report stage in the House of Lords, which has suggested a number of amendments to the legislation that are unlikely to be ratified before the dissolution of parliament.

Reports suggest that Conservative plans to reduce ground rent to a peppercorn rate for all existing leaseholds have been diluted by intense lobbying from the freehold sector, which claims the policy will cost the pensions

industry billions of pounds — although anti-leasehold campaigners say the impact has been greatly exaggerated. Freeholders have also threatened to take the government to court for breaching their human rights concerning property ownership.

When she was the shadow housing secretary, Labour's Lisa Nandy pledged to abolish leasehold in the first 100 days of a Labour government, but the party soon rowed back on this pledge, wary that there was no quick fix to overhauling the centuries-old system. Harry Coffin, founder of the Free Leaseholders campaign, says this was "a massive blow to leaseholders because it signalled that Labour has deprioritised them".

Labour has committed to enacting the Law Commission's recommendations on leasehold, but campaigners want the party to go further and make sure all



Left: Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer and Ed Davey. Above: a manor house near Grantham, Lincolnshire, is on sale for £1 million with By Design Homes



autumn budget, which would be a middle-class handout. That will not be happening. Landlords and second-home buyers, meanwhile, currently pay an extra three percentage points in stamp duty. This policy was introduced by George Osborne in 2016, and despite the bitter complaints of investors, it will almost certainly remain regardless of which party wins the election in July.

Whether under a Tory or Labour government, the Treasury will be reluctant to sanction any cuts to stamp duty at all, as it brought in £11.61 billion in the 2023-24 tax year.

Separately, calls by some analysts for the scrapping of capital gains tax (CGT) relief on the sales of main residences have been consistently dismissed by the government because it would stop people selling up and penalise swathes of middle-class voters who made money on family homes.

Separately, it's unlikely that a government of any colour will unpick Hunt's abolition of non-dom status, although it may be toughened. In his March budget the chancellor said that, from April next year, people who move to the UK and claim non-dom status will have to pay tax like everyone else on their foreign earnings if they stay here for five years or longer. Labour has indicated it may make the arrangements for the first four years tougher, but the party was loose on detail. As it stands, plans to scrap non-dom status could generate £3.6 billion a year for the Treasury, according to The Times.

Cladding and building safety

About 580,000 people are still living in fire-risk flats, amid the scandal exposed by the Grenfell fire in 2017. Only 8 per cent of buildings known or estimated to be unsafe have been fixed. Although Gove changed the law to make developers and building landlords pay to fix homes, most residents' lives remain frozen. Some, such as those in blocks under 11m tall, still face uncapped costs to fix their homes. Neither the Conservatives nor Labour have announced substantive new plans on how they will end the crisis.

Holiday lets and second-homers

Despite a number of politicians owning more than one home, no political party is going to go easy on those who own additional properties. The Conservatives have given councils in England the power to charge second-home owners council tax at double the rate from next April; Labour is not likely to reverse this. Labour has also previously backed the Tories in their tightening of the rules around second-home owners paying business tax instead of council tax and have pledged to bring in a licensing system for holiday lets. Nandy said last year that "excessive rates of second-home ownership have a direct impact on communities, and especially the availability and affordability of homes for local families and young people". Labour's position on CGT is uncertain, leaving second-home owners guessing on whether selling up makes sense sooner rather than later.

new flat-owners are commonholders or at least own a share of the freehold.

Only yesterday, the shadow housing minister Matthew Pennycook tweeted: "If elected, we intend to finally bring the archaic and iniquitous leasehold system to an end and make commonhold the default tenure."

Sebastian O'Kelly, chief executive of the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership charity, told the news website PoliticsHome: "Matthew Pennycook is doing the politically

prudent thing, which is to be pretty imprecise."

Affordable homes and Help to Buy

The lack of affordable housing has underpinned the housing crisis, as property prices have accelerated away from earnings in recent decades.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), a full-time employee in England spent an average 8.3 times their annual earnings buying a home in 2023 [compared with 3.7 times in 1997], and 6.1 times in Wales [compared with 3 in 1997]. The figure for Scotland a year earlier, when last calculated by the ONS, was 5.3, with Northern Ireland at 5.1. For years, the government artificially eased part of this problem through pumping money into the system via the Help to Buy scheme, which began in 2013 and closed last year, and offered buyers of new-build homes a government equity loan of up to 40 per cent of the purchase price. It ended in part because it acted as an enormous cash bung to developers by artificially driving up the price of their properties.

There were reports last winter that ministers were considering bringing it back, but this seems unlikely given it's been called "the crack cocaine of the housing industry", and the Conservative policy on affordable homes in general is very non-specific — Gove had demanded urgent action from the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, in the spring budget, but it wasn't forthcoming.

For Labour's part, last week Rayner promised that every new development would be made up of 40 per cent of affordable homes, including a mix of social housing, council housing and

other tenures. The Liberal Democrats, meanwhile, have promised powers for local authorities to drive through new social and affordable housing.

The future of property taxes

Stamp duty land tax has been used in recent years as a weapon to curry favour with middle-class voters, put off landlords and boost first-time buyers. Usually, people don't pay the tax on residential properties costing up to £250,000. First-time buyers do get relief, however. They pay nothing on properties costing up to £425,000, with a further discounted rate on purchases up to £625,000 until March 31 2025. Then it reverts to £300,000 on a £500,000 property.

To boost the UK property market during Covid, in July 2020 Rishi Sunak, then the chancellor, introduced a stamp duty holiday on properties under £500,000, and extended it until June 30, 2021. Instead of simply boosting the market, it rocket-fuelled it. Prices rose at their fastest rate since 2004, as millions of buyers seized the opportunity to head for rural areas — the "race for space".

There were reports last month that the Conservatives were considering cutting stamp duty again by raising the threshold to £300,000 in a future

Main image: a Queen Anne house near Colchester, Essex, is on sale for £4.95 million through Jackson-Stops. Above: a four-bedroom farmhouse near Chichester, West Sussex, is on sale for £2.5 million with Strutt & Parker. On the cover: a three-bedroom home in Chelsea, southwest London, is on sale for £9.25 million with Strutt & Parker

Labour says it will build 1.5 million homes over five years — 300,000 every year until 2029

Why aren't we building homes where we need them?

In The Sunday Times



House prices and prime ministers

Prime ministers since 1976	Annualised average change
Tony Blair (May 1997 to Jun 2007)	+9.0%
James Callaghan (Apr 1976 to May 1979)	+4.2%
Boris Johnson (Jul 2019 to Sep 2022)	+2.4%
Margaret Thatcher (May 1979 to Nov 1990)	+1.7%
David Cameron (May 2010 to Jul 2016)	+0.7%
Theresa May (Jul 2016 to Jul 2019)	-1.2%
John Major (Nov 1990 to May 1997)	-1.9%
Gordon Brown (Jun 2007 to May 2010)	-5.0%
Liz Truss (Sep 2022 to Oct 2022)	-5.4%
Rishi Sunak (Oct 2022 - Present)	-15.6%

*represents house price growth, not property values
Source: Middleton Advisors

Green homes

Labour has scaled back its expensive and ambitious plan to insulate 19 million homes in a decade, at a cost of £6 billion a year — the pledge was designed to reduce energy bills. Now its target is to retrofit five million homes in that period.

Help!

I can't sell my £22.5m mansion

The taxi tycoon John Griffin has tried everything to offload his Regent's Park pile, from slashing the price to feng shui. What's a multimillionaire to do? By David Byers

John Griffin is notoriously determined. The 81-year-old left school at 15 with no qualifications, survived tuberculosis as a child and is now worth hundreds of millions of pounds after founding the taxi giant Addison Lee. Knighted last December, the father of two is used to getting what he wants.

However, there is one hurdle Griffin can't seem to overcome: he can't offload his grade I listed mansion opposite Regent's Park. It has been on the market since 2022.

"In this room, a gentleman sat there and made an offer which was highly acceptable. And I stood up with him and we shook hands. What happened next? Nothing. It was most disappointing," Griffin says, gesturing at a chair in his study, as he recounts one galling failed deal to sell the 6,730 sq ft end-of-terrace property a year ago.

"This chap, I honestly can't believe a human being would break the agreement he made. He shook my hand. We were let down. There were six of us in the room."

Some observers may say that Griffin ought to have woken up and smelt the rather fragrant flowers across the road from his home in northwest London. The house, located at the end of Hanover Terrace, and built by the Buckingham Palace architect John Nash in 1822, has languished on the market for £29 million since November 2022 — although in February it was finally reduced to £27 million and then, three weeks ago Griffin dropped the price to £22.5 million.

Rather than drastically reducing it earlier, Griffin, who bought the six-bedroom, eight-bathroom home in 2014 with his wife, Rita, after selling Addison Lee for £300 million, initially decided to try a different selling tactic.

In June last year Sotheby's International Realty, their estate agency, brought in a feng shui master to reposition the interior of the mansion to make it more attractive for sale — a process that was shown in the Channel 4 documentary *Britain's Most Expensive Houses*.

As we stand in his lateral first-floor double reception room, which has a view of the famous park beyond, I ask Griffin if the positioning of his furniture is still based on feng shui.

"I don't know. It's all bullshit really," he replies with a mixture of bluntness and charm. At this point Lee Greenfield, a senior director at Sotheby's International Realty, who is standing

alongside us, jumps in: "Well to be honest, it's something that was obviously useful at the time. And if you're into that, then it would definitely be very helpful. But I can't comment because it was the past regime — nothing to do with us."

This isn't the only time during the interview that Greenfield refers to his own estate agency as "the past regime" — a curious figure of speech, on the face of it. However, in the case of Sotheby's, it makes sense. Last year the agency, which had a reputation for being somewhat understated and glacial in its approach, was taken over by George Azar, a no-nonsense banker who has turned the business upside down.

Greenfield, who joined in October, is one of the new recruits alongside "super agents" Claire Reynolds, Marcus O'Brien and Becky Fatemi, who are now working to a US-style commission model.

It is this new-look Sotheby's which advised Griffin to slash his home's price by £4.5 million. It was a ruthless recommendation — the £22.5 million asking price isn't much more than the £21 million that he paid for the house.

"We took a general consensus of the marketplace. If you want to sell something, you have to be aligned with market conditions and you have to be proactive. And we took the decision that the guide price of £22.5 million is a little bit more palatable," Greenfield says.

Whatever the debate over the price, Griffin is at pains to tell me how his attempt to try to sell the house has left him deeply disillusioned with the way the selling process works — addressing



John Griffin standing outside his Regent's Park home. Right, from top: the gym, the main reception room,



One of the guest bedrooms in the grade I listed John Nash-built property



The dining room, in which the entrepreneur met David Cameron

ANIRA SUEMORI FOR THE TIMES



and the ground-floor staircase

this will be his latest campaign. The entrepreneur, who is now chairman of the careers mentoring charity Finito, speaks bitterly of window-shoppers looking around his home discourteously, while others expressed an interest but then vanished into thin air.

Griffin claims that any agreement to exchange on a property should be legally binding, like in Scotland, where accepted offers carry legal and financial weight after solicitors exchange documents called missives. As a result, gazumping is highly unusual north of the border.

"I am a great advocate of that, I really think that's what we should be doing," he says. "We've got to look at the whole question of buying and selling. The way the system works now, people are wasting my time, they're wasting everyone's time — they're even wasting his time," he adds, pointing at Greenfield. "He [Greenfield] has come

here today, and we've seen him four or five times, but you know really he's a victim too."

So why, I ask, is Griffin trying to sell at all? He explains that since the pandemic he and his wife have been mostly living in a house they bought in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, which is closer to their son Liam, who bought back Addison Lee in 2020 and is now its chief executive, and their other son, Kieran. A grandson, who is at university in Cambridge, regularly commutes back to Potters Bar too.

Among several highlights of the Hanover Terrace house, Griffin tells me, is an elegant ground-floor dining room with double-height ceilings looking over Regent's Park. This is the first room we visit. On a windowsill I spot a framed photograph of Griffin with David Cameron, which was taken when the former prime minister "popped in for tea". Griffin is one of the Conservative Party's biggest donors, having given £4.08 million between 2013 and 2019. He is an admirer of Cameron, but tells me he became disillusioned with the performance of Boris Johnson, and says the party has gone "tits up" in recent years.

"I was thinking of having a dinner here [for leading Conservative supporters], but Cameron said: 'Don't do that, they're not worth it,'" Griffin jokes. "This is one of the great rooms of London, after all."

Another highlight is the airy downstairs kitchen that leads out to a private walled garden, at the end of which is a self-contained mews house containing a gym. Greenfield says the mews house would be worth several million if it was sold on its own.

All the rooms are spacious, particularly the principal suite, which takes up almost an entire floor on its own, and the double reception room. The place looks well maintained, even if the decor is a little tired in places. Intricate cornicing and period fireplaces add character. One slight drawback is that there is no lift, a de rigeur feature in prime properties with several storeys — Griffin's home has five.

Sotheby's stresses it's the prestige location that makes this a marquee property. The views are among the finest in London. Among Griffin's neighbours on Hanover Terrace is Damien Hirst, Britain's richest artist, who reportedly paid £40 million for his property four years ago, but is still making improvements, including a yoga room and swimming pool. "These houses were built to be seen — we want to be seen, and we want to see," Griffin says, looking out from the reception room balcony towards Regent's Park.

As I chat to Greenfield just outside the property, the area's appeal to a certain type of demographic is underlined when Daniel Dagers, a super-prime estate agent who is starring in *Buying London*, Britain's answer to the US luxury property TV show *Selling Sunset*, strolls by and shakes Griffin's hand.

So who would buy such a house? Greenfield says he anticipates buyers will be a family who live here permanently rather than occasional residents, but that the prestige location may appeal to British and foreign buyers alike. "You could have an English or European family here. You could have a Chinese buyer, you could have an Indian buyer that wants to buy [into] its heritage. This is a family house — I don't think this is going to be a pied-à-terre."

If the price is now right, then Britain's self-made minicab tycoon will soon be making another big sale, a decade after his previous big payday. But, unlike last year, you can be sure he won't be turning to feng shui to do it.



Above: Buying London estate agents Rosi Walden, left, and Rasa Bagdonaviute, right, with interior designer Juliana Ardenius, centre. Below: DDRE Global founder Daniel Dagers. Bottom: Sasha Nugara

Property porn and ridiculous feuds

It's been slated by po-faced critics — but *Buying London*, the UK's answer to *Selling Sunset*, is supposed to be a prime bit of fun, says Gen Z fan Sasha Nugara

Selling *Sunset*, *Buying Beverly Hills*, *The Parisian Agency* ... it's no wonder London was next on Netflix's list for a luxury real estate reality show.

It was beginning to feel like London had been forgotten. As Daniel Dagers, the founder of the estate agency DDRE Global (and the star of the show) said at the premiere for the new British version of *Selling Sunset*, *Buying London*: "London is like a friend who doesn't know she's beautiful."

The premiere, held in the May Fair Hotel, was full of VIPs, glitz, glamour and a decent helping of drama — an apt representation of what there is to expect. And it's fair to say, after the success of *Selling Sunset*, we should expect a lot.

Buying London has been dubbed by some as the most hated TV show ever made. Beautiful people selling beautiful homes — it's nothing we've never seen before, so why is it so offensive? Maybe it's too close to home. Maybe it's too jarring while we're in the midst of a real property crisis.

But if there's one thing *Buying London* is not trying to do, it's address those gritty issues, or be relatable to the average Londoner.

The reality is, in London there's a lot



of wealth — Dagers believes that London is the luxury property capital of the world, so there's no point in running from it. And who better to narrate it than a man who dubs himself "Mr Super Prime". It's meant to be fun, so let's stop being so po-faced about it.

I am with Dagers on his love of London. I live here, work here and party here, and it's where my parents met. It's a city full of opportunity — and the series portrays it well, with drone shots of the skyline and a glossy office with a view of the city.

I am 23 and live in a tiny rental share with friends; I can't afford to buy a house in central London, but I'm also happy enough to not be mad about the fact that some people can.

Buying London is more than an estate agent's catalogue book: all the ingredients are there for a hit reality TV show. In the first episode there's a generous dose of drama, with backstabbing, flirting and bitching, as well as stunning properties, enviable glamour and a beautiful cast.

Throughout the series expect to groan, cringe, laugh and gasp. At one point the interior designer Juliana Ardenius flirts with the agent Oliver Hamilton in front of his wife, Vivi. It's normal for characters to bring their partners on to the show to add another layer to the plot and it's clear Vivi wants a piece of the action. On hearing of Ardenius's intentions, her quick quip, "Why would you buy Swarovski when you have diamonds at home?" deserves to go down as an iconic line — a moment she assured me was completely unscripted.

It feels like a more down-to-earth version of *Selling Sunset*, and with a diverse group of agents, including those from Lithuania, South Africa and (even) Chelsea, it feels more real and attainable than some of the US storylines. Although selling multimillion-pound properties while wearing six-inch heels and sequins can only be so relatable.

So hate it or love it, I'm a fan. *Buying London* has successfully merged my two favourite things — the city I live in and real estate drama. Plus, it's supposed to be fun and lighthearted ... sometimes all you want is a dose of property porn and to laugh at other people's ridiculous feuds.



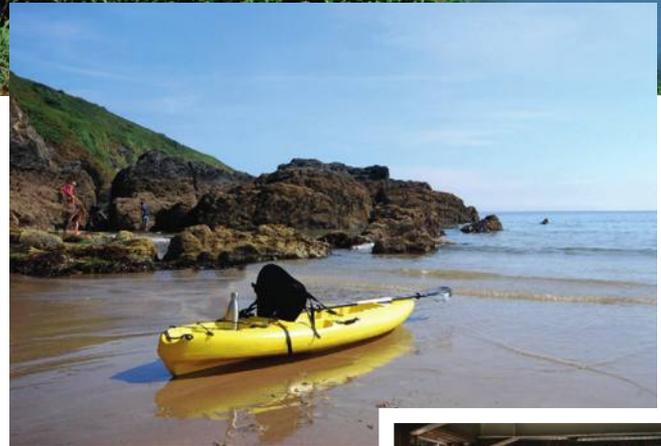
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